

LAND REFORM

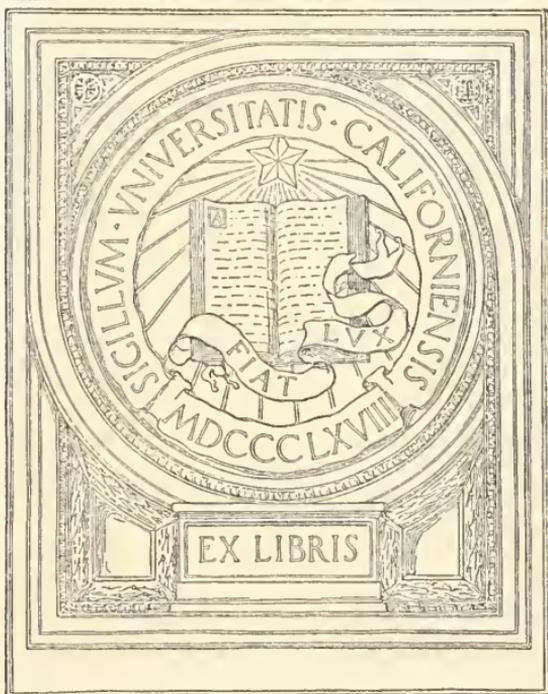


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BY THE RIGHT HON.
JESSE COLLINGS, M.P.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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LAND REFORM

OCCUPYING OWNERSHIP

PEASANT PROPRIETARY

AND

RURAL EDUCATION

BY THE

RIGHT HON. JESSE COLLINGS, J.P., M.P.

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“MOREOVER THE PROFIT OF THE EARTH IS FOR ALL; THE KING
HIMSELF IS SERVED BY THE FIELD.”—*Ecclesiastes* v. 9.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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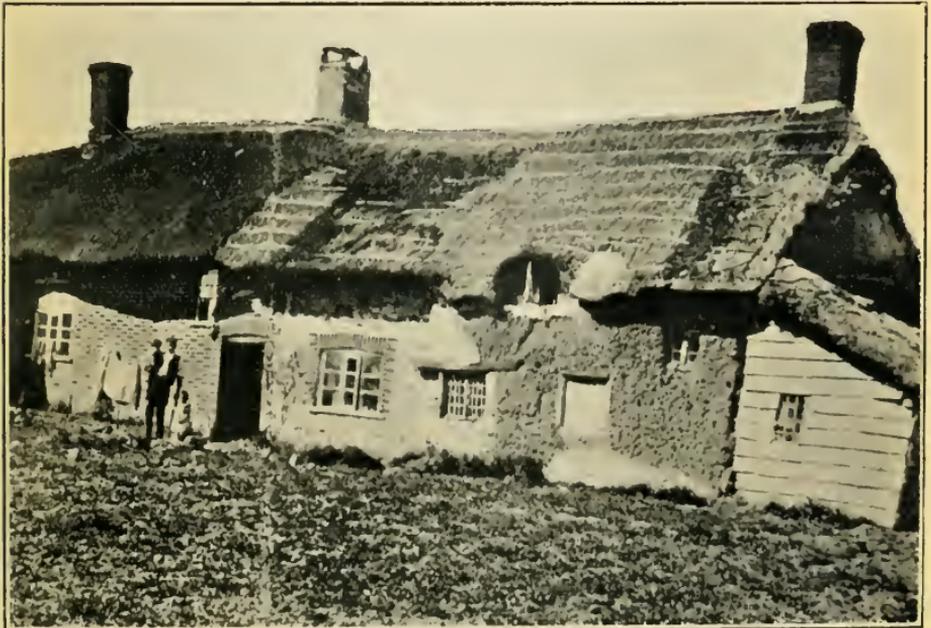
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A NOBLE PEASANT WOMAN
TO WHOSE CHERISHED MEMORY THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED BY THE
YOUNGEST AND LAST SURVIVOR OF HER MANY CHILDREN



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HER BIRTHPLACE (BROADHEMBURY, DEVON)



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INTRODUCTION

DURING the past few years several Allotment Acts have been passed by Parliament which have conferred great benefits on the rural labouring population. A Small Holdings Bill also, after years of delay, became law in 1892. From causes which will be referred to, County Councils, in whose hands the administration of this Act was placed, have, with few exceptions, made no attempt to deal with it. But in the few cases where the Act has been put into operation, the results have been most satisfactory and encouraging. The chief significance, however, of these measures lies in the fact that Parliament, by passing them, has reversed its former policy. The Legislature has at last recognized the principle of giving public aid to restore to the labourers some little of that personal interest in the soil of which ages of previous legislation had so completely deprived them.

The Purchase of Land (England and Wales) Bill, introduced in the session of 1904, while containing the same principle as the Small Holdings Act, is a far more important measure, affecting, as it does, all classes of the agricultural industry. It seeks by State aid to restore those classes of yeoman farmers and peasant proprietors which in former times were such valuable elements in our rural economy, and had such a marked influence on the social life of the nation.

It was my intention at first to write a few pages only, simply to explain the scope and provisions of the Bill. But the subject was so interesting, and its bearings so far-reaching, that I felt impelled to continue my remarks until the subject-matter had grown to the dimensions of a book—a book which, after some hesitation and much diffidence, I have ventured to place before the public, in the hope that at least some of the propositions and opinions contained in its pages may be found heedworthy.

My general apology for taking this step is the life-long attention I have given to the question of the land, and my close relationship with not the least important class connected with its cultivation. I have always regarded agriculture (in its widest sense) as the chief national concern, and as the only basis on which the real welfare of a country can be securely established. If we have purchased commercial supremacy at the cost of a permanent decay of that great industry, we have bought it at a ruinous price.

Nations may have brilliant epochs—more or less long-continued—of commercial prosperity, with vast accumulations of money wealth, but their strength, virility, permanence, and resisting power must ever depend on a numerous rural population. The combatant in classic story who, when hurled to the ground by his antagonist, gained renewed life and vigour by each contact with Mother Earth, is an apt illustration of the strength and recuperative power of a nation whose people are rooted in the soil.

These views and opinions, which I have always held, have been confirmed and strengthened by a long experience in commercial affairs and a close acquaintance with the conditions of life in large towns.

The question of agricultural depression is one that is always with us. Discussions on the subject in Parliament, in the Press, and in agricultural societies have been almost innumerable. But nothing has been done worth consideration, certainly nothing of an effective kind, to provide a remedy for an evil the existence of which is universally admitted. Successive Governments, as far as Great Britain is concerned, may be said to have shown an almost absolute indifference to a matter that should have had the foremost place in their programmes.

Up to about sixty years ago the landed interest—or rather, the landlord interest—was paramount in Parliament. Since that time (at least in the House of Commons) that power has steadily declined, and the commercial and urban influence has as steadily increased. The manufacturing school of that day unfortunately regarded agriculture, if not with antagonism, at least as of secondary importance. They had need of the support of agriculturists in order to carry out their free-trade policy, and they secured that support by foretellings which have never been fulfilled and by assurances—no doubt sincerely given—which have never been realized. The effect of that policy was to bring the British farmer into competition with the whole world, and to leave him there. No attempt was made, by readjustment or removal of the special burdens on land, or by any other means, to enable farming to adapt itself to the new conditions it had to face.

The manufacturing classes declared land to be “a raw material,” but they left it subject to those rates and charges which they took care should not be

imposed on any raw material used in their own industries ; and thus, on the principle that "if you tax the machine you tax the product," the farming interest remains unduly handicapped to this day.

These classes have still the same short-sighted indifference to the condition of agriculture, on which their own prosperity so largely depends. They show this indifference generally, and especially by their attitude towards such measures as the Cattle Diseases Act and the Butter Bill, by their determined opposition to the shilling duty placed on imports of foreign corn, and to the small scrap of just relief given to the farmer by the Agricultural Ratings Act.

On the other hand, the tendency to throw the burdens of the commercial classes on to the shoulders of the general community is increasing. This tendency is shown by such measures as the Rating of Machinery Bill, and by a Bill promoted by the powerful shipping interest, which proposes that the whole cost of lighting our coasts should be paid out of the taxes of the country. At the same time the farming interest has to pay, through the general taxes and local rates, the cost of rural education, almost the sole outcome of which is a supply of workers for the towns, for railways, and non-rural industries generally.

All these considerations point to the urgent necessity of increasing the power of the agricultural interest in the House of Commons. But this cannot be done under our present system. It can only be brought about by a large increase in the number of those who have a direct and personal interest in the soil.

During the past four or five decades of years the rural population has been steadily getting fewer, until,

by the last census, we find that only about 23 per cent of the people of England and Wales are found in the country districts. Of this remnant, which includes those who live in the country for pleasure or retirement, only a small minority has any direct cause to concern itself with the interests of agriculture. During the same period the number of agricultural labourers has lessened by one-half, while the general population has enormously increased.

Farmers have been steadily on the downward path. Large numbers of them, by emigration and other outlets, have left their occupations altogether. Many, no doubt, have been, with difficulty, holding their own; but taken as a class they have been steadily losing their capital, and of late years have been figuring in a very prominent place in the annual list of bankruptcies.

In the meantime the land has been steadily going out of cultivation and lessening in value. In the returns for last year (1904) we find that out of a total of 32,317,610 acres under grass or crops of some kind in Great Britain, only 1,375,284 acres were cultivated with wheat. This is less than the previous year by 206,303 acres. The great extent of this falling off can be realized by bearing in mind that the area of the county of Surrey under crops and grass is only 268,451 acres, and that of many other of our counties much less. It is evident therefore that if the present state of things continues, the time is not far distant when a field of corn will be a rare sight in our country.

We are every year becoming more dependent for our daily bread on foreign imports, the stoppage of

which, from any cause, even for a few months, would cause a famine in the land.

Some years ago an enterprising American attempted to make a "corner" in wheat. He did not succeed, but came near enough to success to show that what was too difficult for a private person would be quite practicable for a hostile nation.

In case of a war with a great Power or combination of Powers (themselves self-feeding) it would not be difficult, but a mere business transaction, for our opponents, secretly acting through chosen agents, by the well-known operation of dealing in "futures," to place this country in a perilous position. Our navy might possibly—though this is doubtful—make the sea secure for grain-laden ships, but the grain itself would not be forthcoming except in scanty quantities and at famine prices. In fact, we are in the foolish position of spending vast sums to strengthen and guard the fortress, and omitting to victual the garrison inside, trusting for that to convoys from without which may never come.

Unhappily, the mass of the people of this country have been so long cut off from any connection with the land that they have ceased to regard agriculture as a subject which specially affects them. They regard it simply as one among many industries, instead of as being the root of all others, and the one industry in which they are vitally concerned.

Land being one of the elements indispensable to human life and happiness, its ownership is naturally subject to certain conditions for the public good which are attached to no other form of property. The first of these conditions is that it should not become dere-

lict or even half-cultivated, but should be made to yield food to its full capacity. The people have a natural right to claim the fulfilment of this condition, and to call for such a system of cultivation as will secure it. With these views I have endeavoured to speak, not only to agriculturists, but to the general public, and especially to the labouring classes, and to point out that under the system proposed in this volume it would be possible to increase largely, even to double, the present produce of the soil, and, at the same time, to provide a vast amount of good and continuous employment for the people.

It may be suggested that there was no need for dwelling at length, as in the following pages I have done, on agrarian proceedings in past times. That would be so were it not for the fact that the effects of these proceedings are living forces with us at the present day. It is impossible to judge rightly the present condition of land tenure in England without recalling the historic processes by which it was created—processes by which the yeoman farmer was reduced to the position of a dependent tenant, and the peasant proprietor to that of a landless man.

The history of the land question from the point of view of the occupying owner—peasant and yeoman—has never yet been written. Historians as a rule deal mainly with the political events and national occurrences of the times of which they write. Facts with regard to the land may be duly recorded, but their bearings on the life of the people are insufficiently dealt with, misapplied, or passed over altogether. As an instance, take the so-called "peasant revolts" which were ever recurring throughout succes-

sive centuries. Those who took part in them (yeomen as well as peasants) are usually described as "rebels," "fanatics," "idle and vagrant persons," etc., while their leaders are nicknamed and caricatured.

Looking beneath the detraction, misrepresentation, and tainted party colouring, which generally follow defeated efforts, it will be found that the root cause of these revolts was the intolerable agrarian oppression which existed. These uprisings were forlorn attempts of desperate men to keep by force those rights in the land on which their well-being and very lives depended, and from which they were being steadily ousted under baron-made law or by the "strong hand" under no law at all. A study of those uprisings, and the causes of them, is absolutely necessary in order to trace and understand the social history of England down to the present time.

Read by this light it will be found that the "Wat Tylers," "Jack Straws," "John Balls," "Jack Cades," and others were the inevitable outcome of the almost incredible cruelty and oppression under which the peasantry were suffering. Kett, the great yeoman—called "Kett the Tanner"—is always described as the "rebel leader" of the widespread Norfolk revolt in the sixteenth century. His army of sixteen thousand husbandmen was at last defeated, not however by Englishmen, the mass of whom were on his side, but by foreign mercenaries. He himself was hanged in chains as a traitor. But it is time that he was spoken of, not as a "traitor," but as a brave leader of men, just in action, moderate in demands, and one who, when the people know their own, will be looked upon as a hero who laid down his

life for the despoiled tillers of the soil whose just cause he championed.

The prowess shown in the frequent agrarian struggles and on-falls is worthy of being called to mind. In none of the renowned battlefields of those times were the qualities of dogged courage, patient endurance, and defiance of odds, more often shown than in those so-called rebellions. These qualities, which from the earliest times belonged to the yeomanry and peasantry of this country, became imprinted on the English race. How long they will remain unimpaired among the people after these classes have disappeared, and whether or not they will tarry for long in town populations made up largely, as medical men tell us, of "stunted men and anæmic women," are moot questions.

In dealing with the agricultural labourer I have based my statements on my own experience, on the lore and traditions of the cottage, on Parliamentary papers, as well as other authorities.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the "agricultural labourer" of modern times is in a position quite different from that of the "agricultural labourer" of former years. In former times the agricultural labourer (always called the "poor" and the "labouring poor") was a man who generally possessed land and almost invariably had rights of common in connection with the curtilage of his cottage. This enabled him to keep stock of various kinds and of more or less value, the proceeds of which, added to his earnings as a labourer, placed him in a fairly prosperous condition.

The modern agricultural labourer is a mere wage-

receiver The process of his degradation to a distinct hireling class was a gradual one. It was enormously quickened about the middle of the eighteenth century, and completed about the middle of last century. During these long years he was a unique and pathetic figure in the social life of England, a man starving in the midst of plenty through a life of patient endurance and ceaseless toil, lightened by no hope for the morrow or any prospect but the workhouse and the grave.

The prosperity of commercial and manufacturing undertakings, which was so quickened in 1843 and—from causes which will be examined—increased so rapidly during succeeding years, enabled the labourer somewhat to improve his miserable condition by migrating to the industrial centres. This migration has continued to the present day. It received a great impetus by the operation of the Education Act of 1870, which gave the labourer instruction enough to enable him to see beyond the limits of his parish and to acquire that discontent which, after all, is the parent of change, if not of improvement. This exodus of the labourers from the land and the consequent deserted state of our country-sides constitute a national danger, the magnitude of which is either not seen or is disregarded by all those who view the condition of the people through commercial spectacles.

A certain class of persons, including a school of political economists (happily becoming more and more discredited), produce an array of figures to show how great is our prosperity as a nation. Our exports and imports have reached a record amount. Receipts

from the income-tax are yearly growing. Accumulated wealth, ever on the increase, is reckoned by thousands of millions, and shows a satisfactory average sum per head of our population.¹ This golden image set up to represent the national prosperity is certainly a splendid one, but it has feet of clay.

Doubtless we are in the front rank as a nation of brokers, bankers, carriers, and other handlers of wealth, but the vital question is, What is our position as a producing country? Are the productive powers of England increasing, decreasing, or at a standstill? That is the real test; for—to put the case in an extreme way—the man who cultivates in wheat a thousand acres of land hitherto uncultivated creates more real wealth for the country than do all Lombard Street and the Stock Exchange put together.

We are assured by those economists who deal only with totals—to whom the condition of the units of our population seems to be of small account—that we are the most prosperous nation in Europe. But everything depends on what is meant by “the nation” and what is meant by “prosperity.” The only true gauge of real prosperity is the condition of the people generally; and tried by that standard, we are anything but a prosperous country. No doubt England is the happiest place in the world for the limited number—the very few millions of wealthy and well-to-do persons. Their motto is naturally “let well alone.” With many of these classes there is a feverish race for

¹ Sir Robert Giffen assumes the aggregate income of the United Kingdom to be about 1,750 millions per annum, and the aggregate wealth of the United Kingdom about 15,000 millions. (Paper read before the British Association, 11 September, 1903.)

wealth, and an indulgence in luxury of every form, which are demoralizing to themselves and to those who come in contact with them. The pace is thus set, and those with smaller means, through a spirit of imitation and rivalry, strive to keep up with it, and so the old simplicity of our national life is disappearing before the attractions and temptations of a hollow and an artificial society.

But outside this circle what are the undisputed facts? We have a large section of the people struggling for a bare subsistence, another large section living in a hand-to-mouth way, while probably a fourth of the whole population are either on the poverty line or below it—on the “verge of hunger” or in actual want.¹

The labour statistics of the Board of Trade are being continually referred to, and too often accepted, as an indication of the state of the labour market in this country. No doubt, on paper, the standard of weekly wages of skilled workmen is satisfactory. But it is not known how many of them are working full time and getting a full week's wage, because the term “unemployed” in these statistics means a man who is without any work in his own trade. If he is employed only two or three days a week he would not be included among the number of “unemployed.” Further, no information is or can be given of the number of skilled workmen who, through want of work and other causes, leave their unions and take to employment of

¹ “In their own land vast wealth and hideous squalor, shameful luxury and gaunt hunger, lived side by side, and presented a problem of which the wisdom of man could not at present see the solution.” (Bishop of Liverpool, Commemoration Sermon at Oxford, 19 June, 1904.)

a lower grade, and, as age and incapacity come on, sink finally into the ranks of the submerged.

These Board of Trade returns, interesting so far as they go, refer only to about one million of the pick of skilled workmen, on the reports of whose organizations the statistics are based. They are no guide whatever to the condition of the millions of persons—the great bulk of the people—who depend solely on employment for their living.

The actual condition of large masses of our population is best known to the devoted men and women who work privately or in connection with such associations as the Salvation Army, Church missions, refuges, and numerous other similar agencies. But these workers know too well that the result of their self-sacrificing, faith-supported efforts is rather the alleviation of existing human suffering than a permanent solution of the seemingly hopeless social problems with which they are confronted.

Side by side with plethoric wealth we have our Poor Law institution, peculiar to this country and, in its present form, a standing disgrace to it. Organized relief no doubt will always be needed for cases of poverty, disease, and misfortune, which in some degree will ever exist. But it should be given as far as possible in a manner not calculated to demoralize and degrade the recipients. The operation of our Poor Law has been and is rapidly sapping the life and destroying the self-respect of masses of the people. Numbers of obscure respectable poor whose sufferings are perhaps of all the most acute, shrink with a wholesome dread from parish relief; some prefer even to starve, but as a rule poverty and hunger compel them at last

to sink into the ranks of pauperism. There are thousands of persons who are not only benevolent, but actively beneficent, who spend time and money ungrudgingly in trying to alleviate the misery that exists. I would ask these persons and others when next they journey through the country to note how small is the quantity of tillage they see ; that there is grass, grass, almost everywhere, the land carrying cattle instead of men. While noting this let them recall the poverty they deplore and the condition of slum life they may have witnessed. They may then safely associate those two conditions (of the land and of the people) as veritable cause and effect.

The divorce of the people from the land was the original cause of our Poor Law system. The same cause has been operating since the sixteenth century, and is at work with similar effect at the present time. The "casual" and the "vagrant" of to-day are indirectly (through the effect of the rural exodus) the counterparts of the "valiant beggar" and the "sturdy vagabond" of old. The perplexed authorities in those days adopted branding, ear-cropping, and hanging as a cure for the evil. Our Boards of Guardians in similar straits are crying out for fresh methods of dealing with these so-called "pests of society."

But the only effective way of dealing with vagrancy and able-bodied pauperism is to remove the cause of which they are the outcome. Prompt legislation for the revival of agriculture with the consequent re-peopling of the land is the only hopeful way out of these evils. In this direction also I believe lies, to a large extent, the solution of those social problems in our midst—of overcrowding, provision for old age,

the state of our streets at night, the unemployed, etc., etc.—which occupy and perplex the mind of every thoughtful person in the kingdom.

The unceasing migration from our country-sides into the centres of population is at the root of those evils. During the period in which our trade and manufactures were increasing by “leaps and bounds” labour from the country was more or less welcome and useful, but for years past our towns and other centres of industry have been dangerously overstepping their powers of profitably absorbing this steady human influx. The process of the evil is a simple one, and I have watched it in individual cases. The man from the country, being strong, towardly, and cheap, finds as a rule employment of some kind. But there is no legitimate room for him; he only displaces another man, who in his turn displaces another, and so on till an older and a broken man is found at the bottom of the social scale, to swell the ranks of the unemployed and destitute.

The proposals made in the following pages are—in the true and not in a party sense of the word—conservative in the highest degree. However they may be criticized, they have at least the merit of being definite, practical, and such as can be put into immediate operation without injury to any existing interest. Whether or not a British Government will deal with the question in the same wise spirit and with the same object as similar questions were dealt with by great continental statesmen, remains to be seen.

In any case our present wasteful out-of-date land system cannot long remain unchanged. In times of

bad trade and dearth of employment, the people generally will more and more realize the extent to which their well-being depends on the cultivation of the land in which they live.

The danger is that, by delay, this great national question will become one of party politics, and that time and energy will be wasted by the advocacy of impracticable schemes, supported by those specious party cries so often heard on platforms, to which the terms "land" and "landlords" so readily lend themselves.

In the history of social and political movements, in this and in other countries, one thing is clear, that wild and unjust demands could have been almost always forestalled and prevented by the timely adoption of reasonable reforms.¹

J. C.

EDGBASTON, BIRMINGHAM,
October, 1905.

¹ The plan adopted in the arrangement of the contents of this book is first: to describe the provisions of the Land Purchase Bill and of the Agricultural Education in Elementary Schools Bill; then to discuss the merits of the latter measure; after that, to consider the origin and growth of our present land system; and lastly to set forth the arguments for and against the proposals made for a reform of that system.

Note.—This work was finished in 1905, and arrangements were made for its appearance in the first week of January, 1906, but from causes which could not be avoided the publication was delayed for several months. This explanation is necessary to enable the reader to rightly understand certain references that appear throughout the book which could not be corrected without re-writing the text. As examples, the expressions "present Government" and "this Parliament" mean the Government and Parliament of 1905. The term "last year" means 1904, the "present year" 1905, etc. For the same reason official and other reports dealing with the year 1905 are not used. They were not available at the time of writing.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

THE first edition of *Land Reform*, issued a little more than a year ago, was so well received by both the press and the public that it is now nearly exhausted. I have been urged for some time past, by a number of correspondents, to issue a new edition at a popular price, so as to make the work more readily obtainable by those to whom price is an object. As I believe that the scheme contained in the book is an effective one—if not the only effective one—to secure a settlement of the Land Question in the interests, not only of agriculturists of all classes, but also of the whole nation, I decided to issue a new edition at such a price as would place the work within the reach of the general body of readers. I was encouraged to do this by a number of letters from working men (in different industries) who admitted that a perusal of the book had opened their eyes to the fact that their welfare—material and social—was vitally dependent on a prosperous Agriculture.

I have endeavoured to show that the land is the natural source of national wealth; that while every other industry is being developed to its highest point, that of agriculture is neglected and fast decaying, and that by a restoration of this great industry the Home Trade would be increased by some millions sterling a year, to the benefit alike of the manufacturer, work-

man, and trader. In support of these views there are several propositions contained in these pages, namely :—

(1) That the policy of placing trade and commerce above agriculture is a wrong one.

(2) That an amount of capital (including the personal labour of the cultivator), invested in land under the conditions of ownership, yields a greater return to the community, and a wider distribution thereof, than a similar amount invested in commerce and manufactures.

(3) That if health, physical strength, and a numerous, fixed, rural population are to be reckoned as national assets, agriculture, under the conditions named, enriches a nation more than manufactures can do.

(4) That the Home Trade is more certain, less fickle, and, under the proposed conditions, would become more valuable than the Foreign Trade.

If I can succeed in arresting the attention of the people generally to these propositions, and in showing that the question treated is not one that affects primarily landlords and farmers, but is one of national concern—bearing directly on the welfare of all classes of the community—then the main objects of the book will be secured.

It is, of course, useless to place these views before those who regard agriculture simply as any other trade, instead of as being the basis of all other trades. They naturally ask, why should State aid be given to agriculture any more than to other industries? This limited and mistaken view was taken by the Minister in charge of the Small Holdings and Allotments Bill passed last year. In describing that Bill he said, “ I

have not named and shall not name any proposals for coddling or for forcing an Industry which cannot stand alone, without State grants or, what is the same thing, contributions by the general taxpayer out of duties upon imported produce."

This statement shows a hopeless failure to grasp the real position of agriculture in the general economy of a nation. That position is illustrated in a striking manner by a distinguished statesman, M. Jules Méline, formerly the French Minister of Agriculture. "The public prosperity," he says, "is like unto a tree: agriculture is its root, industry and commerce are its branches and leaves: if the root decays the leaves fall, the branches drop off and the tree dies."

The British farmer has no wish to be "coddled": he desires only fair play—to be put on a level with his foreign competitors. He now pays every year from ten to fifteen per cent of the value of his output for the support of national and local government. The foreigner pays nothing, but has our market open to him free from any toll whatever. It is *he* who is "coddled," and protected in an unfair competition with the home producer.

In the present edition I have not thought it necessary to make any alteration in the statistics contained in the first issue; for although there is some variation from year to year in matters to which these statistics refer, that variation does not affect in the slightest degree the arguments which the figures are employed to support.

It may be noted, however, that the land is still going steadily out of cultivation, and that the process of rural depopulation is as steadily going on. The report

of 1906 shows that the conversion of arable land into pasture was being continued with speed and persistency; that of 1907 tells the same dismal tale of the yearly diminishing area of land under the plough.

The area devoted to growing the three chief cereals—wheat, barley, and oats—has decreased during the last year (Return 1907) by nearly 90,000 acres, and is now the lowest on record.

The references to Socialism (pp. 417-20) were penned before the last general election, and it is interesting and instructive to note that the forebodings then uttered have been realized so soon.

The socialistic element is now powerful in the House of Commons; is a force in the Administration itself; and has a marked influence on the policy of the Government. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act of last session is a distinct recognition of the socialistic demand for the nationalization of the land. That measure erects a barrier against small holders ever becoming owners of the soil they till. They are to be tenants of County Councils, without any legal security as regards rent or tenure. The rent they will have to pay will include interest on the money paid for the land, the heavy local expenses incurred, and, in addition, a yearly sum as a sinking fund which in a period of years will recoup the whole cost of the holdings. The land, however, for which the small holders will have paid actual cash, will not belong to them but to the County Councils who are their landlords!

During the passage of the Bill through Parliament, all attempts to give the small holders even the *option* of purchase were defeated. The settled policy of the

Government was to discourage ownerships under that or under any other measure. The Minister in charge of the Bill was frank and thorough on this point. "If I thought," he said, "that under the Act of 1892 (see pp. 207-20) there was likely to be a large amount of purchase by tenants in the future, I should be inclined to limit rather than to extend the facilities for that purpose."

It is probable that under the Act of 1907 the number of tenant holders will be increased, so great is the demand for small holdings on any terms. So far as this is the case the Act will be a success *on the lines on which it is framed*; but, as a means of attracting people back to the land, and rooting them on the soil, there is every likelihood that it will be an expensive failure. In any case, such a measure—the mere outcome of party politics—does not touch even the fringe of a solution of the pressing question of the land.

It is the main object in these pages to show that that solution can be found only in a measure of land reform based on the principle of *occupying ownership*—thus securing the restoration of the two classes of cultivators which form such an important part in the economy of all other nations, and which, in the past, formed an equally important part in that of our own country, namely, the yeoman farmer and the peasant proprietor.

J. C.

EDGBASTON,
BIRMINGHAM,
March, 1908.



Purchase of Land
(England and Wales) Bill.

A
B I L L

To provide facilities for the Sale of Land to occupying Tenants ; and to extend the System of Peasant Proprietary in England and Wales.

*Presented by Mr. Jesse Collings,
supported by
Sir John Dorington, Mr. Spear,
Sir John Kennaway, Mr. Herbert Roberts,
Sir Lewis Molesworth, Colonel Kenyon-Slaney,
Mr. William Mitchell, and Lieutenant-
Colonel Pryce-Jones.*

*Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed
22 February 1905.*

The Bill is in Two Parts :
Part I.—“Acquisition of Land by Tenants.”
Part II.—“Purchase of Land for
Smaller Holdings.”

No tenancy-at-will or with a year's notice, however favourable the conditions of compensation for unexhausted improvements, can give the farmer security beyond the year. . . . The "good understanding" which has hitherto as a rule protected the English farmer under a yearly tenancy will not for many years longer be able to stand the inevitable pressure of home and foreign competition. (Sir James Caird.)

The magic of property turns sand to gold. . . . Give a man the secure possession of a bleak rock and he will turn it into a garden. (Arthur Young.)

The farmer compared with the proprietor is as a merchant who trades with borrowed capital compared with one who trades with his own. . . . The station of a farmer besides is from the nature of things inferior to that of the proprietor. (Adam Smith.)

CHAPTER I

SYNOPSIS OF PURCHASE OF LAND (ENGLAND AND WALES) BILL, 1905

PART I

OCCUPYING OWNERSHIP

Part I. provides means to enable the tenant to acquire the freehold of the farm he rents. When the landlord and tenant may agree for the sale of a farm, and on the price to be paid for the same, the Board of Agriculture may, after making due inquiries, advance to the tenant the whole of the purchase-money.

The repayment of the advance so made is to be by an annual instalment (purchase annuity) at the rate of $3\frac{1}{4}$ (three pounds five shillings) per cent of the whole sum.

The three pounds five shillings per cent is made up of two pounds fifteen shillings per cent for interest and ten shillings per cent for sinking fund. This sinking fund will in a certain number of years recoup the whole amount advanced, and no further payments will be made.

The advances and rates of repayment are the same as those accorded to the Irish tenant under the provisions of the Irish Land Act, 1903.

As soon as the agreement for purchase is completed the tenant becomes immediately the owner of

the farm, subject to payment of the annual instalment and to certain other conditions.

The only conditions of importance are those contained in Clauses 11 and 12, by which subdivision and subletting of the farm are forbidden except with the consent of the Board of Agriculture, and restrictions are placed upon the power of mortgaging.

Under Clause 10, the farmer, if he is able and willing to do so, can at any time redeem the outstanding purchase annuity, by the payment of a lump sum.

No holding of leasehold tenure can be sold under the Act unless the lease, under which the landlord is possessed, is one renewable for ever, or for a term of years of which not less than sixty are unexpired at the time of the sale.

Definitions are given in the Bill of the terms "absolute owner," "tenant for life," and "limited owner."

Provisions are made for the distribution of the purchase money among the persons entitled to, and having charges upon, or otherwise interested in any holding sold under the Act.

The sum to be advanced for the purposes of this part of the Bill is limited to ten millions sterling. The Bill, like the Irish measure, contains no compulsory provisions. It seeks only to give to English farmers advantages and opportunities similar to those given to Irish tenants by the Act of 1903.

CHAPTER II

OCCUPYING OWNERSHIP (*continued*)

It is difficult to see how any valid objection can be raised to the principle of the Bill in any quarter, for, as Sir James Caird stated some years ago: "There is not a single reason in favour of exceptional aid from the Treasury for Ireland that is not equally applicable to the rest of the United Kingdom."

It will be noticed that on the completion of the purchase the farmer becomes the actual owner of the land, subject to the yearly instalments. He has freedom of cultivation, security for outlay, and every other incentive for industry, energy, and enterprise, inasmuch as all improvements made and the result of all money spent on the land remain his own. Subject to the yearly instalments and other conditions named, he can at any time sell his farm, or can devise it to those who come after him. But the holding must always be in the hands of an occupying owner.

The amount of an instalment, by reason of the very low rate of interest on which it is based, will, as a rule, work out less, in some cases much less, than the rent previously paid.

Nearly all other nations in Europe, some by revolution, others by wise statesmanship, have adopted "cultivating ownership" as the basis of their land tenure. Great Britain (no longer Ireland) almost, if not quite alone, retains a system based on "landlord, tenant, and labourer." The results of that system, as experience shows, are disastrous to all concerned.

Landlords have seen their rents reduced to the lowest point ; tenants have lost their capital ; labourers have been driven from the land ; and the whole community is suffering socially, economically, and physically from the decay of agriculture. No doubt it will be urged that there are other causes of the decay of agriculture, but an attempt will be made to show that those causes would not have existed but for the land system referred to, and that they cannot be removed so long as that system lasts.

Another serious question in this connection is that of our food supply. The large and yearly increasing area of land laid down in so-called permanent pasture ("tumbling down" to rubbish would be a better description so far as much of it is concerned) is a serious and progressive reduction in the self-feeding power of the nation, because, as Adam Smith remarks, "a cornfield of moderate fertility produces a much greater quantity of food for man than the best pasture of equal extent." The area under corn crops in this country is not only extremely small, but it does not yield to its full capacity. Sir James Caird remarked, some years ago, "People are surprised that so large a proportion of cultivated land is still permitted to remain partially productive." But there is no ground for surprise. A good tenant farmer, from a love of his calling, and to the extent of his means, does justice to the land ; but he has no encouragement to do so. On the contrary, the system under which he works justifies the description frequently given of it as "a premium on bad farming."¹

¹ It is frequently stated that the average yield of corn per acre in Great Britain is larger than that in any other country in Europe. This statement is true, but it is a misleading one. No fair comparison is

I have received many private letters giving strong opinions on this point. The following two are typical of the whole, and are selected as coming from men well known in the agricultural world, and who are considered to be good farmers:—

“15 October, 1903.

“I welcome every effort to rid farmers of the millstone always round their necks. I dare not farm well, or my rent may be raised, or I may not be able to get the reductions off, which any of my neighbours can who never put more into their land than the next crop will take out. There is nothing so disheartening as to feel that one cannot safely make the land produce all it can, and though I have felt it best to do all one can in spite of the bad system, I have been paying ten to fifteen shillings per acre more rent than my neighbours, whose farms used to be higher rented than mine.”

“23 December, 1903.

“I am heartily in favour of making it possible for tenants to own their occupations. The present system of tenancy is a premium on bad farming. Whenever any change of ownership or other cause involves a readjustment, the good farmer, in most cases, has to pay an increase of rent, and the bad farmer gets a reduction.”

In looking for a remedy for this state of things it is wise frankly to consider the facts of the situation. Under our present system it is difficult to see how any sufficient help can be given to agriculture. Small advantages such as are given by the “Agricultural possible, because the cultivating owner on the Continent utilizes every patch of ground. He grows corn on land that would not be used for that purpose in this country. He gets a less number of bushels per acre off such land and thereby lowers the total average yield, but the cultivation pays him and is a gain to the community.

Rating Act," and such as would be given by, say, a half-crown duty on imported corn, are no doubt valuable, and the gains therefrom remain with the farmer. But any legislation proposed with the object of giving substantial aid to the tenant would be regarded and strongly opposed, as being "landlord relief." It must be admitted, moreover, that there are grounds for such opposition. The man who has control over rents must always be master of the position, and the landlord having himself passed through bad times, would naturally, by an increase of rent, secure a share, and in many cases, perhaps the whole, of any benefits which might accrue from such legislation.

This view is confirmed by past experience and by the evidence given before many of the numerous Royal Commissions and Select Committees on agricultural depression. This evidence conclusively shows that though improved prices may benefit the tenant farmer to some small extent, and to a larger extent during war or other exceptional times, yet the main and general result of high prices has always been increased rents.

Under a system of "Cultivating Ownership," however, all these difficulties disappear. Any aid given would stay with the cultivator and be used for the improvement of the land and for the increase of its production. Further, public opinion, when fully informed on the subject, would soon be in accordance with the view that really effective assistance given by legislation to the occupying owner—say, for example, a premium on every acre cultivated in wheat—would be for the benefit of the whole community, which has a primary interest in the productiveness of the soil.

These proposals must be considered together with

the provisions of the second part of the Bill—provisions for the restoration of a peasant proprietary for the production of the smaller articles of food. If the provisions of the Bill as a whole were carried out we should then see the two branches of the agricultural industry—the large cultivation and the small cultivation—placed under what Arthur Young called the “omnipotent principle” of ownership, with the result that the produce of the land would be more than doubled. The effect might be even to prove that Sir J. B. Lawes was not over-sanguine when he said that “the soil of this country is capable of producing very much more wheat as well as meat, if not indeed all that is required to support the population.”

The social and other questions involved in these proposals will be considered later on; but without further argument every one must see that a revival of agriculture, and of the numerous subsidiary trades connected therewith, would, by a continually increasing demand for labour, be a natural and practical remedy for the depopulation of our rural districts and for the over-population of our towns, which have together become a national danger of the first magnitude.

PEASANT PROPRIETARY

Wherever we find peasant proprietors we also find the comfort, security, confidence in the future, and independence which assure at once happiness and virtue. . . . His little patrimony is a true savings bank, always ready to receive all his little savings and utilize all his moments of leisure. . . . The peasant proprietor is of all cultivators the one who gets most out of the soil. . . . Let other nations boast of their opulence, Switzerland may always point with pride to her peasants. (M. de Sismondi.)

I conceive it to be established . . . that no other existing state of agricultural economy has so beneficial an effect on the industry, the intelligence, the frugality and prudence of the population. (John Stuart Mill, "Political Economy.")

The peasants are not, as with us, for the most part totally cut off from property in the soil they cultivate, totally dependent on the labour afforded by others—they are themselves the proprietors. . . . They labour busily, early and late, because they feel they are labouring for themselves. (Howitt, "Rural and Domestic Life of Germany.")

It is almost a universally acknowledged fact that the gross produce of the land in grain, potatoes, and cattle is increased when the land is cultivated by those who own small portions of it. (Prussian Minister of Statistics, quoted by Mr. Kay in "Free Trade in Land.")

The ancients thought it of prime importance to limit the size of estates, as they deemed that it was better to have a small acreage with better cultivation, an opinion also held I see by Virgil. And if one will confess the truth, the "Latifundia" (huge estates) have been the ruin of Italy, and are now also ruining the provinces. (Pliny, "Natural History," Book XVIII.)

An activity has been here that has swept away all difficulties before it, and has clothed the very rocks with verdure. It would be a disgrace to common sense to ask the cause. The enjoyment of property must have done it. Give a man secure possession of a bleak rock and he will turn it into a garden. (Arthur Young, "Travels in France.")

CHAPTER III

SYNOPSIS OF PURCHASE OF LAND (ENGLAND AND WALES) BILL, 1905

PART II

PEASANT PROPRIETARY

Part II. of the Bill enables the Board of Agriculture to purchase any land which they may deem suitable for the purpose of providing holdings for persons who desire to buy and who will themselves cultivate the holdings.

Every such holding shall be not less than three acres and not more than one hundred acres in extent.

The Board may adapt any land they may acquire for the purpose of these small holdings by dividing it and doing what is necessary to make each holding complete in itself, the cost of such adaptation to be equitably apportioned among the several holdings.

The Board may erect on each holding a dwelling-house and such other buildings as may be desirable for the due occupation of the holding, or if thought preferable they may advance sums to the purchaser to enable him to do the work himself, such sums to be included in the purchase price of the holding.

The Board may advance any money not exceeding nine-tenths, or, if they think fit in suitable cases, up to the whole of the cost, to a purchaser of a small holding

for the purposes named in the foregoing sections, and the method of repayment and the provisions as to subletting and subdividing are the same as in Part I of the Bill.

The Advisory Committees appointed by County Councils and Councils of Non-County Boroughs under the "Small Holdings Act, 1892," are to be Advisory Committees to the Board, to give information and assistance in respect of putting this part of the Bill into operation.

The sum to be advanced for the purposes of this part of the Bill is limited to two millions sterling.¹

¹ In every rural district there are to be found men very suitable as regards character and ability to be peasant proprietors but who have not the sum required to be paid down at the time of purchase. To meet such cases the Board of Agriculture, on the recommendation of the local Advisory Committee, is enabled to advance the whole of the purchase money. As far as young men are concerned, a real prospect of getting land of their own would be enough to induce the best of them to save money in order to become purchasers.

CHAPTER IV

PEASANT PROPRIETARY (*continued*)

THE imports of the smaller articles of food into this country are enormous, and are increasing every year. Through changes in classification made in the official returns at different times it is difficult to show in tabulated form the actual increase of every article during a given number of years. But selecting those articles which are returned under the same headings in 1895 and 1904, the following table shows the rapid rate at which the imports have increased during the ten years :—

TABLE No. 1.

	Imports 1895. £	Imports 1904. £	Increase in 10 years. £
Bacon . . .	7,925,979 ...	12,832,142 ...	4,906,163
Hams . . .	2,898,018 ...	3,104,999 ...	206,981
Butter . . .	14,245,230 ...	21,117,162 ...	6,871,932
Cheese . . .	4,675,130 ...	5,843,770 ...	1,168,640
Eggs . . .	4,003,446 ...	6,730,574 ...	2,727,128
Raw apples . . .	960,273 ...	2,118,294 ...	1,158,621
Raw pears . . .	166,696 ...	503,573 ..	336,877
Raw plums . . .	166,045 ...	526,438 ...	360,393
Raw cherries . . .	96,047 ...	319,824 ...	223,777
Lard . . .	2,941,941 ...	3,342,389 ...	400,448
Raw onions . . .	696,428 ...	1,076,472 ...	380,044
Potatoes . . .	1,169,922 ...	2,437,971 ...	1,268,049
Poultry and game . . .	605,160 ...	—	—
Poultry only . . .	—	1,089,145 ...	—
Game only . . .	—	128,132 ...	612,117
Rabbits . . .	315,594 ...	780,737 ...	465,143
	<u>40,865,909</u>	<u>61,951,622</u>	<u>21,086,313</u>

Besides the above there are other articles which, for the reason given, cannot be tabulated for the purpose

of comparison. In the year 1904 the imports of these articles were as follows :—

TABLE No. 2.

Raw currants, gooseberries, and strawberries	£ 214,543
¹ Raw fruits of kinds that could be grown at home	372,575
Fresh milk and cream	25,771
² Condensed and preserved milk in various forms, and sterilized milk	1,640,215
³ Raw vegetables unenumerated (peas, beans, celery, cabbages, etc., etc.)	457,491
Margarine	2,494,467
	<u>£5,205,062</u>

From the above figures it will be found that of raw fruits of the kinds we could produce, and are producing at home, we imported in 1904 to the value of over four millions sterling. No doubt a considerable quantity was sent from warmer climates before our own produce was marketable, but the quantity so sent was but a small proportion of the whole. Besides the articles noted, there are tomatoes which could be grown in England in the same manner as they are grown in the Channel Islands.⁴ There is also as-

¹ Of this amount (£372,575) Germany sent us to the value of £52,692, Holland £18,699, France £24,757.

² The great bulk of this came from Norway, Holland, France, and Belgium.

³ Of this amount (£457,491) France sent us to the value of £277,356, Holland £97,389, Germany £19,481, Belgium £5664.

⁴ Some time ago I was visiting a peasant proprietor in Guernsey who owns about fifteen acres of land, which he cultivates largely with tomatoes in glass-houses built in a plain and cheap way under his own direction. He knew the south of England fairly well, and said that he could do better there, as land was so much cheaper than in the Island. I reminded him that there was plenty of land to be rented. His reply—which he considered conclusive—was, "Seeing the competition we have to meet, hired land would be no good to me."

paragus—a plant indigenous to England—for which there is an enormous demand, and the successful cultivation of which, in a form to meet the requirements of the market, requires that minute attention which a small owner alone can give. Besides the articles named there are vast quantities of dried and preserved fruits and vegetables and of fruit jellies of various kinds imported every year—mainly from Holland, Belgium, France, and Germany—which, with a revival of rural prosperity, would in all probability, at least to a large extent, be produced at home. Flowers and honey may be termed specialities of the peasant proprietor. Of the former we imported in 1904 to the value of nearly a quarter of a million sterling, and of the latter about £30,000.¹

Here at our very doors we have a vast and ever-increasing market for articles of food which this country is by nature fitted to produce, and with regard to some of them more fitted than any other country. But it is a market we cannot supply under our present system, and so the door is closed to sound and profitable employment for an enormous number of our people. At the same time millions of acres of land have gone out of cultivation, and the process is steadily continuing, while the rural population are migrating to already overcrowded centres of industry, in the hope of bettering their condition.

It is as if a manufacturer with the offer of abundance of orders, with materials lying on the ground, and workmen standing idle, were, through defects in his

¹ A year or two ago there was a growing trade in the export of English grapes to France, but recently the French Government put a prohibitive duty on that article which straightway put an end to the trade.

plant and machinery, to allow those orders to pass to foreign makers who showed more adaptability in their methods of production. Only by a system of peasant proprietary can this vast amount of trade be secured for our own people. There is no other way. Peasant proprietary existed at one time in this country for the country's good. It exists now in other lands, where it is prized as a firm basis of national strength and security. It was destroyed in England largely by legislation. It can be restored only by the same means.

M. de Laveleye (the Belgian Rural Economist) stated that "peasant proprietary is a lost art in England." It is true that ages of class legislation—most of it unjust, much of it iniquitous—has divorced the peasant from the soil; reduced him to a mere wage-receiver and left him with no prospect but that of private charity or parish relief. Other nations have pursued precisely the opposite policy. They held it to be in their best interests, at all costs, to root the peasant in the soil instead of squeezing him off. Stein and Hardenberg in Prussia dealt with the question in its most complicated form. To the bitter opposition of the feudal powers, and to the warnings of the economist, they had practically one reply, which was to the effect that a numerous rural population, possessing interests in the land, was of vital importance to the state—to its health, strength, and permanence. Subsequent events have abundantly vindicated the wisdom of their statesmanship.

Mr. Thornton—one of the greatest authorities—in his "Plea for Peasant Proprietary" states that "as long as the connection of the peasantry with the land

remained unbroken, England was perfectly free from every symptom of pauperism." An attempt to restore that connection should enlist, not only the sympathy, but the active aid of all classes of the community.

The scheme proposed is at least a practical one. At the worst, any money risks which might be involved by its possible failure, or partial failure, are quite unworthy of consideration alongside of even a chance of success and the consequent benefits, social and economic, which would accrue to the nation.¹

¹ Peasant proprietary no doubt, as M. de Laveleye states, has practically died out in England. In different parts of the country, however, there are still to be found many examples of the old yeoman farmers, a class of men that used to exist in such large numbers, and which it is the object of the Land Purchase Bill to restore. An account of the position of one of these cultivators might enable the general reader to realize the importance of the class better than he could by any general description. To that end the following letter might be useful, a letter received this year from a yeoman farmer in the west of England, whom the present writer has known for the past thirty years, and for the correctness of whose statements he can vouch:—

“The Purchase of Land Bill is much wanted, and I am sure the Bill will rapidly gain ground among farmers when its objects are known and understood. I have a practical experience of the merits of your proposal (cultivating ownership), for, as you know, I own the farm I occupy, and can therefore realize to the full what the magic of ownership, as Arthur Young calls it, will do. I own and cultivate 120 acres of land. I keep 70 sheep, 50 to 70 bullocks, 4 horses, a fair stock of pigs, and a large number of poultry, and I grow a considerable quantity of fruit. I am

liberal in the employment of labour, as the land is naturally so poor and hilly that, if it were let and rack-rented for a term of seven years, no tenant farmer would give more than 10s. an acre for it. Sixty years ago the farm was valued at £55 a year. Last year (1904) the whole of this Union was valued by a well-known firm of valuers, and my farm was assessed by them at £211 a year.

"I am bounded on three sides by tenant farmers who have no interest in improving their land. I have had the curiosity to look into the past and present rateable value of their farms, and find it is now just what it was many years ago, about 12s. an acre, although the land is, to say the least, quite as improvable as mine. Obviously the output of food from these farms is very small as compared, acre for acre, with that of my own farm, and the national loss, due to this system of tenancy, is, as a consequence, very great. Some people thought that Lord Derby was drawing the long-bow when he said the produce of the soil of England could be doubled. It is all nonsense, it could be done easily, very easily.

"Singularly enough, one farm that adjoins me has for many years been cultivated by the owner, and I must confess that it has increased in value even more rapidly than my own."

The writer of this letter takes a prominent part in local work, education, etc., shows a keen interest in agricultural and other public questions, and is a member of the County Council. The arrangements and surroundings of his comfortable and well-equipped homestead show the special attributes of a permanent home. This is the type of farmer which it is sought, for the public good, by the proposals made, to increase by thousands in number. No doubt he works hard, but, as a yeoman owner, he enjoys what he himself describes as "one of the healthiest and most independent of occupations under the sun."

Agricultural Education in Elementary Schools.

A

B I L L

To promote Agricultural Education and
Nature Study in Public Elementary
Schools.

*Presented by Mr. Jesse Collings,
supported by*

*Sir John Kennaway, Mr. Rothschild,
Mr. Seymour Ormsby-Gore, Sir Ernest Flower,
Mr. Spear, Mr. Morrell, and
Sir Fortescue Flannery.*

*Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,
9 March 1905.*

AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND NATURE STUDY

In teaching facts to the young, the great thing to aim at is not discipline, but interest; learning should be a joy, children should be assisted forward by attraction in front. . . . First arouse interest, then supply information. . . . Is the teaching in rural schools all that could be desired in view of the future life and surroundings of the scholars? . . . I have often felt as if they would be better out observing nature, with educated assistance, in the fields, and laying a foundation for knowledge such as may hereafter provide them with some hobby of perpetual and lifelong interest; instead of being cooped up in stuffy rooms "with blinded eyesight, poring over miserable books." Books, too, are necessary, of course, and poetry and much human information as well; but should not the forces and the intricacies and the secrets of nature also be opened up? . . . Yet these children, uneducated and unenlightened, will have far too much of it, will feel deadly dull, and will flock into the towns hereafter for comradeship and interests which they cannot create for themselves. (Sir Oliver Lodge.)

There is no doubt of the necessity for work of this kind (nature study) with the children. The love or antipathy of the farm is engendered at a very early age in the minds of the young. (Prof. Bailey, "Cornell University," U.S.A.)

The efficiency of tuition will, other things equal, be proportionate to the gratification with which tasks are performed. . . . It is desirable that the instinctive inclination which every child shows to observe natural beauties and investigate natural phenomena should be encouraged. (Herbert Spencer, "Education.")

From observation and memory there is only one step to reflection. . . . every object that surrounds the child might be made instrumental to the excitement of thought. . . . We must bear in mind that the ultimate end of education is not a perfection in the accomplishments of the school, but fitness for life. . . . There are scarcely any circumstances in which a want of application does not proceed from a want of interest. Indescribable tedium must oppress the juvenile mind while the weary hours are slowly passing away, one by one, in an occupation which they can neither relish nor understand its use. . . . It is well to make a child read and write and learn and repeat—but it is still better to make a child think. Education, instead of merely considering what is to be imparted to children, ought to consider first what they may be said already to possess, if not as a developed, at least as an involved faculty capable of development. (Pestalozzi, "Letters on Education," 1827.)

I found that in America it is the "practical" subjects which are principally taught. . . . With the ordinary "everyday" boy who has to fight his way in the world, the bulk of the time is devoted to practical subjects likely to be of most use to him in after life. (Alfred Mosely, "Reports of the Mosely Commission.")

CHAPTER V

SYNOPSIS OF THE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS BILL, 1905

THE general object of this Bill is to provide for the teaching in public elementary schools of agricultural and horticultural subjects ; to give facilities for nature study ; and generally by means of object lessons to cultivate habits of observation and inquiry on the part of the pupils.

A Schedule attached to the Bill contains the following subjects, in addition to nature study, to be taught in the schools : Fruit-, flower- and vegetable-growing ; poultry- and bee-keeping ; budding, pruning and grafting ; cow- and pig-keeping ; milking ; rotation of garden crops ; nature and properties of soils ; knowledge and choice of seeds ; structure, life and food of plants ; action of birds and insects on crops ; use of manures ; use of simple tools ; packing fruit, vegetables and other produce for market.

Clause 2 gives to local Education Authorities wide powers for giving this teaching and for the provision of school gardens, tools, workshops, and all else that is necessary for carrying it out in an effective manner.

A special grant, not exceeding 75 per cent of the cost, is to be made by the Board of Education to local Education Authorities towards the expenses incurred in carrying out this part of the Bill.

Under Clause 3, local Education Authorities are empowered to form small museums or collections, consisting of minerals, plants, seeds, birds, animals, etc., etc., for the purpose of illustrating the instruction given.

Towards the expenses of putting this section into operation a special grant, not exceeding 50 per cent of the cost, is to be made by the Board of Education to the local Education Authorities.

Local Education Authorities are empowered to apply, for the purposes named in this Clause 3, any sums they may deem necessary from the Local Taxation Act, 1890 (Whisky Money).

Under Clause 4 the Board of Education is directed to make such alterations in the Code as may be necessary to make the teaching specified in the Bill compulsory in all elementary schools situated in rural and semi-rural districts.

Further, the grants paid on account of children taught in the subjects named are to be according to the highest scale named in the Code.¹

¹ A Bill similar to the present one was introduced by the present writer in 1893. It was backed by Sir John Lubbock (Lord Avebury), Sir Bernhard Samuelson, Sir John Kennaway, Sir Robert Reid, and Mr. George Dixon. It passed its second reading, but the Education Department at that time looked on the measure with scant favour, and it went no further. The present heads of the Board of Education, together with the Secretary to the Board, are, however, showing themselves more favourable to a change in the direction desired.



CHAPTER VI

RURAL EDUCATION

VARIOUS causes are assigned for the fact that the younger generation are leaving the country districts as fast as they find opportunities for doing so. Better wages, attractions of town life, social considerations, and the stagnation of village life, are the reasons usually given for this "exodus." But there is no doubt that one of the most potent causes of all is to be found in the kind of education given in rural schools.

The direct tendency of that education is to create a distaste for agricultural labour—if not for manual labour of all sorts—and a dissatisfaction with country life generally. By its new ideas, totally dissociated from the localities in which they live, are instilled in the minds of the young, who believe that such ideas can only be realized elsewhere. This, and a total absence of any prospect for the young labourer of a career on the land, are together sufficient to account for that wholesale migration which is such a serious incident in our national life.

The authorities a generation ago, in putting the Act of 1870 into operation, took a too scholarly view of education. Their methods were to store the rustic mind with undigested facts, to teach children as you would teach parrots, unmindful of the fact that they—the children—had powers of observation, of thinking, and of inquiry, the development of which is "education." Hence the well-stuffed codes and the wonderful invention of "payment by results" (rather a payment for appearances), which together gave a paper

satisfaction to the ratepayers, but cribbed the powers of the teacher and were injurious to the child.

It was an error to assume that the agricultural labourer of that day was an uneducated oaf. It is true he had no book-learning, but he had a shrewd common sense, while his knowledge and powers of observation with regard to crops, weather, seasons, and all other things that came within the narrow range of his hard and dismal life, were marked and hereditary. In rural schools the true educational method should have been (besides the three R's) to lay hold of and develop the inherent capacity in the children, and by appropriate teaching to train them in the knowledge of the "how and the why" of the natural objects by which they were surrounded. As Lord Bacon says, "Certainly custome is most perfect when it beginneth in young yeeres. This wee call education; which is nothing but an early custome."¹

There is on the part of the young no natural antipathy to country life. On the contrary, their inborn tendency is to love it. That tendency could be developed and made lasting by a suitable system of education and training.

The teaching of agriculture (agriculture in its widest sense) and a study of the phenomena connected with the mystery of growth, is the one teaching that can be made interesting and even fascinating to the minds of children. As Professor Carroll (Report, 1902) states: "In no other subject of education are there so many details within which may be found matter of disciplinary value in training the minds of the young. . . . In agriculture there exists ready in its every phase and varied in its extent, matter for useful in-

¹ "Essay on Custom and Education."—*Arber's Reprints*.

struction. . . . In vegetable physiology and botany there is in the neighbourhood of all rural schools matter for thought, observation, and teaching."

To be effective, however, in developing the tastes and influencing the career of children, this teaching must be begun early. For children engaged in book-learning and literary cramming till they are thirteen or fourteen years old, it is too late. By that time other ideas and habits will have been acquired, and a dislike for country work confirmed. Lord Kelvin states:¹ "The work on which I am engaged this day is work to which I was initiated when I was a child," and he goes on to narrate the subsequent steps in his great career. So, on the same principle, children in the elementary schools, if "initiated" in rural subjects, and with some prospects of a career held out to them, would become the natural feeders of those admirable classes for "technical agricultural teaching" which so many County Councils have instituted, and these classes would then become continuation schools in the true sense of the term.

But teaching of a kind quite different from this was adopted at first in our rural schools, and with some modifications has been continued to the present day. Children are subject to a steady grind of book-work, practised without much interest, and often with aversion. As Sir Oliver Lodge describes it, "a certain amount of orthodox but dull material is laid before them, and they are condemned to spend a certain number of hours over it." The memory is loaded with facts and information often useless and mostly soon to be forgotten, while the powers of observation are destroyed and the "innate inquisitiveness of child-

¹ "Nature," 29 October, 1903.

hood slain." A system more calculated to give children a distaste for country life and to divorce them from their surroundings can hardly be imagined. It is, as a writer observes, as if "the manufacture of little clerks was the final end of education."

Mr. J. A. Willis, one of H. M. Chief Inspectors, puts the case very clearly. He says that the scheme of work in several subjects is too large and too detailed for rural schools. For example, he condemns the practice of teaching history "in periods," as it involves an amount of detail "quite foreign to the minds of the elementary scholar." He adds. "Nothing can be more mournful than to see little unfortunates, on their first introduction to history, laboriously spelling their way through statements in journalese English about the policy of Sir Robert Walpole, because, forsooth, 'we are taking the Hanoverian period'!"¹

Mr. Willis is content to abide the charge of "lowering the standard of education." He very wisely has the "ordinary child" in mind, though, as he says, the "extraordinary child" need not be left out of account. In the same report Mr. Willis states: "As I said in my last report, I believe that if teachers were minded the cottage garden could be made the basis of the whole rural education."

Many of the general body of Inspectors in the same Report speak in a similar strain. These men, being in continual touch with schools, teachers and teaching, have the best opportunities of knowing the actual state of things, and therefore their opinions ought to receive the greatest consideration.

¹ General Report on Elementary Schools (Cd, 1706-1903). *Note*.—These Reports are quoted at some length because so few of the general public have either the opportunity or the desire for studying Blue Books.

The following extracts from their Reports are instructive and worth quoting.¹ Mr. Jarman says (p. 29) :

“ I think the average child leaves school less thoroughly prepared for the ordinary working person's life. The exceptional child, keen to learn, is better than he used to be, but the average child is more superficially taught. There is a growing spirit of indifference to School Work on the part of the children.”

Mr. E. Roberts reports (p. 59) :—

“ There hardly exists a rural school which is not surrounded by a rich variety of phenomena, growths, and animated life, upon which children can bring their powers of observation to bear with radiant pleasure and delightful profit. These should be sought and studied, and not the stereotyped and hide-bound homilies, however eminent their authors and excellent their contents.”

Mr. Hughes states (p. 64) :—

“ Finally there is one general remark that I should like to make, and that is to emphasize what I have already hinted at, as to the lack of growth of resourcefulness in our pupils. Too often indeed pupils leave school unable to do anything for themselves. . . . There can be no doubt that our trained teachers are apt to teach far too much,—the children are never allowed to surmount an obstacle for themselves—they are not allowed to think a matter out for themselves—the food in front of them is arranged so scientifically, it is so carefully sifted and chosen, that the mastication becomes a most mechanical process. . . . Until we can inscribe Power and not Knowledge as the aim of training we shall suffer from a bad system of education.”

¹ General Report on Elementary Schools (Cd, 1706-1903).

Much evidence is to be found also in the Report, showing the remarkable effect which an improved method of teaching has on the children in schools where such teaching is given.

Mr. L. J. Roberts (p. 52) says :—

“The process of making acquaintance with external nature is being made delightful and stimulating to the children, and while their capacity for exact observation is being developed, they are being taught to take a pleasurable interest in every living thing around them. That interest in the green earth and its feathered and four-footed tenantry, which is seemingly instinctive in most children, is being fostered into a lifelong resource. It is pleasing to notice how many school plants are now grown for observation, and how the growth of the plant is observed and recorded from day to day, so that the children gain something of the pleasure of original investigation, simple though it be as yet. . . . Many teachers possess a special knowledge of school gardening and a real interest in the subject, and one cannot too greatly admire the readiness with which many of them, often out of school hours, take their scholars to the school-house garden, there to tell them what he has learned and observed in his leisure hours.”

If we turn from the evidence of inspectors to that of teachers, we find that with many of them the same view of the subject prevails. ¹The following extracts

¹ For a full report see “Nature Study,” by W. M. Webb. (Co-operative Printing Society, London. Price 6d.) See also a valuable work, beautifully illustrated, on the same subject, “Eton Nature Study and Observational Lessons.” (Matthew Davenport Hill and Wilfred Mark Webb. 1903. Duckworth & Co.)

from papers read by teachers at a recent "Nature Study Exhibition" are very interesting :—

"The school garden is a piece of ground preserved solely for school purposes. . . . Except that it is kept weeded during the holidays, the whole work of the garden and orchard is done by the boys and girls, from first to last, under the direction of a master on the staff. The experimental portion is used for growing all the plants most necessary for life in different conditions of soil, manure, and so on. In fact, it is an outdoor laboratory, to be used in connection with the class-room, in which further experiments are carried out in plant physiology and the chemistry of earth, air, and water, for the investigation of the problems suggested by the garden work." (Mr. F. H. Badley.)

Again :—

"I am dissatisfied with mere book-education. I want my children to see, to smell, to handle, to feel, and to think about things for themselves. In books we do all this, at best, second-hand, I want to make their observation more acute and their records more accurate. . . . We are not taught to see things, and we do not see them. We go through life without seeing half the beauty, half the wonder that is daily before our eyes." (Mr. H. Lorison.)

It is difficult to understand how the Board of Education—in spite of traditional leaning in favour of literary education—can resist evidence, not only from its own officers, but from many other quarters—in favour of a reform in the present methods of teaching. It is true that several subjects of a rural kind are now added to the code as "optional" subjects. This "permission" is useful as far as it goes,

as it gives an opportunity for managers and teachers to show what good results can be got from the kind of teaching referred to, even when given under unfavourable, and sometimes even discouraging, circumstances. But the schools in which this instruction is given with any thoroughness are comparatively few in number. Inspectors report whole districts with few, if any, school gardens. It is stated that school gardens are very slow to "take on," for the reasons that the "expenses are great," and that the "grant is inadequate," etc.¹

This state of things is likely to continue so long as what may be called apathy exists at headquarters.

The addition of Nature Study and the teaching of agriculture as "optional" subjects to an already overcrowded curriculum is altogether insufficient to meet the case. They should be made compulsory subjects in all rural schools, and a foremost place given to them, by the omission of other subjects that are either useless or of minor importance. It is not a question to be treated in any perfunctory way, but as a serious and pressing one on which the future character of rural life in England greatly depends.

In France the Chiefs of the two Departments of

¹ The Education Committee of the Warwickshire County Council have provided school gardens in some villages, but they state: "As the Board of Education have declined to express an opinion whether a Local Education Authority may provide land for school gardens for the use of children attending non-provided schools, we have required managers of non-provided schools to provide the land at their own cost." (Report of Warwickshire Education Committee, 19 April, 1904.)

The same Committee later on state: "We are of opinion that though the teaching of some principles of Agriculture and Domestic Economy is desirable, the practical difficulties and expense are so great that we do not see our way to recommend it for all rural schools." (Report, July 30, 1904.)

Government (Agriculture and Education) combine together to promote in every way the teaching of husbandry in rural schools. Their joint object, freely expressed in reports and speeches, is not only to improve agriculture, but "to inspire the young with a love of country life," so as to keep them permanently on the land. They regard any tendency towards migration as a national misfortune to be counteracted in every possible way. In this course they are backed up by the Government and by public opinion. Instead of £136,000, which is the sum placed at the disposal of our Board of Agriculture for all purposes, the French Department of Agriculture is credited by the State (1904) with £1,759,000.¹

The yearly grants in aid given by our Board of Agriculture to agricultural institutions of various kinds amount to only £10,000, while the vote for agricultural education in France has reached the sum (1899) of no less than £152,460.²

Agricultural teaching is compulsory only in the elementary schools of France; but in order to have no idle interval in the child's education, a new class of schools was established by the Act of 1875, which are practically continuation primary schools. They are for the children of labourers, peasants, and small farmers, who can enter at the age of thirteen on leaving the elementary schools.

¹ "Consular Report No. 3172 on the French Budget for 1904."

² "Consular Report No. 505 on Agricultural Education in France, 1899." This is, of course, in addition to the large sums voted by Local Authorities for the same purpose. In the small kingdom of Würtemberg (about the size of Wales), with a revenue of about four and a half millions sterling, the State grant was £72,550 for the promotion of agriculture. This is in addition to grants for veterinary matters and for the management of woods and forests.

The object of these *Écoles pratiques d'Agriculture* (Practical Agricultural Schools), as officially described, is the "practical elementary teaching of agriculture." The whole of the teaching staff and the expenses of all accessory work (such as experiments, etc., etc.) are provided exclusively by the State.

A farm is attached to each school, and the training is thoroughly practical—learning by doing. The object, as stated in one of the reports, is "to take the child when he leaves the primary or superior primary school, to give him two years' thorough practical and theoretical learning, and then to send him back to the agricultural family, which he will not again leave." Such is the object of the *École pratique d'Agriculture*; the School does not pretend to make finished agriculturists of its pupils, but it furnishes them with the means of becoming so, by giving them a solid foundation of essential agricultural knowledge.

The promoters (Local Authorities or others) are responsible only for the establishment and upkeep of the schools, for which they receive the fees. These fees are fixed by the Minister of Agriculture, who in an official circular fixed them at from £16 to £24 per annum, which sums include board, lodging, and every other expense. For day pupils the fees are very low, generally merely nominal. But a very large number of free scholarships is given by the State and by the Local Authorities to assist—in the words of the circular—"those small cultivators who desire for their children the training offered, but who cannot well afford the expense." Practically no one is excluded on the score of expense.

Full particulars of these schools are given in a report issued by the Minister of Agriculture (*Rapport*

sur l'Enseignement Agricole en France, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris).

They are described in this Report as "practical schools of agriculture for the class of peasant proprietors, who form such an immense majority of the cultivators of the soil—for those laborious peasants who are counted by millions, and who constitute one of the greatest forces of the country." The Report further states that the children are taken at the age of thirteen, on leaving the primary schools, with the object of completing the instruction given in those schools.

It is claimed for this widespread and "very suitable agricultural education,"¹ that it binds the children to rural life, and makes them less desirous of going into towns "to swell the numbers, already too great, of those *déclassés* who constitute a perpetual danger to society." There were thirty-nine of these schools established at the date of the report, and a hope is expressed that the time is not far off when each of the eighty-seven departments of France will possess one.² These institutions are referred to at this length because they are so nearly connected with the elementary schools, and chiefly because of the value set on them by the French authorities, both central and local. They are valued, not only from an economic point of view, but on account of the great effect they are supposed to be having on the social life of the nation.

The most important and instructive document of

¹ See Vol. I, p. 74.

² The present writer has visited two or three of these schools, and though it is unwise to generalize from a few examples, yet, judging from these examples, the schools deserve the high praise given to them.

all, however, is that issued by the French Minister of Education, which contains "A Scheme for the teaching of elementary ideas of Agriculture (a compulsory subject) in rural schools." It is a practical guide to teachers in giving this instruction. It contains essential directions with which the teacher must comply, with such modifications as are required by the circumstances of the locality. The document is well illustrated with drawings showing the apparatus, kind of experiments, etc., recommended. Three courses of instruction are set forth: the Elementary Course, for children from seven to nine years of age; the Middle Course, for children from nine to eleven; and the Higher Course, for those from eleven to thirteen.

It is impressed on the teachers that "the aim of elementary instruction in agriculture is to initiate the bulk of our country children into that degree of elementary knowledge which is necessary to enable them to read a modern book on agriculture with profit . . . to inspire them with a love of country life so that they may prefer it to that of towns and factories; and to convince them of the fact that agriculture, besides being the most independent of all means of livelihood, is also more remunerative than many other occupations, to those who practise it with industry, intelligence and enlightenment."¹

Many of our County Councils have made admirable arrangements for teaching the various branches of agriculture. But they labour under great difficulties—

¹ "Enseignement des Notions Élémentaires d'Agriculture dans les Écoles Rurales." This scheme should be read by all who are interested in the subject. A full translation is published by the Board of Education in Ireland as an Appendix to the Report (C. 8925-1898).

first, the sparseness of the rural population ; next, the want of preliminary training in the elementary schools ; and lastly, the almost total absence in our villages of the class of children found in the French schools. In France the great bulk of the pupils in elementary schools are the children of small farmers, peasant proprietors, or of labourers either owning some land or with prospects of doing so.

In English schools these classes are rarely found. The children learn what is set before them, with no fixed idea as to their later career, except it be to get away from their villages, as others have done before them. If there is a very sharp lad among them, he is considered by parents and friends as "too good for the land," meaning by that that he is too good to become and remain an agricultural labourer, to which state his prospects are at present confined.

No doubt there would at first be a difficulty in securing competent teachers, but it is a difficulty connected with educational administration, and could be readily overcome if there were a will to do so. At present the best-paid situations are in cities and other populous places. The village schoolmaster, besides being less well paid, leads an isolated life, unrelieved by any special interest (either for himself or his pupils) in the dull routine of instruction he has to give. These positions should be reversed, and the best teachers should be secured for country schools by the offer of pecuniary and other inducements.

To acquire a practical knowledge of the subjects to be taught in the schools, free scholarships should be offered to teachers, tenable at suitable agricultural institutions. The knowledge of these subjects should be obligatory on teachers in rural schools, and a certi-

ificate of proficiency in them should carry with it special advantages.¹

Under these new conditions numbers of men and women, whose natural tastes and inclinations lean towards country pursuits, would speedily qualify themselves as teachers in rural schools where the education given would be so interesting to themselves and to their pupils.

There are many who hold it absurd to suppose that agriculture can be taught to young children in elementary schools. But the term agriculture is used here, not in the usual and restricted sense of referring only to the farmer's work of raising corn, cattle, etc. It is used in its real and inclusive sense, as relating also to horticulture and to everything else connected with the cultivation of the soil.

No one pretends that advanced agriculturists can be turned out of the elementary schools. But what can be done is, in the words of Lord Kelvin, "to initiate" the children in rural subjects; and, during the most impressionable age, to form and confirm their taste and love for everything belonging to country life. It is a timely and necessary beginning of an education to be continued during later years.

Those who are old enough can remember at what a very early age children in former times—either by apprenticeships or through the needs of parents—took part in farm work; and it is astonishing what

¹ Mr. Howard states: "Facilities and assistance are at present needed for rural teachers to attend suitable classes. Even if fees for tuition are merely nominal, the travelling expenses are serious for a teacher with a small salary" (General Reports on Elementary Schools, Cd, 1706, 1903).

useful things they were capable of doing. This custom, however, was a wrong one, not on the score of health, but because it deprived the children of education, and wiped out the period of child-life with its leisure and play. Still, if we are to have a continuous race of agriculturists, this "initiation," this training, must be begun at the same early age, and the elementary school is the only place where such training can be given to an extent sufficient for the object in view, and in a manner that will leave the pleasures of child-life untouched. Work in connection with the land is not like that in factories and workshops. Children have a natural bent to busy themselves in it whenever they can get the chance of doing so.

It is useless, however, to expect that this alteration in rural education will be sufficient of itself to stop migration, at any rate, so far as the cleverer children are concerned. Indeed, so long as there is no visible career on the land, and to become "little clerks" remains the ambition of sharp children in rural

¹ A letter recently received from a clergyman illustrates this point. "I have been Vicar and Rector of two country parishes : twenty-two years in Suffolk, twenty-one in Berkshire. During most of that time I have taken children out of school hours and had them to work in the house ; if girls, in the garden, and in the stable if boys. Many have thus got 'technical education' and have started in good places on leaving me. I have a boy now nearly twelve, who came to me eighteen months ago. He has learnt to clean shoes, knows how to milk, to help in the stables, even to harness a pair, and has got some knowledge of poultry-keeping, growing cucumbers and melons in frames, and, in fact, is generally useful and perfectly healthy. He regularly attends school. He began at 1s. a week, and now earns 3s. a week. If he were free from school he would be worth 6s. a week." (From the Rev. C. T. Cornish, Childrey Rectory, Wantage, August, 1903.)

The present writer could dig, plant, attend to poultry and pigs, and do other work of the same kind at ten ; could mow, harness, and "put to" a horse, and do other things on the land at twelve to fourteen, the doing which was regarded as a pleasure, and not as a toil.

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schools, it would perhaps be better to let the present system of education remain as it is, and to improve it in the direction of making these children *efficient* "little clerks," so as to give them equal chances with those turned out from urban schools with whom they have to compete.¹ Therefore, the recommendations contained in the "Rural Education Bill" must be taken with those contained in the "Land Purchase Bill," particularly in the second part thereof which relates to the creation of a peasant proprietary. To the extent that these reforms taken as a whole could be carried out, to that extent would the whole force and meaning of our country life be changed.

Agriculture is the one industry that never dies. It is the one for the produce of which there is an ever-increasing demand. To the degree that it is restored to prosperity on the lines suggested, to that degree the "decay of our villages," about which so much has been written, would be stopped, and their "silent loneliness," so much complained of, would disappear. In olden times village life in "Merrie England" was not a dull one. The villages were peopled by all those classes of cultivators that have been destroyed, largely by legislation, and which it should now be the object of legislation to restore. The old yeoman farmers were alive with interests in their own property. The small colonies of peasant proprietors in Worcestershire and elsewhere are not "lonely," nor are their lives dull, and with proper education and fair

¹ "Some country schools have a kind of connection with various London firms, and find regular employment there for some of their brightest boys, who often do very well." (Mr. Henderson, Report on Elementary Schools, Cd, 1706, 1903, p. 75.)

prospects the rural youth would learn to regard the country districts as their permanent home.

These ideas may appear somewhat visionary, and it is possible that the attempt to realize them would be tempered by some failures. But they are in reality reasonable and practical. The policy they contain should be a popular one, because, to say the least, it gives some hope of a remedy for the present deplorable condition of rural life in England.

CHAPTER VII

THE ENGLISH LAND SYSTEM ITS ORIGIN AND GROWTH

BEFORE dealing further with the arguments for and against a scheme for the restoration of Yeoman or Occupying Ownership, and Peasant Proprietary, it is well to review the causes which have led up to the present system of land tenure in England. Such a sketch, however, to be of any use, must begin at a very early date, for "the centuries are all lineal children of one another."¹ Without this historical reference, it is impossible for the general reader to understand the present position of the Land question. The problems contained in that question can only be solved in the light of history. It is quite necessary "to learn the meaning of the old order of things with its community and equality, as a key to the right understanding of the new order of things, with the contrasting individual independence and inequality."²

This sketch, however, is by no means made in a spirit of antagonism to any particular class. On the contrary, it is made in the hope that all classes—landlords included—after seriously considering the results of past legislation and methods, will come to the conclusion that for their own as well as for the national good, a drastic alteration is urgently needed. At the

¹ Carlyle.

² "The English Village Community," Seebohm.

same time no excuse or apology is felt to be necessary in placing before the public the case of the descendants of the despoiled classes of former days. It must always be borne in mind that the principle of *purchase* is the basis of the proposals now made. That being so, it is impossible that any material harm can be done to anyone. There remains, therefore, only the wisdom and fitness of the suggested changes to be considered.

A proper understanding of the following pages is difficult therefore without some knowledge of the history of land tenure in England. The study of all matters connected with the land from early times—the various kinds of land tenure which existed and the complicated laws, customs, and practices on which these tenures rested—are all intensely interesting. It is to be regretted that more persons—especially young persons—do not engage in this study, as it is the very best quest into the real history of the English people. For the present purpose and for the sake of plainness, it is thought best, in tracing the growth of the English land system, to start from a certain point—the Norman Conquest—when a comparatively new order of things with regard to the land began.

As to questions such as the existence of feudal tenure in England before the Conquest, and the modifications thereof which the Conqueror introduced; the changes effected by its development as a territorial system rather than a judicial one; the position of the Anglo-Saxon holders of folcland and bocland; the manner in which King William treated the land question from the point of view of a conqueror dividing the spoils among his followers, and also from the point of view

of a rightful heir to the English Crown, which he claimed to be; the extent to which the King retained the supreme power in his own hands and exacted a direct oath of fealty to himself from every tenant of land in the kingdom, whoever was his lord; the manner in which the whole country was parcelled out into manors; the powers of the lords of the manors and the extent to which they were controlled by custom; the methods by which the manors were divided into the lord's demesne, common land, and holdings of free and unfree tenants and the terms of the tenure of these holdings; the manner in which the lord carved up portions of his demesne lands and let them to a new body of tenants, who, so long as they paid their rents, had practically perpetual tenure and were free men; the creation of a class of customary tenants, or copyholders, who, notwithstanding the payment of rents, retained the servile status; how far these copyholders were the historical successors of the old English folcland holders, who had heritable titles, according to local customs, and who paid services originally to the State, but subsequently to the lord; the intricate manner in which sub-letting—sub-infeudation—was affected by the statute "*Quia Emptores*," 1290; the different forms and powers of alienation:—all these subjects are fully treated by eminent authorities, and are most interesting even to students without legal training, but would take too much space to deal with here.

The laws relating to land are so complicated that only lawyers can understand them. The only method for a layman to pursue is to carefully study the opinions and decisions of the best authorities on each of the several branches of the question, and to

accept the views of these authorities when he finds them in general agreement.¹

In dealing thus with the question of the land, the great facts to be grasped—on which the most eminent writers are agreed—are, that land throughout England is the subject of “Tenure,” and not of Ownership; that absolute ownership of land is unknown to English law; that in practice in early times and in theory at the present day the only absolute owner is the king, and that every one else holds such land as he may possess (whatever may be his rights with regard to it and its free alienation) simply as a tenant of the king.

This may or may not be regarded by the territorial party as a mere legal fiction, but nevertheless there seems to be no doubt that in theory at least the king—as representing the people—is the sole owner of the soil of England. “The king of Domesday is the supreme landlord of all the land of the nation;

¹ As a short account of the English Land Laws, and one containing very few technical terms, “The Land Laws,” by Frederick Pollock (Macmillan) will be found most useful. On the land laws and customs, and on other questions connected with the land, the following are among the best authorities:—“The English Village Community,” Seebohm. “Constitutional History,” Stubbs. “Law of Real Property,” Joshua Williams. “Common Rights,” by the same author. “Village Communities,” Sir Henry Maine. Goodeve’s “Law of Real Property.” “Custom and Tenant Right,” Charles Elton. Freeman’s “History of the Norman Conquest.” “Villeinage in England,” Professor Vinogradoff. “The Growth of the Manor,” by the same author. “Constitutional History of England,” Hallam. “Europe during the Middle Ages,” by the same author. “History of the Law of Real Property,” Kenelm E. Digby. “Six Centuries of Work and Wages,” Thorold Rogers. “The Economic Interpretation of History,” by the same author. “Agricultural Community of the Middle Ages, Enclosures etc.,” Dr. Nasse. “Economic History,” Professor Ashley. “A Students’ Manual of English Constitutional History,” D. J. Medley. “History of the Anglo-Saxons,” Sharon Turner. Also the Statutes at large, and the Rolls of Parliament, so far as they deal with the question.

the old folk land had become the king's and all private land is held mediately or immediately of him."¹

It is worthy of note that in the old statutes referring to the question, the fact that the ownership of land is vested in the nation, as represented by the king, seems to be unquestioned. Every holder of land is a tenant except the king. The Charter granted by Henry III, which confirms the provisions of Magna Charta, contains, in the second chapter, the conditions on which the tenants-in-chief renewed their holdings.

"If any earls or barons or any other which hold of us in chief by knight's service dye and at the time of his death his heir be of full age and oweth to us relief, he shall have his inheritance by the old relief, that is to say the heir or heirs of an earl for a whole earldom by one hundred pounds; the heir or heirs of a baron for a whole barony by one hundred marks; the heir or heirs of a knight for one knight's fee one hundred shillings at the most," etc.²

Also it is enacted in the same reign that :—

"No one shall constrain a freeholder to answer for his freehold without the King's commandment."³

Again, a Statute of Edward II enacted :—"When anyone who holds of the King in chief and his heir enters on the land before he has done homage to the King and received seisin of the King he shall gain no freehold thereby."⁴

¹ Stubbs' "Constitutional History."

² 9 Henry III.

³ 51 Henry III, Ch. 22.

⁴ 17 Edward II, Ch. 13.

These and other Statutes on the subject are set out in English in an edition (black letter) by Joseph Keble published in 1681. They are "not abridged nor parceled but taken intire as in the Public Rolls."

The principle of feudalism was a life estate only, the land reverting to the King on the death of the holder ; the greatest landlord therefore was only a tenant, holding land under the King on condition of services rendered, usually of a military kind. These tenants-in-chief in their turn granted land to sub-tenants on the conditions that personal service should be given or annual payments made in money or in kind. In parish records and county histories the particulars of these tenures are very frequently given. For instance, "The hundred of Wynkelegh is in the hands of Sir Roger de Keynges, and the same Roger holds the said hundred from Lord Gilbert, and aforesaid Gilbert holds the said hundred of the king in chief ; that the hundred is valued at a half mark per annum."¹

The oath of fealty taken by freemen and villeins before the lords from whom they held lands involved mutual obligations between the two parties. It in no way suggests that either party was an owner of land or anything more than a holder of it. The statute enjoins that : "When a freeman shall do fealty to his

¹ "History of the Manor of Winkleigh, Devon," by Charles Worthy, 1876. An immense number of parish records contain similar information. As an instance, in the history of Southmolton, among other cases it is stated that : "The Manor of Southmolton with the said Borough and hundred is held of the king in the form aforesaid and is worth yearly clear £18." "Records of Southmolton," John Cock, 1893.

The services by which lands were held varied greatly ; they were sometimes of a substantial kind, and often light and even nominal.

On the holder of the land at Bicton (Devonshire) was imposed the duty of guarding the gate of Exeter Castle. The holder of land at Budleigh had to pay 11s. a year. Some holders had to execute summonses and distrains, others to supply the king with bows and arrows, and salmon when he came to Dartmoor to hunt. Some had to supply armed attendants, etc. A list is given in a paper read before the Devonshire Association by the Rev. Oswald Reichel, July 20, 1905.

See also more complete accounts in the "Pipe Rolls," or the "Great

lord he shall hold his right hand upon a book and shall say thus : Hear you my lord, that I shall be to you both faithful and true, and shall owe my fidelity unto you for the land that I hold of you, and lawfully shall do such customs and services as my duty is to you at the terms assigned. So help me God and all His Saints."

The oath taken by a villein is somewhat different. He does fealty "for the land that I hold of you in villeinage, and shall be justified by you in body and goods," etc.¹

This holding of land in fealty seems to have lasted at any rate in theory till it was abolished with other feudal incidents in 1660. In 1642 an ordinance was issued founded on an Act passed in that year by which episcopal lands were to be sold and the proceeds used for the payment of the debts of the kingdom and for the service of the Commonwealth. The purchasers were not to be absolute owners, but were to have "letters patent for these grants which they were to hold directly of the king in fealty only."²

Indeed, the legal principle of land tenure in England seems to have continued unchanged down to

Rolls of the Pipe." These remarkable records were begun in the twelfth century. They set forth the financial position of the holdings of the country. There is no suggestion in them of any private ownership of land. They contain minute particulars of lands granted by the Crown; the yearly sums payable to the Crown on account thereof; the disbursements (tithes, alms, etc.) made by the holders of farms, and other matters. The accounts are put in Dr. and Cr. form, and show the balance due to the Exchequer. These records are edited by the "Pipe Roll Society," which has published a number of volumes. Volume iii, which contains the "Introduction," is specially interesting. It gives a facsimile of the elegant style of handwriting of the time, and several examples of the completeness with which the accounts were kept.

¹ 17 Edward II, St. 2.

² "History of Northallerton," Rev. J. L. Saywell, 1885.

the present day. A great authority on the subject writes: "An English subject may enjoy the absolute ownership of goods, but not of land. The law does not recognize absolute ownership in land unless in the hands of the Crown. . . . For by English law the king is the supreme owner or lord paramount of every parcel of land in the realm. English law then recognizes property in, but not absolute ownership of land: the most absolute property in land that a subject can have is but an estate. . . . In law a landholder's estate is his interest in the land of which he is a tenant, and the word is specially used to denote the extent of his interest. Thus a man is said to have an estate for life in land, or an estate of inheritance, as an estate in fee simple; and all his estate in his land is equivalent to his right therein."¹

The vast number of freeholders which existed in olden times were freeholder-tenants, who as a rule held their lands from over-lords or from the king himself, subject to a variety of services which were not of a servile kind—knight's services, etc. These freeholders were nominally protected by the common law, and from a legal point of view were safe in the possession of their holdings. For centuries they were a powerful class and resisted the encroachments of the territorial magnates, but as time went on, by one means or another they were gradually worsted in the struggle and eventually they disappeared as a prominent factor in our rural economy. Of these freeholders Stubbs writes:—"Next after the gentry in respect of that political weight which depends on the ownership of land was ranked the great body of freeholders, the yeomanry of

¹ "Law of Real Property," by Joshua Williams. 19th edition, 1901.

the Middle ages, a body which in antiquity of possession and purity of extraction was probably superior to the classes that looked down upon them as ignoble.”¹

There was another order of cultivators which, perhaps, from an historical point of view is more interesting than any other, namely, the copyholders. They were largely recruited from the villeins, who were a grade above the serfs, and held their lands on a servile tenure, that is, on conditions of service rendered to the lords, usually in the form of ploughing, mowing, and tilling the lords' demesnes—services which in those days were deemed to be of a servile kind. The nature and extent of these services were “copied” or enrolled on the rolls of the manor and were enforced with more or less severity according to the will of the lord. After the “Black Death,” labour being scarce, these services were enforced with a cruel rigour. One of the outcomes of the rebellion under Wat Tyler was a great increase in the ranks of this class with an improvement in their position. The lesson the great landholders learnt from that rebellion was, that they could no longer, with impunity, inflict these onerous conditions on those who held under them, and consequently personal services were generally modified or commuted into annual money payments. But the fines, fees, and other exactions connected with the copyholds were retained. The actual tenure of these copyholders, or customary tenants, was reckoned quite as secure as that of the freeholders. They ranked in importance and probably in numbers with the freeholders, and the two classes together formed the great body of English yeomanry.

¹ “Constitutional History,” Vol. III.

The position to which the copyholders had attained is described by one of the most eminent authorities. "Whereas at one time they were so dependent on the lord's will that the lords upon the least occasion, sometimes without colour of reason, sometimes only to make evident to the world the height of their power and authority, would expel out of house and home their poor copyholders, leaving them helpless and remediless by any course of law, and driving them to sue by way of petition. But now copyholders stand on a sure ground; now they weigh not their lord's displeasure, only having a special care to perform carefully what duties and services soever their tenure exacts."¹ On the same subject Hallam writes: "So long as the copyholder did continue to discharge the stipulations of tenure (inserted on the roll), the lord was not entitled to divest him of his estate."²

But all this apparent security did not save the copyholders as a body. There remained the fines on alienation and on succession. There remained also the heriots, a tribute which the lord demanded on the death of the holder, and which was usually paid in the form of goods, chattels, or the best beast on the holding. The copyholder therefore was subject to "suit, service and arbitrary fines and to heriots which add a sorrow to death."³ The amount of the fines was not, as a rule, stated in the manor rolls; as land became more valuable, it was raised and raised to sums that it was impossible for the farmer to pay, and so the holding had to be surrendered to the lord, to whom it was

¹ Sir Edward Coke, quoted in the "History of the Law of Real Property," by Kenelm E. Digby (p. 248). Third Edition, 1884.

² "Middle Ages," Vol. III, p. 17.

³ "Custom and Tenant Right," by Charles Elton.

worth many times the lawful rent which the copyholder had been paying. That a legal limit should be put to the amount of these fines was one of the demands made by the insurgents during the yeoman and peasant rebellions of the sixteenth century.¹ Besides these classes there was the great mass of peasantry, practically all of whom had land or rights in the land of some kind. The village tradesmen, smiths, wheelwrights, and others, also held land of their own, subject to their doing certain work on the lord's demesne.

The modern historian, as a rule, passes over with scant notice the disputes and severe struggles between the territorial lords and the cultivators of the soil; and yet these disputes and struggles constitute to a large extent the social, the domestic history of England. The history of the proceedings, legal and illegal, with regard to the land of England has never yet been fully written from the view of the cultivator and of the general community.²

¹ In the old histories bitter complaints are made of this unjust exercise of the arbitrary powers of the landlords. Cases are recorded where the fines alone which were demanded amounted to £100 and upwards—probably ten times, and sometimes even twenty times the fixed yearly rentals of the small copyholds.

² For valuable suggestions touching the legal part of this chapter I am indebted to Mr. Rowland Powell-Williams, of Lincoln's Inn, son of my former colleague, the late Rt. Hon. J. Powell-Williams, M.P. for the South Division of Birmingham.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ENGLISH LAND SYSTEM (*continued*)

THE policy adopted by the landed aristocracy in those early times, and carried out through succeeding ages in a continuous and unswerving manner, was a very plain one. Shortly stated, it was to turn commonalty into severalty; to ignore the rights of the community; to destroy all joint and common ownership in the soil, and to turn the landlord into a landowner. The general result of that policy was to reduce the yeoman and copyholder to ordinary rent-paying tenants, the peasant to a mere wage-receiver; to aggregate land into large, often immense estates, the private property of a comparatively few persons; and finally, to settle our land system on the basis of landlord, tenant, and labourer.

One potent method of pursuing this policy was by legal proceedings. The feudal land laws were so intricate and subtle that long and expensive lawsuits, carried on by wealthy landlords, by the aid of cunning and unscrupulous lawyers, too often ended in the ruin of the cultivating holder and the loss of his land.

Hence it was that, in all the peasant revolts, such fierce hatred was shown towards the lawyers, many of the insurgents no doubt having lost their lands by process of law and most of the others being liable to a similar proceeding.¹

¹ This point will be further dealt with in the chapters on "Peasant Revolts."

But of all the means by which the cultivators of the soil were deprived of their rights, the inclosures of land were undoubtedly the most effective and calamitous. The evils connected with the practice were the result, not so much of the actual inclosures of land, as of the principle of general confiscation on which they were carried out.

The beginning of the policy of inclosures—as far as legal action is concerned—may perhaps be placed at the passing of the “Statute of Merton” in 1235, extended soon afterwards by the “Statute of Westminster.”¹ Before that date, a lord could not inclose without the consent of his free tenants.² The Court held at Merton, composed of the “archbishops, bishops, and the greater part of the earls and barons of England,” decreed that “as certain great men” complained that they could not make profit, etc., from their waste lands, territorial lords thenceforth should appropriate their vast manors, provided they left to the freeholders existing at the time “sufficient pasture to their tenements with ingress and egress to and from the same.” The freeholders themselves had no voice in this settlement. Thus the barons assembled, by a law made by themselves, gave to themselves full rights over all the manor, wastes, woods, forests, and pastures of England, with the exception of the “sufficient pasture” which was to be left for the then existing freeholders. In the face of an ever-increasing population,

¹ “Henry III held Parliament at Merton the day after his coronation, in which were enacted Provisions of Merton, which are the most ancient body of laws after Magna Charta, and consist of eleven Articles” (Camden’s “Britannica,” published 1607). The Statute of Westminster was 13 Edward I, chap. 46.

² See “Villeinage in England,” by Paul Vinogradoff. (Clarendon Press.)

the statute contained no provision whatever for the descendants of the then existing freeholders and commoners, whose rights in the soil—rights equal to those of the lords—were thus extinguished.

The effect of these statutes was not immediately felt. The population was then so small, the extent of the so-called "wastes" so vast, that it was only in a limited number of cases that lords of the manor found it to their interest to inclose. But the evil seed had been sown which was to ripen into disaster and ruin. The Black Death, imported into this country in 1348, destroyed, according to the lowest estimate, a third of the whole population.¹ This appalling mortality caused such a dearth of labour that it was found more profitable to lay down land in grass, and consequently inclosures were multiplied.

The high price of wool early in the fifteenth century gave an immense impetus to the practice of inclosures. The increasing demand for English wool, from Flanders and other manufacturing places, stimulated the rapacity of the landlord class, who found that by creating large sheep-farms, their revenues were enormously increased.

As land became more valuable, so inclosures, legal and illegal, were carried on with increasing activity—an activity that was continued through successive centuries down to about two generations ago.

During these centuries the act of stealing the goose from the common was treated as a violation of the rights of property, to be promptly dealt with by the prison and the gibbet; but the seizing of the

¹ All the old chroniclers refer to this fearful pestilence. For a modern account of its origin and progress, see "Six Centuries of Work and Wages," Thorold Rogers, Vol. I, p. 219.

common itself was viewed in a different light. It was a larger and more respectable transaction, carried out under class-made law, or more often by the strong arm under the law of "might is right," so potent in former times. Donald Ben Lean, in "Waverley," was regarded, not as a purloiner of cattle, but as a "gentleman drover," for the reason that "he never lifted less than a drove in his life."

Vast areas of land were cleared of men to make room for sheep. Commoners found their few acres of arable land almost useless when deprived of that common pasture for their cattle, which had always belonged to them. Rights, customs, and privileges which had been enjoyed by different classes of cultivators from time immemorial, were extinguished by force or legal technicalities, while large numbers of freeholders and copyholders were, by the same means, either evicted or reduced to the position of tenants, with ever-increasing rents. These dispossessed classes were driven by want and despair to swell the ranks of beggars, vagabonds, and robbers, whose existence so puzzled successive governments, and for whose suppression the most cruel and wicked laws were enacted in vain.

One of the most brilliant of modern historians thus vividly describes the situation :—

"Increase of rent ended, with such tenants, in the relinquishment of their holdings ; but the bitterness of the ejections which the new system of cultivation necessitated, was increased by the iniquitous means that were often employed to bring them about. The farmers, if we believe More in 1515, were 'got rid of either by fraud or force, or tired out with repeated wrongs into parting with their property. In this way

it comes to pass that these poor wretches, men, women, husbands, orphans, widows, parents with little children, households greater in number than in wealth (for arable farming requires many hands, while one shepherd and herdsman will suffice for a pasture farm)—all these emigrate from their native fields without knowing where to go.' The sale of their scanty household stuff drove them to wander homeless abroad, to be thrown into prison as vagabonds, to beg and to steal. . . . The social disorder, in fact, baffled the sagacity of English statesmen, and they could find no better remedy for it than laws against the further extension of sheep-farms, and a formidable increase of public executions. Both were alike fruitless. Inclosures and evictions went on as before and swelled the numbers and the turbulence of the floating labour class. The riots against "inclosures," of which we first hear in the time of Henry the Sixth, and which became a constant feature of the Tudor period, are indicative not only of a perpetual strife going on in every quarter between the landowners and the peasant class, but of a mass of social discontent which was to seek constant outlets in violence and revolution. . . . England, for the first time, saw a distinct criminal class in the organized bands of robbers which began to infest the roads, and were always ready to gather round the standard of revolt. The gallows did their work in vain. 'If you do not remedy the evils which produce thieves,' More urged, with bitter truth, 'the rigorous execution of justice in punishing thieves will be vain.'"¹

¹ Green's "History of the English People," Vol. II, chap. i. The quotations here given are paraphrases from More's "Utopia." In the "Utopia" itself (see Arber's Reprints) the description is more detailed, and is more pathetic and angering than even Green's. By a statute of Henry VIII, chap. 25, a sturdy beggar is to be whipped for the first offence, his right ear is to be chopped off for the second, and if he again offend he is to be indicted for wandering and idleness, and if convicted to suffer death as a felon.

In the greater part of Europe the same bitter struggle was seen between a rapacious feudal aristocracy and the despoiled cultivating classes. In Germany the struggle culminated in the formidable and widespread peasant wars of the sixteenth century, which were crushed out by wholesale bloodshed and almost incredible cruelty.¹ In most of the countries of Europe, however, the cultivating classes, though defeated in their armed efforts, had, later on, their rights largely, and in some cases wholly, restored to them, either by revolution or by wise legislation. In our own country similar risings, continually recurring, were either quenched in blood or appeased for the time by promises never fulfilled, and which were never intended to be fulfilled. But in England, while armed efforts were thus put down, the wise legislation never appeared. On the contrary, when legislation on the subject was adopted it was in an opposite direction, by enabling the territorial party to complete their policy under the sanction of successive Acts of Parliament. "In France, the peasant won, the manor lost. In England, the manor won, the peasant lost. In Germany, a drawn battle."

During the ages of struggle in this country, monarchs, statesmen in high places, and others, saw the impending national danger and sought to avert it. Dignitaries of the Church, to their honour, took the side of the people.² Bishop Latimer, in his oft-

¹ See "The Peasants' War in Germany," E. B. Bax, 1899.

² In the Primer (or Prayer Book) of King Edward VI, 1552, which was the authorized Prayer Book of that day, there appears the following "Prayer for Landlords," coming immediately after the Collects: "We heartily pray Thee to send Thy Holy Spirit into the hearts of them that possess the grounds and pastures of the earth, that they, remembering themselves to be Thy tenants, may not rack or stretch out the rents of

quoted sermon, preached (1549) before Edward VI and his Court, spoke plainly on the subject. He charged the nobility (many of them being present) with reducing the yeomanry to slavery for the sake of acquiring private wealth. "These graziers," he said, "enclosers and rent-rearers are hinderers of the King's honour. For wher as have bene a great many of householders and inhabitantes there is now but a shepherd and his dogge. . . . We have good statutes made for the common-welth as touching comeners, enclosers many meetins and sessions but in the end of the matter there cometh nothing forth."¹

The monarchs of those times and their advisers were not political economists, the "dismal science" being as yet undiscovered. They held what with many seems now the exploded doctrine that the wealth of a nation lies in its people, and its strength in a prosperous rural population. They, therefore, did not accept the plea of the landlords that inclosures, grass lands, and cattle, were the most profitable to them. Accordingly in successive reigns many ordinances

their houses or lands, nor yet take unreasonable fines or moneys, after the manner of covetous worldlings, but so let them out that the inhabitants thereof may be able to pay the rents and to live and assist their families and remember the poor. Give them grace also to consider that they are but strangers and pilgrims in this world, having here no dwelling-place but seeking one to come; that they, remembering the short continuance of this life, may be content with that which is sufficient, and not to join house to house and land to land to the impoverishment of others, but so behave themselves in letting their tenements, lands, and pastures that after this life they may be received into everlasting habitation."

It would be interesting to know why, and by whose authority this appropriate supplication was afterwards omitted from the Common Prayer Book.

¹ "Seven Sermons before King Edward VI," by Hugh Latimer. (Arber's English Reprints.)

were made with the object of restraining the evil practices referred to. But, as will be seen, the landed aristocracy were strong enough, in spite of all opposition, to carry out their policy to completion.

The Act 4 Henry VII, ch. 19, imposed heavy penalties for "decaying Houses of Husbandry or for not laying convenient land for the maintenance of the same." It describes the increasing evils and desolation resulting from the "wilfull waste of Houses within this realme and laying to pasture lands which customably have been used for tillage." It states that in some places "where two hundred persons were occupied and lived by their lawful labour now there are occupied two or three heardsmen, whereby husbandrie, which is one of the greatest commodities of this Realme, is greatly decayed, and the defense of this land against our enemies outward feebled and impaired."

The Statute goes on to enact that at least twenty acres of land shall be attached to each farmhouse, and that the "owner of such house do keep and sustaine the buildings on the said ground and land convenient and necessairie for maintaining and upholding of the said tillage and husbandrie."¹

Another Act in the same reign provided that whosoever decayeth any town, hamlet, or house of husbandry, or shall convert tillage into pasturage, shall forfeit half the profits thereof until the offence be removed.

¹ Of this Act Lord Bacon writes: "By this means the houses being kept up did of necessity enforce a dweller, and the proportion of land for occupation being kept up did of necessity enforce that dweller not to be a beggar or cottager but a man of some substance to keep hinds and set the plough on going. This did wonderfully concern the might and manerhood of the kingdom."—"History of Henry VII."

In 1534 an Act was passed with the following significant preamble :—

“Inasmuch as divers of the King’s subjects, to whom God of His goodness hath disposed great plenty and abundance, now of late years have daily studied and practised ways and means how they might accumulate into few hands, as well as great multitude of farms, as great plenty of cattle, and in special sheep, putting such lands as they can get to pasture, and not to tillage, whereby they have not only pulled down churches and towns and enhanced the old rents, or else brought it to such excessive fines that no poor man is able to meddle with it . . . the great reason that moveth these greedy and covetous people to accumulate in their hands such great portions of the lands of the realm, from the occupying of the poor husbandman, is the great profit that cometh from sheep, some having as many as 24,000,” etc. etc.

The Act goes on to provide that under heavy penalties no one person shall keep more than 2000 sheep.¹

¹ Many other Acts of the same kind and with the same objects were passed in successive reigns. See Statutes at large, Edward VI, chap. 5 ; 4 Henry VII, chap. 16 ; 7 Henry VIII, chap. 1 ; 6 Henry VIII, chap. 5 ; 27 Henry VIII, chap. 22 ; 39 Elizabeth, chap. 1 ; and others.

In 1517 a Commission was appointed to inquire into the operation of the above statutes “against ingrossing and inclosure.” Cardinal Wolsey, in 1518, issued a decree ordering the inclosers, under heavy penalties, to “pull down and lay abroad all inclosures and ditches made since the statute of 1 Henry VII.” (1485). To those who wish to study this question the following important work will be found useful, “Domesday of Inclosures, 1517-18,” edited for the Royal Historical Society by J. S. Leadam, M.A. (Longmans, 1897). The extent to which the statutes in question had been set at naught is shown by such passages as the following : “Six messuages occupied with 280 acres of land all razed to the ground.” “Evictions and displacement of labour of 670 persons accompanied by destruction of 119 dwellings,” etc. etc. The arable land, when turned into sheep-farms, rose enormously in value on account of the high price of wool. Farm-houses being no longer wanted were pulled down.

By the Act 31 Elizabeth, chap. 7 (1589), no one was allowed in rural districts to build "any manner of cottage or dwelling unless the same person do assign and lay to the same cottage or building four acres of ground at the least." Anyone building a cottage without this provision "shall be fined forty shillings for every month the cottage is so continued."¹

Destitution, disorder, and crime, direct results of cutting off the people from the land, had become so serious and widespread throughout the country that in order to deal with them the memorable Poor Law Act, 1601, was passed, which, with amendments, including the drastic amendment of 1834, is the basis of our Poor Law of to-day.²

Thus official pauperism began. It grew rapidly as regards both numbers and cost, and is now recognized, without shame, as a permanent institution in the social economy of the "wealthiest nation in Europe." Every householder, when paying the poor-rate, should remember that the origin of the impost was the ousting of the people from the soil, and that its continuance on

A few shepherds only were required, and thus a vast number of small yeomen and peasants were ruined and rendered homeless, and became for the most part vagabonds. All this was done for greed and in violation of the law. "The husbandman thrust owte of their owne," as More says, by "the covetous and unsatiabable cormorante" ("Utopia"). See also for valuable information on the subject, Prof. Ashley's "Economic History," Vol. I, chap. iv. (Longmans).

¹ There are evidences that this Act was put in force. Hearn, in his "Book of Dorset Sessions," speaks of persons convicted of breaking this law, and adds the "parties were peremptorily ordered to pull down the cottages erected." Quoted in "History of People in Southern Counties in Past Centuries" (by George Roberts, 1856). This Act was repealed by 15 George III, chap. 3.

² For a detailed account of the almost incredible state of degradation, immorality, and semi-barbarism to which the "bold peasantry" of England had been reduced under this Poor Law, see "Report of Poor Law Commission," 1834. This report was reprinted in 1885, No. 347.

its present scale is mainly due to the same cause. It is probable that the strong measures referred to had some effect in checking for a time the practice of inclosures. No doubt, the ever-increasing amount of relief given under the new Poor Law contributed to restrain the rural population from those acts of disorder, beggary, and crime to which they had been driven by want and despair.

Up to the end of the seventeenth century inclosures had been made by private action. There are no records to show what proportion the area which had been inclosed up to that time bore to the whole of the land of England. Later statistics, however, make it clear that there were many millions of acres of land still uninclosed.¹ It seems certain that during the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth there still remained a multitude of cultivating owners, composed of yeoman farmers, peasant proprietors, and labourers with rights in the land. The wage-receiving labourers were, however, increasing in number, and were very badly off, being largely dependent on the poor-rates for existence.

Lord Macaulay, writing on the state of England in 1685, dwells on the power of the yeomanry, whom he describes as "an eminently manly and true-hearted race." He goes on to say :—

"The petty proprietors, who cultivated their own fields with their own hands and enjoyed a modest competence, then formed a much more important part of the nation than at present. . . Not less than one

¹ Lord Macaulay quotes an authority showing this to be the case. From "Abingdon to Gloucester, for example, a distance of forty or fifty miles, there was not a single inclosure, and scarcely one between Biggleswade and Lincoln." The population at that time was estimated at $5\frac{1}{2}$ millions (Vol. I, chap. iii.).

hundred and sixty thousand proprietors, who with their families must have made up more than a seventh of the whole population, derived their substance from their freehold estates."¹

But only a few years later, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a new system was adopted with regard to inclosures—a system which was destined to destroy the state of things described by Lord Macaulay. Parliamentary powers for inclosing land were asked for, and—the territorial party being dominant in the Legislature—were easily obtained. The first Inclosure Act was passed in 1710. This was the beginning of the last chapter of the proceedings which completed the divorce of the people from the soil. The rural population, which up to that time had been despoiled by private action, was thenceforth to suffer, perhaps even more severely, by Acts of Parliament.

The effect was not immediately felt; for the period of high prices had not yet begun, and the area inclosed for some years after the passing of the Act was comparatively small. Professor Rogers describes the first half of the eighteenth century as a time of prosperity for the peasantry.² But later on prices rose enormously, in consequence of the Continental and American wars. This gave a great, almost a wild, impetus to the inclosure of land.

In the first Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1867 (issued in 1896), it is estimated that from the time of the first Inclosure Act, 1710, to the year 1760, there were 334,974 acres inclosed—an area about half that of the county of Dorsetshire. But

¹ Macaulay's "History of England," Vol. I.

² "Six Centuries of Work and Wages."

from the latter date (1760) to 1867 there were above four thousand inclosure Acts passed, and the quantity of land so inclosed was no less than 7,325,439 acres. Thus the total of the land inclosed from 1710 to 1867 was 7,660,439 acres, or about one-third of the whole of the land under cultivation in England and Wales at the time of the Report (1867).

This does not include large areas of land inclosed without the sanction of Parliament—roadsides (so useful to the cottager by giving food for his cow), commons, pieces of commons, and other intakes. The usual practice in such cases as these was to put up rail and post or some other kind of fence. In very many cases these fences were pulled down in the night by the people in the locality. They were put up again, and perhaps pulled down a second time; they were again put up, and as a rule they permanently remained. The usual notice, "Trespassers will be prosecuted," then appeared, and the people's land became private property. Any action at law was too costly for the commoners to take; but a case is recorded of a man of wealth and influence who interfered to stop one of these illegal inclosures and to save the common right of the people. In 1866 the lord of the manor of Berkhamstead inclosed a large part—500 acres—of the common land with more than a mile of iron fencing. Mr. Augustus Smith (of the Scilly Isles) happened to be a commoner in the parish, and he took the side of the people. Assisted by a large body of hired navvies, he pulled down the whole of the fencing and laid it carefully on the ground. The lord of the manor began an action for trespass against Mr. Smith, who, however, defended the rights over the common of himself and other commoners and of the

“freeholders and copyholders of the manor.” The result of the trial was that a perpetual injunction was granted with costs. The common was thus saved for the people to whom it belonged.¹

The effect of this vast increase of inclosures was soon generally felt. Small holders and peasant proprietors disappeared as fast as the common land on which they relied for pasture was inclosed, and their holdings were absorbed into adjoining farms. Prices of cereals ruled so high that old pastures and other kinds of land, suitable or unsuitable, were put under the plough. To make the evil worse, the rage for large farming set in. By adding farm to farm, and holding to holding, there was supposed to be an economic gain through having only to keep up one homestead instead of several. It was true, and known to be true, that the process inevitably squeezed the smaller and moderate-sized farms out of existence and caused the classes that tilled them to disappear; but the notion of gain overpassed every other consideration. On this subject also the local records and histories give abundant information.² In a very interesting account of the manor of Bramshot the following appears:—

¹ A brother of the writer's, in one of these cases of illegal inclosures, pulled down the fences, which were of iron and masonry. He was prosecuted, and the trial took place at the Exeter assizes before a judge and jury, when the verdict was given in his favour, and the ground—since become very valuable—was saved for the use of the public for ever. But it very rarely happened that the efforts of the common people to protect their rights were successful. These efforts were not often made, because they carried with them social punishments hard to be borne.

² These extracts and quotations are given because they bring the matters referred to more clearly to the minds of general readers than mere abstract statements can do. The same remark applies to extracts and quotations generally throughout this book. Old documents, official documents, Blue Books and Hansard, though they are mines of information, are consulted only by the few. For this reason the present writer

“While large estates were being thus acquired by the Butlers, little holdings were being thrown together, to be held in the same hands. The history of the Downlands estate will illustrate the process. A small copyhold called by that name for centuries was enfranchised by George Enticknap in 1686, and another adjoining it called ‘Clerks,’ by Thomas Enticknap in 1703. The two were merged in 1742 and sold to Nicolas Kent. . . . The other tenement at ‘Clerks’ was used by the labourers on the land. ‘Adams’ and the ‘Church Farm’ with ‘Old Place’ were acquired at different dates, and so the present estate was rounded off. . . . A like accumulation was going on elsewhere.”

After giving several other cases the writer continues :—

“In 1786 twelve of the farms consisted in each case of two or three of the old holdings thrown together. . . . All this could not have gone on without considerable displacement of the old yeomanry, the copyholders of early date. They have left their names in many cases linked to the farmhouses which they once occupied, or where their dwellings stood, but one after another they departed, and while a few rose to more substantial fortunes, most of them sank to the level of the wage-earners around them. Even thus early the changes had begun which turned the substantial houses of the yeomen into pairs of inconvenient tenements for carter and for shepherd who were needed close to the farm buildings. . . . At Westmeon all the land at the beginning of the last century (nineteenth century) was owned by the men who

has thought it best to illustrate his general statements by concrete cases. This might be thought unnecessary, and even tedious, by experts, but by the general public—for whom, it might again be stated, these pages are mainly written—the way taken might be found a gainful one.

worked it, and there is much evidence to show that the same was true of many parts of England. But in Bramshot the displacement began long before."¹

The practice of consolidation was the subject of a large amount of discussion and of protest during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. One writer states:—

“It is no uncommon thing for four or five wealthy graziers to engross a large enclosed lordship, which was before in the hands of twenty or thirty farmers and as many tenants as proprietors. All these are hereby thrown out of their livings, with their families, and many other families who were chiefly employed and supported by them.” Again: “In several parishes in Hertfordshire twenty-four farms, numbering on the average from 50 to 150 acres, have been melted up into three farms.”

The same practices are reported in almost every county. A writer as early as 1778 states:—

“Much has been written for and against the utility of great farms; but the argument against them drawn from the consequent depopulation of the country, seems strongly enforced by an instance in this neighbourhood. At Chadsunt was a mansion house, the seat of Mr. Newsome, and ten farmhouses on so many farms, let altogether at about £800 per annum. Not long since this estate was sold to Lord Catherlough; the ten farmhouses are pulled down, and all the lands and the mansion house are let at £1000 per ann. to one farmer who manages the business, as a grazier, with the help of two or three servants.”²

¹ “Scenes of Rural Life in Hampshire among the Manors of Bramshot,” by W. W. Capes, Rector of Bramshot. Macmillan, 1901.

² “A Tour in Warwickshire, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire,” 1778.

Eminent rural economists and political economists supported the policy of inclosures as the best means of improving agriculture and consequently of increasing rents. Sir John Sinclair, himself a large landowner, for some years President of the Board of Agriculture, was an enthusiast in the matter of inclosures. His reports abound with statements in favour of the system. His arguments in its favour are elaborate and conclusive from his own point of view.¹ "The very appearance of inclosures," he says, "indicates comfort and security. Landlords, on that account, never fail to draw very advanced rents from well-inclosed lands. They are generally let at from 2/- to perhaps 10/- or 15/- per acre higher than open lands of the same description in their immediate neighbourhood." In a letter written in 1811, he describes the effect of inclosures and consolidation of holdings on a particular parish:—

"The chief circumstance," he writes, "in which the present differs from the past state of the parish (Melrose) is the general enlargement of the farms. Except in the case of the carrier, and the miller, who rent a few acres, a small farm is nearly unknown. The displacing of the old small tenants was at first viewed with deep regret, but the introduction of a better and more spirited style of agriculture has, in a limited period, raised the rental of the parish from £4000 to nearly £20,000 a year."

Arthur Young, who was secretary to the Board of Agriculture was—for similar reasons—much in favour

¹ These arguments are set out at length in a chapter on "The Nature and Advantages of Inclosures," contained in "The Code of Agriculture," by Sir John Sinclair, Bart., Founder of the Board of Agriculture. Fifth edition, 1832.

of inclosures. Among other proposals he puts forward a scheme for inclosing a square of land twenty-two miles each way, and dividing the whole into farms of one square mile each.

Now, by this scheme 484 square miles of land—equal to 309,760 acres—would be inclosed, and 484 tenant farmers would be placed on holdings of 640 acres each. Young goes into elaborate calculations as to cost of inclosure and other details of an economic kind, and concludes by saying:—

“Such an improvement as this creates a clear income to the landlords of more than eleven hundred thousand pounds a year, and forms a new rental of ninety thousand a year, and of course such an income to the tenants, who in return support many other classes, etc.”¹

He makes no mention of the rights of the commoners, of the peasant proprietors and others, in the commons to be inclosed. With regard to the labourers, whose wages were then seven and eight shillings per week, he guards himself by saying: “Very far is it from my thoughts to assert or hint that our poor are too well paid. I am sensible that there is much wretchedness amongst some of them which ought to be alleviated.” But the labourers in nearly all cases eked their miserable wages by certain benefits they got from the commons—benefits of which inclosures, as fast as they were made, deprived them.

In many parish and other local records a profit and loss account is preserved which shows the enormous

¹ Arthur Young's “Tour Through the Southern Counties of England and Wales.” Third edition, 1772.

gains which fell to the share of the inclosers. A balance-sheet of the inclosure of King's Sedgmoor (12,000 acres) shows that after Parliamentary and all other expenses are charged, there remains for the inclosers a net profit of £365,373. 15s. 4d.¹

Later on, McCulloch, speaking of the advantage of having division of labour on a farm, so that the occupier might avail himself of new improvements and increased facilities for production, adds: "But it is almost superfluous to say that these objects can only be attained when the lands of a country are divided into extensive farms occupied by opulent farmers."² In this, and in his opinions of peasant proprietary generally, experience has proved that McCulloch was wrong in every particular.

Numerous essays have been written by economists on the "Theory of Rent," but a study of the evidence given before the numerous Royal Commissions shows that, whatever might be the "theory," the practice was to get as much rent as the farmer could be induced to give, which was in many, if not most, cases more than he could afford to pay.³ Tempted by the high prices which prevailed, competition set in among the farmer class for the possession of the large farms that had been created, and rents in consequence rose

¹ "General View of Agriculture in Somersetshire," by John Billingsley, of Shepton Mallet, 1798.

² "Principles of Political Economy." Third edition, 1842.

³ The study of these essays on "Rent" is a necessary but a profitless one. Political economists differ on the subject, but their theories, though interesting, are of no practical value. Ricardo states that "Rent is that portion of the produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil," and not for buildings and improvements. "Political Economy," p. 46, 1819. McCulloch takes a similar view, and sustains it by pages of bewildering disquisition. Adam Smith's theory, from which the above writers dissent,

rapidly. A golden era for the landlord began about 1770, which lasted for about a century.

Mr. Porter, writing on the subject in 1846, states:—

“With scarcely an exception the revenue drawn in the form of rents has been at least doubled since 1790. This is not a random statement, but as regards many counties in England can be proved by living witnesses”; and he adds: “During the same period the prices of most of the articles which constitute the landowner’s expenditure have materially fallen.”¹

Mr. Caird (afterwards Sir James Caird), after visiting thirty-two out of the forty counties of England, states: “It thus appears that in a period of eighty years the average rent of arable land has risen 100 per cent.”²

It must not be supposed, however, that the rapid increase of inclosures, the eviction of farmers and copyholders, and the consolidation of farms, were carried out without the strongest opposition. The literature of the time is full of it. The expropriated class of small farmers, having no power and no longer any social standing, had to accept their lot. The peasantry were not a factor in the political system that then existed, and were cowed into submission. There was no longer any violent resistance, except occasional out-

is more akin to the general practice as regards rent: “The rent of land, therefore, considered as the price paid for the use of land is naturally a monopoly price. It is not at all proportioned to what the landlord may have laid out upon the improvement of the land, or to what he can afford to take, but to what the farmer can afford to pay.” (“Wealth of Nations,” 11th ed., 1805, Vol. I, p. 231.)

¹ Porter’s “Progress of the Nation.”

² “English Agriculture in 1850-1.” (James Caird—the “Times” Commissioner.)

breaks, the last of which were the "Swing Riots" of 1830-1.¹

But earnest and far-seeing men among all classes, even among landowners themselves, were found, as they were found in previous centuries, who protested against the policy that was being pursued. Philanthropic societies were formed to counteract the evil. Clergymen pointed out the ruin that was being wrought in their several parishes. But it was all in vain. The landed interest was all-powerful in Parliament, and the ruinous system was continued with unabated vigour.

The Rev. D. Davies, Rector of Barkham, writes in 1795 :—

"Cottages have been progressively deprived of the little land formerly let with them, and also their rights of commonage have been swallowed up in large farms and by enclosures. Thus an amazing number of people have been reduced from a comfortable state of partial independence to a precarious state as mere hirelings, who when out of work immediately come upon the parish."

In 1831 a society was formed called the "Labourer's Friend Society," with the object of giving back to the peasants, by voluntary agencies, portions of the land of which they had been deprived. It was an influential society, with the king and queen as patrons. Its aims and methods seem to have been similar to those

¹ These were not riots but lawless acts—rick-burnings, etc., done in different parts of the country in the name of a fabulous person, a "Captain Swing." Many of the participators were taken, some of them were hanged, and others transported. Particulars of these so-called "riots" can be found in Alex. Somerville's "Whistler at the Plough."

of the "Rural Labourers' League" of the present day.¹

In 1835 The Labourer's Friend Society issued a report which throws a strong side-light on the miseries and injustice inflicted on the rural population, "by enclosing waste lands and depriving labourers of their hitherto available resources."

A few extracts from this report might be interesting to the general reader. In support of the contention that "enclosures and the severance of the labourer from the land was a principal cause that has led to the peasant's degraded condition," the report, among other cases, states that "the parish of Abringdon Pigots in Cambridgeshire was enclosed in 1770; before the enclosure every man had a cow. On the enclosure the owners of common rights had allotments assigned to them, but they were soon severed from the cottages and thrown into the adjoining farms. Before the enclosure no poor's rates had been levied, but ever since the allotments had been taken from the cottages, the poor's rates have been gradually increasing, and they now bear a large proportion to the rental."

"In the parish of Lidlington, in consequence of the same system of depriving cottagers of land, the poor's rates, which in the year 1751 were only sixpence in the pound, became four shillings in 1801, and have been since annually increasing."

The report contains a remarkable letter from the Rev. R. Warner, Vicar of Castle Carey, Somerset-

¹ The principal objects of the Rural Labourers' League are: to assist every practical effort to secure a more direct connection between the agricultural population and the soil; to improve the condition of the rural labourers with a view to make village life more attractive, etc. (Office: 110 Strand, London.)

shire, pointing out that the existing state of things is "deplored by every humane man and a subject of serious alarm to those who are in the habit of directing their thoughts to the usual causes of decadence and ruin; because they are well aware that, as these classes (the peasantry) form the foundation of the pyramid of civil society, by which alone the superior grades are supported, in their regularly ascending series from the yeoman to the monarch, so, if they be allowed to be reduced to dust, the destruction of the whole fabric will then be no longer a doubtful problem." The reverend gentleman goes on, in the most earnest language, to welcome all plans "for restoring to them the advantages which they once enjoyed, and which they have a right still to enjoy by all the laws of God and man."¹

Examples are given of petitions against inclosure. Mr. Herod, a small yeoman farmer of North Creak, Norfolk, describes his journey to London to present a petition against an inclosure bill for his parish. His journey was fruitless. Mr. Herod afterwards states:—

"Here were lands that the poor would have been happy to hire, at a fair rental, to keep their cows upon, rather than sell them when the Act took place; but not one was favoured with an acre. They were all laid on to the great farms." He goes on to describe the inevitable results, in the form of increased poverty and destitution, and double and treble poor's rates. Those of the peasantry who ventured to continue to put their cows and stock on pastures, which were their own, were summoned and punished

¹ Could the writer of this letter know the state of things which now exists in our towns and rural districts, he would see how largely his grave prophecies have been fulfilled.

as trespassers and their cattle impounded. They had to submit, and finally sank into the position of hirelings. They were only men, and figured lightly in schemes which promised higher rents and profits.

The present writer has now before him a printed copy of a form of a petition which was largely used in the various parishes. The preamble is as follows:—
“We the underwritten the Freeholders, Copyholders, Leaseholders and others of the inhabitants of the Parish of — in the County of — beg leave to set forth,” etc. After referring to the high rent to be paid for land when inclosed, “where now no rent is paid for rearing cattle on commons,” the petition states “that provided the said common be inclosed, many poor inhabitants in the said parish will be reduced to distress, as they will be deprived of their present benefit of rearing horned cattle, pigs, etc., and furnishing themselves with fuel in winter, etc.” “In short,” the petition concludes, “we cannot see any benefit to the nation in general, nor to any individual, by enclosing said common except to the landowners who may thereby be enabled to raise their rents at the expense, and detriment of the parish at large.” Besides individual protests, combined action was taken by the farming classes against the rapid increase in inclosures. The arguments against the practice are often expressed in dignified and well-reasoned terms. One farmer writes:—

“I have laid it down in my mind as a truth that agriculture is the parent of industry and wealth. . . . It is the only root from whence can spring lasting wealth, power, and happiness. . . . Whenever the farming interest shall be considered by the legislature as subservient to the trading interest, this nation, from

that moment, is tending towards decline. First, in respect of power and happiness, and afterwards in respect of wealth. . . . There are other classes of people living near great commons, besides farmers, who derive very essential advantages from the rights of common; namely the cottager, the mechanic and inferior shopkeeper; but more particularly the cottager, who in general are labourers to the farmer. This common right is an incitement to industry . . . a means of supporting their children with credit and comfort. . . . They become valuable members of society. Young men and women, after a few years' service in which they manage to scrape up £20 or £30, marry and take a cottage near a common. They then stock their cottage with cows, calves, sheep, hogs and poultry, &c., as much as their little fortunes will admit of. He then hires himself as a day labourer to a farmer, and the wife stays at home to look after the live stock. I could mention many cottagers in my neighbourhood under this predicament who keep two or three milch cows, two or three calves a-rearing, forty or fifty sheep, two or three hogs, and poultry consisting of chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys. . . . The greatest part of the live stock, viz., of cows, sheep, hogs, poultry, &c., seen upon the commons in general in my neighbourhood, which are numerous and extensive, are the property of cottagers. . . . We may expect to see, every session, fresh violations of the natural rights of the cottagers and the legal rights of the small freeholders and copyholders, a species of legal rapine justified by the Acts of the legislature under the plausible pretext of the public good. It is said that what people consent to give up cannot be deemed an act of violence, and the law declares that the consent of three-fourths of the inhabitants in respect to number and value of possession must be first obtained before any such Act can pass, but this is mere sophistry, for those must be very obstinate or

very ignorant who will not allow that coaxing, bribing, and threatening, together with many other acts which superiors make use of, will very often induce the inferiors to give their consent to things which they are convinced will be to their future disadvantage."¹

In 1813 a General Inclosure Bill was promoted by the territorial party which, however, did not pass. Its object was to do away with the heavy Parliamentary expenses connected with private bills. William Cobbett was applied to for his support to the measure, but, though he would have been a great gainer by the inclosure of commons in his neighbourhood, he was strongly opposed to the Bill. He wrote:—

“Those who are so eager for new inclosure seem to argue as if the waste land in its present state produced nothing at all. But is this the fact? Can any one point out a single inch of it which does not produce something and the produce of which is made use of? It goes to the feeding of sheep, of cows, of cattle of all descriptions, and, what is of great consequence in my view of the matter, it helps to rear, in health and vigour, numerous families of the children of labourers, which children, were it not for these wastes, must be crammed into the stinking suburbs of towns amidst filth of all sorts, and congregating together in the practice of every species of idleness and vice. A family reared by the side of a common or forest is clearly distinguishable from a family bred on the pestiferous stench of the dark alley of a town.” He goes on to say that with regard to the waste in his neighbourhood (Botley), he would be entitled, in case of a general inclosure, to sixty or a hundred acres of good land, yet he “would never consent to the inclo-

¹ “Observations on the Enclosures of Waste Lands.” By a Society of Farmers, 1785.

sure of it, or any part of it, except for the purpose of the labourers. All around this great tract of land, which is called waste, the borders are studded with cottages of various sizes and forms, but the more beautiful for this diversity.”¹

But remonstrance, opposition, and petitions were all of no avail. On the contrary, in 1844 another departure was made in the matter of inclosures. In order to avoid the expenses connected with private bill legislation, measures were demanded to make inclosures less costly and still more easy. In that year a General Inclosure Bill was introduced. This being a public Bill came under the notice of the whole House, where it received so much opposition that it had to be withdrawn. The debate on the measure is, however, of much interest from the fact that even in the House of Commons, where the landed interest was predominant, grave doubts were at last felt as to the soundness and justice of the manner in which, under Parliamentary sanction, the policy of inclosures had been carried out during more than a hundred years past.

Mr. Aglionby, in opposing the Bill, said :—

“ If the poor had rights, they ought to be inalienable, they ought to be protected. . . . Inclosure Bills had been introduced heretofore and passed without discussion, and no one could tell how many persons had suffered in their interests and rights by these Bills. They were referred to Committees upstairs, but everyone knew how these Committees were generally conducted. They were attended only by hon. members who were interested in them, being lords of the manor,

¹ “ Selections from Cobbett's Political Register,” 1813, Vol. IV.

and the rights of the poor,¹ though they might be talked about, had been frequently taken away under that system." (Hansard, Vol. 75, p. 301.)

The Prime Minister (Sir Robert Peel), in his speech on the second reading of the Bill, said :—

"As to the actual rights, the House must be cautious how they deal lightly with those rights. . . . The rights of common connected them (the peasantry) with the soil. The right of turning a goose on a common made a man feel interested in the tenure of land. It might be more beneficial to him to accept two or three pounds,² but recollect that you are not dealing with the rights of the individual, but with those of his successors." (Hansard, Vol. 73, p. 976.)

In the face of this opposition the Bill was withdrawn, but the promoters persevered and managed to secure the appointment of a Select Committee "to inquire into the expediency of facilitating the inclosure of commons, etc." This Committee, "after taking the evidence of competent and experienced witnesses,"

¹ It must be remembered that the peasantry and labourers of all conditions, were described in official and other language of the time as "the poor" and the "labouring poor."

² Even in cases where a few pounds compensation were given, if the cottager happened to be a tenant, the compensation was paid to the owner of the dwelling to which the common rights were attached. The claims of the cottager, who by long custom had enjoyed those rights, were entirely ignored. He was simply turned out. In any case, as the Prime Minister points out, the incloser had no moral right to buy, much less to take without buying, that which the commoner had no right to sell. The rights of the commoners were very many. The common of pasture was the principal one. Among others there were "Estovers" (the right of cutting underwood and timber for fuel and repairs of buildings, making fences, etc.), "Turbarry" (the right of cutting peat and turf for fuel, furze and ferns for the fodder and litter of cattle), "Pannage" (right of turning swine into the woods to feed on acorns), etc.

reported in favour of a general measure to facilitate inclosures.¹

In the following year, 1845, a General Inclosure Bill, based on this report, was introduced, and after much opposition was passed into law. The promoters of the Bill claimed that it provided safeguards for the peasantry and others who had property and rights in the soil. Some of its provisions seemed, on paper, to go some way in this direction, but experience proved that these safeguards were practically worthless. The debate on the Bill gives further evidence that the opinion of the House of Commons with regard to inclosures was fast changing. It amounted, however, to no more than an attempt to "shut the stable-door after the steed has been stolen."

Lord Lincoln (afterwards Duke of Newcastle), in introducing the Bill, compared it favourably in this respect with the private bill system. He said:—

"This I know, that in nineteen cases out of twenty Committees of this House on private Bills neglected the rights of the poor, . . . Committees being permitted to remain in ignorance of the claims of the poor man because, by reason of his poverty, he is unable to come up to London, to fee counsel, to produce witnesses, and to urge his claims before the Committee."

Mr. Sharman Crawford denounced the measure as a "landlord's Bill." He declared that whatever land was set apart under the Bill for the small holders

¹ The writer has analysed the evidence given before this Select Committee. He finds that the "competent and experienced witnesses" were, with the exception of one farmer, composed of solicitors, clergymen, hotel keeper (1), gentlemen, land agents, and tithe commissioners.

would ultimately be bought up, or by some means come into the possession of the landlords. "It would," he said, "take away rights of common from all future generations. . . . Its provisions would offer a bribe to those who had the present use of those rights to sell that which they had no power to dispose of, the rights of future generations. . . . He did not object to enclosures of commons on just and equitable terms. . . . The experience of past enclosure Bills proved to him that those interests, peasants and labourers, were not cared for. . . . From the reign of Queen Anne (time of first Inclosure Bill) down to the reign of George IV, 1820, six million acres had been enclosed . . . waste lands which, if applied for the purpose of small occupation, would be of great benefit to the poor by increasing employment and the supply of food."

Mr. Hume, as a landed proprietor, strongly opposed the Bill. He said, "In his opinion the commonages comprised lands never granted to any individuals, but belonging to the Crown for the benefit of the public." Referring to the Report of the Committee of 1844, he asked—"What evidence did the Committee receive from the poor who used these commons? . . . He should be glad to hear what trouble had been taken by the Select Committee to get the evidence of the poor man and the labourer on the matter. . . . It was a one-sided report in favour of the landed proprietor. . . . He opposed the measure, as taking away the rights of the community at large. . . . He would put it whether getting rid altogether of the connection of the poor with the soil was not an evil which would affect society at large."

The Bill, however, passed, but the predictions of

those who opposed it turned out to be correct. Some official writers and others, speaking in the landed interest, endeavour to show that great advantages resulted from the administration of the Inclosure Commissioners who were appointed; that a certain extent of the inclosed land was sold in parcels to many persons of different classes; that a large number of roads were made; that the existing commoners who could make good their claim had land assigned to them; and especially that field gardens and allotments were put aside for the labourers. All this is true as far as it goes, but it affected the general results of the Act to such a small degree as not to be worth consideration.

A Parliamentary return of Inclosures, dated 1869, gives 614,804 acres as the quantity of land inclosed since the Act of 1845. Of this large area (about the size of the whole county of Northamptonshire) only 2223 acres were allotted to the "labouring poor." The reasons given by the Commissioners for setting aside such a small quantity of land for that purpose were of the most flimsy kind. The people "had gardens already." Land was "too distant from the dwellings." It was "too elevated" or otherwise "unfit." Much of the land inclosed "was not subject to the operation of the Act," etc. etc.

This policy pursued by the territorial classes throughout the centuries—a policy often checked but never abandoned—may be said to have been completed about the sixties of last century. The proceedings connected with the policy, so far as statistics and dry facts go, are recorded in the numerous Parliamentary Blue Books and other official documents, but the sufferings and wrongs inflicted on the rural

population can be learned only from the literature, chronicles, and other utterances of the time ; while the disastrous effects which the policy itself has had on the social life of England are to be seen in the state of our towns and rural districts to-day. The final result of the policy is that the soil of this country and all beneath it are owned by a handful of men. "It may seem strange that in England, the land where above all others the personal and political rights of the simplest freeman have been saved whole through all changes of princes and dynasties, the law should find so little room for public and unstinted rights of using the very elements. Even the air is not free, for the maxim is that the owner of the soil is owner up to the height above and down to the depth beneath. I conceive it is indisputable that to pass over land in a balloon, at whatsoever height, without the owner's or occupier's licence, is technically a trespass."¹

¹ "The Land Laws" (Sir Fredk. Pollock). The author states that this doctrine does not lead to any "grave inconvenience." It may not do so in the case of a balloon, but if the discoveries of science should make aerial transit practicable—as some say they will—then owners could legally charge a toll for every aerial machine passing over their land. It is, however, fortunate that the element of air is not visible and fixed, and is not subject to manage, like the element of land. Were it so, it is probable that we should now be paying sums for the right of breathing it to certain air-lords who in times past had succeeded in getting it into their hands.

CHAPTER IX

THE ENGLISH LAND SYSTEM (*continued*)

IN the year 1085 William the Conqueror caused a survey to be made of all the counties of England except the four northern counties. Referring to the completeness with which this great undertaking was carried out, one of the oldest and most trustworthy of chroniclers, who wrote in the twelfth century, states: "He (the king) had subdued the inhabitants so completely to his will, that without any opposition he first caused an account to be taken of every person; compiled a register of the rent of every estate throughout England, and made all free men of every description take the oath of fidelity to him."¹

Camden speaks of it as follows: "He (the king) commanded every inhabitant of England to do him homage and to swear fealty to him against all men. He tooke the survey and description of the whole Land neither was there an Hide of England thorow but he knew both the value and the owner thereof; there was neither plash nor place but set down it was in the King's Roll and the rent revenue and profits thereof, the verie tenure of possession, and possessour himself was made knowen to the King."²

¹ William of Malmesbury's "Chronicle of the Kings of England" (Bohn's Antiquarian Library).

² Camden's "Britain," 1586. First translation by Philemon Holland, 1610, p. 153. A copy of this great Survey can be seen in the Public Record Office, but most, if not all, of it has been translated and published. The following example gives the form in which the particulars concerning

This remarkable work is called the Domesday Book, and contains the most minute information touching all the farms of the kingdom. It gives the names of all the holders of land in Edward the Confessor's time and at the time of the survey. It states the number of hides of land in each manor, of the villeins, servi, free men, cottiers, and tenants in socage. It records the quantity of wood, meadow, and pasture, and the number of mills and fishponds, and states the gross value thereof in the Confessor's time and at the time of the survey; and sets out the value of what each freeman possessed, in each of the two reigns. The number of oxen, cows, and swine is also given.¹

every holding were given: "Baldwin holds Chent. There is land for twenty-five ploughs, and as many are there, and twenty serfs and forty two among the villeins and bordars and five swineherds rendering forty four swine. There is a mill returning thirty pence and ten acres of wood and one hundred acres of pasture. Formerly it was worth twelve pounds. Now it is worth ten pounds," etc. etc. (From the part of Domesday Book which relates to Devonshire, translated and edited by the "Domesday" Committee of the Devonshire Association.)

¹ Though a digression, it is interesting to notice the good kind of domestic legislation which was carried out in those, so called, dark ages, especially under the Norman and Plantagenet kings. Our present Local Authorities might, with gain, study those old statutes. The question of adulteration is dealt with in no namby-pamby way. The butcher and the baker had to be careful about the weight and quality of their wares; the brewer was warned, at his peril, to brew nothing but pure beer. A paper read last year before the Sanitary Institute showed that sickness and death lurked in the filthy stuff used in stuffing the cheap bedding usually sold to the poorer classes. Statute 11 Henry VII, chap. 19, directs that no one shall make, obtain, or put to sale any mattresses or bedding unless made of "clean stuff, clean wool or clean flocks," under pain of forfeiture of "all such unlawful wares." Statute 27 Edward III, chap. 11, deals with the question of "forestalling" merchandise or food in a manner that would greatly trouble the speculators in cotton and grain of the present day. Slaughter-houses must be outside a town lest "the air within become corrupt." There are many other acts of a similar character dealing with the domestic life of the people.

On the motion of the late Lord Derby a return—commonly known as the “New Domesday Book”—was ordered by the House of Lords in 1876. This return professes to give the number of landowners in the United Kingdom. It is, however, inaccurate, and greatly overstates the actual number of owners of agricultural land. Men owning land in several districts are counted as separate owners. Leaseholders are included, common land, woods, and wastes which are mostly attached to large estates, and all lands not rated, are left out of account altogether. But the most misleading feature of the return is the inclusion of owners of less than one acre. These small holdings are mainly gardens and plots of land attached to dwelling-houses, and should be discarded in any estimate of the numbers of owners of agricultural land. They, however, immensely increase the tale, being more than two-thirds of the whole number given. This report—the New Domesday Book—is contained in bulky volumes, but an abstract of its contents will be found in a Return presented to the House of Commons.¹ This summary gives a total of 972,836 owners of the 33,000,000 acres of land dealt with.² Of this number however no less than 703,289 are owners of less than one acre each. Those who, previous to the return, knew that the landowners in this country were a small number, were surprised to find that the number was so very small. The return shows how thoroughly the land policy of the territorial party had been carried out and that the smaller cultivating

¹ “Summary of Returns of Owners of Land in England and Wales, exclusive of the Metropolis.” 4 May, 1876.

² The total area (land and water) of England and Wales is 37,327,670 acres, but the return deals with only just over 33,000,000.

owners—yeomen, copyholders, and peasant proprietors, had practically disappeared.

Many able writers have carefully analysed the returns, and the several results arrived at do not greatly vary. Mr. George Brodrick has examined them in a most painstaking manner, and sums up his inquiry by stating:—

“ At all events it is certain that not more than 4000 persons, and probably considerably less than 4000, owning estates of 1000 acres and upwards, possess on the aggregate an extent of 19,000,000 acres, or about four-sevenths of the whole area included in the Domesday Book Returns . . . we find that a landed aristocracy, consisting of about 2250 persons, own together nearly half the enclosed land in England and Wales. The residue of owners between one acre and 2000 acres ostensibly number 249,996, but may be reduced by a proportionate allowance for double entries to 147,657. This would give a net total of about 150,000 owners above one acre in England and Wales, or less than $\frac{1}{170}$ th of the population—a result which corresponds somewhat closely with Mr. Shaw-Lefevre’s conclusion that the whole number of landowners properly so called in England and Wales certainly does not exceed 166,000.”¹

¹ For details of these calculations see “English Land and English Landlords,” by the Hon. George C. Brodrick. Mr. Kay estimates that nearly five and a half million acres, or nearly one-sixth of the inclosed land in England and Wales, is owned by 280 persons, and that more than one-fourth of the land in England and Wales is owned by 710 persons.—(“Free Trade in Land,” by Joseph Kay.) The late Sir Arthur Arnold went carefully into the question of “double entries,” and after dealing in detail with the Return, he came to the conclusion that 525 members of the peerage are counted as 1,500 owners, and that 7,000 persons own four-fifths of the land of the United Kingdom.—(“Free Land,” Arthur Arnold.) Bateman, in “The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland” (1878), gives an amusing account of the manner in which men owning in several districts are returned as separate owners with different names. Errors in names are abundant. Mr. Ellis Namy,

Having traced the proceedings by which the great bulk of the land of Great Britain was inclosed and turned into private property, it may be well to consider the arguments used in justification of these proceedings. One argument, ever repeated inside and outside Parliament, was that inclosing lands provided employment for the rural population. No doubt it did provide employment in the following manner. A common—and the very word *common* indicates the rightful ownership—a common, say of 2000 acres, is inclosed, and the cottagers, commoners, and small yeomen are deprived of their rights on it; any plots or holdings of arable land which they may possess are rendered useless when the pastures are taken away. These men have thus to sell their cows, geese, pigs, poultry—all their little stock—and become mere labourers, dependent on employment for a living. Work is found for them by inclosing, say, a further 2000 acres. They are consequently the innocent cause of displacing another lot of peasantry and in reducing them to the same condition as themselves. And so the miserable process goes on, destroying the race of peasants and increasing the hireling class with cumulative rapidity. This is what really happened, and the process was continued until the cultivating classes referred to disappeared almost completely.

But the main argument in favour of the system of inclosures, was, that it was for the public good, by making the land more productive and profitable. To “approve” the land, and to make it more profitable, for instance, is returned as an owner for part of his land, and as Mr. Vanney for the rest. Viscount Valentia is returned as Mr. V. Valentia. Tenants are often returned as owners. Frequently the same man, if he happens to own land in different counties or parishes, is entered as an owner four or five times over.

were the reasons given before the Court at Merton, when the barons assembled passed the statute of that name in their own favour. The same reasons were urged in succeeding reigns, reasons which, as we have seen, were not accepted by the monarchs of the time ; and the same pleas were urged in support of every Inclosure Act passed by Parliament.

Political economists and other writers of the day supported this view. They rarely allude to the wrongs inflicted on the mass of cultivators by the system of inclosures as it was carried out. If they do allude to these wrongs it is simply to treat them as "inevitable," as results "inseparable from improved methods of agriculture." Lord Macaulay, in his History, passes lightly over this part of the question. "It must be admitted," he says, "that the progress of civilization" has diminished the comforts of certain classes of the rural population, and after referring to the advantages which the peasant had received in food, fuel, etc., he dismisses the subject by saying that "the progress of agriculture and the increase of the population necessarily deprived him of these privileges." But they were not privileges ; they were rights ; and rights of, what was then, the mass of the population, which were sacrificed to what is called "civilization." Moreover, a policy, however beneficial in itself, becomes a vicious one, and produces disastrous results if unjust and selfish methods of carrying it out are employed.

Setting aside, for the moment, the economic side of the question, and looking at it from the point of view of the labourer, the peasant, the yeoman, and the community, several answers can be given to the arguments referred to. To hold that a class of men—

having the power to do so—is entitled to abolish the rights and take the property of other men, or of the community, on the grounds that they can put it to a more profitable use, is a doctrine capable of a far-reaching and dangerous application.

But the territorial classes were at the time all-powerful, and could settle among themselves what they considered right; while those whose interests they dealt with were voteless and powerless. In these modern times an advocate of the rights of a despoiled peasantry, reviewing the question in the light of equal justice between man and man, cannot fail to condemn the whole proceedings. He may justly ask, in the words of the eminent Swiss economist—M. de Sismondi—who wrote on the subject at the time :—

“You tell me you have improved the land, but what have you done with the labourer? You have converted vast wastes into cornfields, but what have you given the peasant in exchange for his commonable rights?”¹

In the same strain a distinguished English economist writes :—

“Few persons are less inclined than I am to call hard names; it is generally best, even when we are protesting against an injustice, to protest against it under the most moderate appellation which it admits of. But there are cases when things ought to be called by names which throw no veil over their enormity, and I confess that I cannot speak of the existing practice of dividing the common lands among the landlords by any gentler name than robbery—robbery of the poor. It will, of course, be said that people cannot be robbed of what is not theirs, and that the commons are not the legal property of the

¹ Essays by M. de Sismondi on “Political Economy and the Philosophy of Government,” translated from the French.

poor. Certainly not; our masters have taken care of that. They have taken care that the poor shall not acquire property by custom, as all other classes have done. But if the commons are not the property of the poor, they are just as little the property of those who take them. They cannot make them their property without an Act of Parliament, and they have had no difficulty in obtaining any number of such Acts from two Houses of their own making as often as they pleased, whether the Government was liberal or conservative. It is only in the last three years that they have been forced, to their own great indignation, to grant a temporary respite, chiefly by the public-spirited exertions of Professor Fawcett and of that very valuable body, the Commons Preservation Society."¹

Turning to the economic side of the question, it was claimed that the result of this great pillage was for the public good by improving agriculture and increasing the productiveness of the soil. But it can be shown, by facts that can hardly be disputed, that all the advantages claimed could have been secured

¹ "Dissertations and Discussions," John Stuart Mill, Vol. IV, pp. 280-1 (Longmans).

The general public are greatly indebted to the Commons Preservation Society, which during many years past has done much valuable work. The society is very active in watching such bills before Parliament as affect commons and open spaces. Its efforts in this and in many other ways to guard the public interests have been successful in a number of notable cases. (See "Report" of the Society 1902-3.) This association is well worthy of the support of all those who are interested in rural questions.

For further information touching matters connected with inclosures see "Open Spaces, Foot Paths, and Rights of Way," by Sir Robert Hunter; also "Essay on Preservation of Commons," by the same author. Sir Robert Hunter has a complete knowledge of the subject, and during many years past has given great and special service to the cause of commons preservation. There is also a useful little pamphlet by Percival Birkett, Hon. Solicitor to the Commons Preservation Society.

See also "Six Essays on Commons Preservation" (Sampson Low, 1867). These are competition essays for prizes given by Mr. H. W. Peck.

in a better and more permanent form by just instead of unjust legislation. No doubt as inclosures increased agriculture was greatly improved. More capital was spent on the land; chemical and other scientific discoveries were made use of; better methods of cultivation were adopted; cattle became larger and more shapely, fleeces heavier, and generally the produce of the soil was largely increased. In the Report of the Select Committee on Waste Lands, 1795, tables are given showing how much heavier beeves and sheep were when fed in inclosures than when fed on the wastes. But this report, like nearly all the agricultural reports of the time, was drawn up by those who looked at things from the point of view of the territorial party. The interests of the multitude of dispossessed peasantry, and other small proprietors, were not considered. No account was taken of the fact that before the inclosure the kine on the common, though leaner, were the peasants' own, and that after the inclosure these men, deprived of their own stock, became mere labourers, working for scanty wages in byres not their own, and tending other people's cattle on the lands from which they had been shut out. Besides, there is reason to suppose that the number of cattle and other stock was far larger before inclosures took place than afterwards. The high prices of grain, which meant high rents to the landlord, led to an indiscriminate inclosure of land. Large areas, totally unfit, were put under the plough. Old turf, the growth of centuries, was broken up, and later on, after the irreparable mischief was done, was allowed to go back into inferior pasture.¹ All this

¹ "A field of old grass is a treasure which deserves to be guarded, and ought not to be wantonly broken up."—"Treatise on Agriculture," by Robert Brown, farmer at Markle, 1811.

was an economic loss as far as the community was concerned. Among the competent judges who were of this opinion William Cobbett, a keen observer, writes:—

“In all the really agricultural villages and parts of the kingdom there is a shocking decay, a great dilapidation and constant pulling down or falling of houses. . . . The cows, pigs, geese, poultry, gardens, bees, fuel, that arise from those wastes far exceed, even in the capacity for sustaining people, similar breadths of ground distributed into these large farms in the poor parts of Northumberland. I have seen not less than ten thousand geese in one tract of common in about six miles in Surrey.”¹ He expresses his belief that these geese alone, “raised entirely by care and by the common,” are worth more than the profit from the inclosed lands referred to.

Had our statesmen in former times, like statesmen in other countries, dealt with this vital question of the land by wise legislation in the interests of the nation, instead of allowing it (often against their better judgment) to be settled by class-made law, greater and more lasting economic advantages would have been secured and the ruin of our rural population avoided.

With the millions of acres of common and waste land to be dealt with, the just and even excessive claims of the landlord class might have been satisfied, and at the same time the yeomen and peasant-proprietors retained permanently in self-contained holdings. No doubt there was a difficulty with the small commoners. The open field system of cultivation was certainly a wasteful one. It was almost impossible to apply new and improved methods of husbandry to long tracts of arable land separated by strips of grass,

¹ “Cobbett’s Rural Rides,” 1821 to 1832.

or balks, and belonging to different owners. But by an adjustment of claims these difficulties might have been readily overcome if the national good had been the principle of action.

This view is well expressed by one of the wisest of our old English writers—one who detested all inclosures that led to depopulation, but was in favour of them when carried out on just lines. "Inclosures," he writes, "may be made without depopulating, . . . but depopulation has cast a slander on inclosures because often done with it people suspect it can not be done without it. Inclosure made without depopulation is injurious to none. I mean if proportional allotments be made to the poor for their commonage and free and leaseholders have a considerable share with the lord of the manor. Inclosure without depopulating is beneficial to private persons. Then have they most power and comfort to improve their own parts, and for the time and manner these may mould it to their own conveniency. The monarch of one acre will make more profit thereof than he that has his share in forty in commons. . . . Inclosure with depopulation is a canker to the commonwealth. It needs no proof; woful experience shows how it unhouses thousands of people, till desperate need thrusts them on the gallows." He goes on to further describe the effect of the action of the "desolating and depopulating owners."¹

¹ Fuller's "The Holy State and the Profane State," 1642; see also "The Good Yeoman" and other essays. Thomas Fuller was a prebendary of Salisbury, and also for a time rector of a village in Dorset, so that he had opportunities of seeing the evils he spoke of, and like so many clergymen in those times did not shrink from denouncing the policy that caused them. The remarkable sentence "The *monarch* of one acre," etc., is a striking illustration of the power of ownership in the cultivation of the soil.

By the course adopted the extinction of the peasant class was inevitable, because when once the common land was inclosed and had become private property, not only the rights of the then existing peasants were affected, but also those of their descendants; "all hope of emerging from their position and rising into a higher grade, however industrious, was taken away."¹ This view was repeatedly urged by one of the ablest of the Royal Commissioners. "I think," he says, "that there is a prior and an equitable right in all cases of inclosures vested in the person who, if the inclosures had not been made, might have obtained interests in that land."²

The superior economic results of an opposite policy of dealing with the land in Germany, and in France under the French Civil Code, will be dealt with in later chapters. In the meantime, however, it might be stated that in Germany, where the problem was similar to that in England, but far more difficult and complicated, wise statesmanship, a century ago, found a way to retain on the land all classes of cultivators, where they have remained until now, the sinews of the empire. But no one will contend that in Germany agriculture is behindhand, or that the most scientific methods are not adopted in the cultivation of the soil.

¹ Royal Commission, "Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture," First Report, 1868.

² The late Mr. Tremehere, with whom the present writer had some correspondence on the subject, which showed the strong views he held on this point—views stronger even than those expressed in his official reports.

CHAPTER X

THE ENGLISH LAND SYSTEM (*continued*)

IN dealing with the causes which brought about the ruin of the peasantry and yeomanry of England, the suppression of the monasteries and other religious houses cannot be left out of account. Before touching on the direct effect which the dissolution had on the cultivating classes, it might be well, in a few words, to consider the object which the despoilers of the monasteries had in view. That object was neither religious nor political but simply a mercenary one, that of getting hold of the wealth of the Church.

In order to carry out this the more easily it was felt to be necessary to embitter Parliament and the people against the dwellers in monastic institutions. With that view the most scurrilous charges against the inmates of the religious houses were scattered broadcast. One of the most violent and damaging documents issued with this aim is entitled "The Beggar's Petition against Popery" (see Somers Tracts, Vol. I, p. 41.) Every known crime is charged against the religious orders, but the work is overdone and bears on its face its object and partisan character. The unscrupulous Cromwell, with the rest of the dishonest cabal that surrounded the king, lent himself to this work.

Under the mask of religious zeal commissioners were appointed to visit and examine the monasteries.

These commissioners, who were creatures of the court, proceeded to vilify the lives and characters of those whom it had been decided beforehand to despoil, and afterwards they, with their staff and helpers, secured a goodly share of the plunder.¹

The sacking of these institutions inflicted on the nation at large losses that were irreparable. Splendid monastic buildings were stripped of historic monuments, ornaments, old bells, screens, windows, metal work, and everything else that could be turned into money, and then left in ruins which were used as common quarries by the people in the neighbourhood. Great libraries containing rare books and priceless MSS. were either destroyed or sold for trifling sums. It is recorded that "two noble libraries" were sold to a merchant for forty shillings and were used mostly for waste paper. Cart-loads of precious documents found their way into the

¹ Speaking of "these instruments employed by the Lord Cromwell," Fuller writes: "The inquisitors were men who well understood the message they were sent on, and would not come back without a satisfactory answer to him who sent them knowing themselves to be no losers thereby." Of one of the principal of these commissioners he remarks: "Though employed to correct others he was no great saint himself; for afterwards he was publicly convicted of perjury and adjudged to ride with his face to the horse-tail at Windsor and Oakingham with papers about his head; which was done accordingly." ("Church History," Vol. II, p. 214.)

This part of the question, though perhaps not quite pertinent to the subject treated in these pages, is an interesting one. No doubt the report of these commissioners, known as the "Black Book," created to a large extent the desired effect. Among the great population of the religious houses there were doubtless many individuals guilty of the alleged crimes, but looking at the corrupt character and evil purpose of the accusers, the non-judicial methods of the inquiry, the rapidity with which it was carried out, and the absence of any sifting of evidence, the impartial student must come to the conclusion that the sweeping indictment of the religious orders as a whole, as it was presented by these inquisitors, is not worthy of acceptance or belief.

hands of different tradesmen who used them as paper in which to wrap their wares.¹

Turning from the venal squalid part of the question it is impossible to over-estimate the evil effects which the movement had on the rural population. Before the Reformation an immense portion of the land of England, probably one-fourth of the whole, was in the hands of the Church. By the suppression of the monasteries the Church lands were nominally transferred to the Crown, but the great bulk of them immediately found their way into the hands of a comparatively few men who were the favourites and courtiers of the king. The first step in the policy of confiscation was the Act of 1536, by which the lands and other property of the monasteries with an income less than £200 a year, were given over to the Crown. It is estimated that nearly 300 religious houses came under the operation of this measure. By the Act of 1539 the remaining monasteries were dissolved and their property also transferred to the king. The final effect of the dissolution of the monasteries was to place

¹ Those who wish to study the subject should read—in addition to the modern historians named—Strype's "Ecclesiastical and Civil Memorials" (Clarendon Press, 1822); Gasquet's "Henry VIII and the English Monasteries"; Dixon's "History of the Church of England"; Blunt's "Reformation in England"; Fuller's "Church History"; Sir Henry Selman's "History and Fate of Sacrilege" (1632), edition edited by Dr. Eales (1888).

See also the lengthy preamble to the Act of Dissolution of the smaller monasteries (27 Henry VIII, chap. 28). In this preamble, while the houses dealt with by the Act are condemned in violent terms, the larger institutions are spoken of as "divers and great solemn monasteries of this realm, wherein, thanks be to God, religion is right well kept and observed." It appears that the suppression of these smaller houses served only to whet the appetite of the king and his courtiers for further spoils, and in spite of religion being "right well kept and observed" in them, the large monasteries shortly afterwards shared the fate of the smaller ones.

nearly the whole of this vast area of the soil of England in the hands of private owners. These lands were distributed mainly to a limited number of courtiers and "satellites who revolved around them," together forming a shameless oligarchy which had the control of public affairs. Not only they, but others of lesser degree, who were their favourites and hangers on, shared the spoil. "A great number of men, when appointed to office, were possessed only of inkhorn and pen—were after two years able to rank in wealth and estate with the highest in the land."¹

Old writers and modern historians are agreed as to the unrestrained rapacity of those pilferers during the reigns of Henry VIII and that of his son, the boy king, Edward VI.

Taking the reign of Edward VI alone, Froude estimates that at a low computation the ministers of the Crown and their friends had appropriated, "I suppose I must not say stolen," he adds, estates worth in modern currency about five millions sterling, and divided them among themselves.²

In this reign the chantries—chapels, most of them

¹ Arundel MS. 151, fo. 386b. See also Sloane MS. 2495, fo. 49b.

Spelman gives a list of the principal families into whose hands these estates passed. Some of them secured from one to twenty abbeys or priories, and one of them no less than thirty. See "History and Fate of Sacrilege."

Further particulars are given of these proceedings in Strype's "Ecclesiastical Memorials," Book II, Chaps. xxviii., xxx. and following.

See also "Rolls Publications," "State Calendars," Vol. XII, Part i. and ii., edited by James Gairdner. In this volume lists and particulars are given of between three and four hundred "grants" made in one year (1537). Each grant contains a list of the property disposed of. In some cases a single grant includes a number of manors, abbeys, advowsons, priories, tithe rents, etc.

² "History of England," Vol. V, p. 467.

rich with endowments bequeathed for religious purposes—were suppressed in the same way as the monasteries. Of this Green writes: "The plunder of the chantries and guilds failed to glut the appetite of the spoilers. Half the lands of every see were flung to them in vain; an attempt was made to satisfy their greed by the suppression of the wealthy see of Durham. . . . But while the courtiers gorged themselves with manors the Treasury grew poorer."¹

The hollow pretence for suppressing these chantries was that their revenues were to be devoted to the maintenance of the poor, for providing schools, assisting universities, etc. On this point Hallam writes: "But this was entirely neglected and the estates fell into the hands of the courtiers. Nor did they content themselves with the escheated wealth of the church. Almost every bishopric was spoiled by their rancorous power in this reign, either through mere alienations or long leases or unequal exchanges."²

¹ Green's "History of England," Vol. II, p. 238.

In the rural districts these chantries afforded the only means by which the people could get any education at all, and nothing arose afterwards to take their place. Great store is often placed on the Grammar Schools and other educational institutions founded by Edward VI and endowed mainly out of the revenues of these chantry lands; but the sums devoted to this purpose were insignificant compared with the total amount of the property confiscated. Strype gives a list and other particulars of these schools, about sixteen in number (see "Ecclesiastical Memorials," Book II, chap. XXXIII). One of them was "erected by the King at Brymingham (Birmingham) called 'King Edward the Sixth's free Grammar School,' for the sustentation whereof he gave all that his barn and four messuages lying in Dalend in Birmingham, to the value of £21 per ann." Since then that small revenue has increased above fifteen hundred-fold. If all the great monastic estates had remained in the hands of the Crown or in the possession of the Church till such times as they could have been dealt with by legislation in the public interest, the available income from them at the present day would be so enormous that there would be no need for rates and taxes for education, or rates for the relief of the poor.

² "Constitutional History," Vol. I, p. 94.

These men seem to have had the fear of "restitution" before their eyes. For this reason they effected exchanges and sales of land, and took other means to make themselves secure. Large estates were bought at low prices by merchants and others of the commercial class, "new men," who wished to found and did found "county families," and by acquiring titles became members of the aristocracy.

Tho. Lever, a divine who, next to Latimer, was one of the most urgent in denouncing the wrongs inflicted on the cultivators of the soil, refers in one of his sermons to the wealthy merchants of London as being not content with their position, but, he said, "their riches must needs abroad in the country to buy farms out of the hands of worshipful gentlemen, honest yeomen and labouring husbandes."¹

It is necessary to refer to these proceedings because the effect of them on the yeomen, the small landed gentry who tilled their own farms, the peasantry and the cultivating classes generally, was so disastrous. The Church of that day being the Church of the people—that is, of the State—Church lands were of the nature of public property. The revenues of these lands were used to an enormous extent in the public service. They were used for schools and other educational institutions, for making and mending roads, building and repairing bridges, making sea walls, dykes, etc. They were further used for providing maintenance and refuge for the poor and for caring for the sick. In the rural districts especially the religious orders might be said to have carried on the work now

¹ See "Sermons" preached by Tho. Lever (Arber's Reprints). These sermons are delightful reading, picturing as they do the age in which the preacher lived.

done by the modern boards of guardians. They were the doctors, nurses, and advisers of the cultivating classes among whom they lived and (many of them being cultivators) alongside of whom they worked, and generally they mingled freely with the people and took an intelligent personal interest in the social life of the districts in which their houses were placed.

The religious orders, in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, were easy landlords.¹ Those holding under them were rarely liable to be ousted from their holdings by excessive fines and other forms of eviction so often practised by the lay landlords. All this was changed when the lands fell into private hands. The "new families" which were founded on monastic spoils recognized none of the public and charitable duties referred to. They repudiated the charges for national works to which the land had been subject. They adopted a course dictated by personal gain, and put the lands which they had grasped to the most profitable use, regardless of the dwellers on the soil whose rights were far superior to their own. They found that sheep farming was the most easy and profitable system they could adopt, but in order to turn tillage land into sheep farms it was necessary to evict the yeomanry, peasantry, and cottagers, and accordingly they evicted them with a merciless hand.

Froude describes the situation by saying: "As to the mass of the people, hospitals were gone, alms-

¹ This has frequently been denied, but it is certain that when the monastic lands came into private hands rents were raised and fines increased in order to get rid of the sub-holders. As to the lands that remained in the hands of the king, a main object of the "Augmentation Courts," established by the Act 27 Henry VIII, chap. 27, and other Acts was to increase the revenues of the Crown.

houses swept away, every institution which Catholic piety had bequeathed for the support of the poor was either abolished or suspended till it could be organized anew. The poor, smarting with rage and suffering, and seeing piety and honesty trampled under foot by their superiors, were sinking into savages."¹

The old feudal aristocracy, oppressors of the husbandmen as they were, had some regard for those rights of the cultivators which were founded on custom law and tradition, but the new aristocracy had none. "Ingrossing" and inclosure and other forms of confiscation were carried out with vigour. Some of the unfortunates who were thus dispossessed of their holdings—uprooted from the soil—entered into trade and other callings, others sunk into the position of hirelings, but most of them, rendered houseless and landless, went to swell the ranks of the vagabond class.

To these must be added the vast number of persons belonging to the religious houses, who, with their dependents, were cast adrift. Altogether, this social revolution resulted in such widespread misery and destitution as can hardly be estimated. The process of turning public lands into private property was the direct cause of the great rebellions of 1549 under Kett and other leaders. Further, it created a multitude of beggars, rogues, and vagabonds, which governments tried in vain to put down by the gallows and other severe punishments, and which, in a later reign, had to be dealt with by the establishment of our poor-law system, and the creation for the first time in England of a class of legal paupers.²

¹ "History of England," Vol. V, p. 273.

² The rebellions under Kett and others will be referred to in a later chapter.

CHAPTER XI

PEASANT REVOLTS

ANY review of the English land system would be incomplete, and could not indeed be properly understood, without some reference to the peasant revolts which occurred during its development. These uprisings are usually called "rebellions," but the most striking circumstance connected with them was the great personal loyalty of the insurgents to the reigning monarch. They believed that if they could lay their case before him, their wrongs would be righted. Their anger and grudge were against the minions that surrounded him and against their tools.

The second circumstance in order was the demand of the "rebels" that the rapacious territorial magnates, who were confiscating their rights, should be made to obey the laws affecting the land. The struggles of the English peasantry and yeomanry, continued throughout the centuries against force, fraud, and oppression, form an interesting and an important part of the story of our nation.¹

In all these struggles the spirit which animated the contending parties was the same, from the days of Wat Tyler to those of Joseph Arch.

In every age the rural population have had their

¹ The peasantry and yeomanry were so much allied, the principles of their land tenure were so much alike, they were so united in interests and in action that, for historical purposes, they must be looked upon as parts of the same body. The insurrections were composed of husbandmen of all classes

poets, their champions, and their martyrs, whose action and utterances can only be fully understood when considered in connection with the evils with which they dealt. Most of these utterances were quaint or allegorical and are apt now to be looked upon as mere literary curiosities. But they were well understood by the masses of the people to whom they were addressed, to whose dumb feelings of misery and despair they gave a welcome voice.

“The Vision of Piers the Plowman,”¹ when interpreted, pictures the oppression, injustice, and selfish arrogance which characterized the ruling classes. It describes the “homely poor in their ill-fed, hardworking condition, battling against hunger, famine, injustice, oppression, and all the stern realities and hardships that tried them as gold is tried in the fire.”² The writer of the “Vision” is constrained to speak out all the bitter truth, and his cry is as earnest as that of “an injured man who appeals to heaven for vengeance.”

But it was by the crude and figurative writings and sermons of John Ball, the “crazy priest of Kent,” for which he was hung, drawn, and quartered, that the rustic population had their eyes opened to the true cause of their sufferings, and caught the first glimpse of their natural rights as men. From that hour slavery,

¹ By William Langland, a poor priest, said to have been born at Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire. His poem, written for the most part on the Malvern Hills, was published in its more complete form in 1377, some years after the “Black Death,” and four years before Wat Tyler’s rebellion. Unlike John Ball, Langland had no intention of inciting the people to resistance, but trusted to milder influences to secure reform.

² “Piers the Plowman,” edited by the Rev. W. W. Skeat, M.A. (Clarendon Press), 1869. An edition published by the Early English Text Society, also by Skeat, is perhaps the more interesting, as the side-notes, being in modern English, allow the text to be read with greater ease.

in its different forms, was doomed in England. In Wat Tyler—stabbed in an hour of truce, by a treacherous sycophant—was found a leader who, by his courage, power, and ability, was able to rouse the people, so prepared, to the only form of resistance then open to them.

In the annals of the English peasantry Wat Tyler's rebellion demands a foremost place and an extended notice, for the reason that it was the first occasion in English history in which the idea of freedom—of personal liberty—was openly received and formulated into a distinct demand. Throughout the villages the eager listening peasantry were told that the time for action had come, that John Ball "hathe rungen youre belle," that by nature all men were born equal; that the distinction of bondage and freedom was an invention of their oppressors, and contrary to the views of the Creator; that God now offered them the means of gaining their liberty, and that if they continued slaves the blame must rest with themselves.

In order to understand the character of the outbreak it is necessary to refer to the condition, at the time, of the cultivating classes who formed the great bulk of the nation. The subject, however, as has been stated, is extremely complicated. Customs varied on different manors. Men under the same name lived in various parts of the country under different conditions, but all of them were under the most oppressive serfage. Speaking generally, there was a number of feudal lords and lordly prelates who held the land as tenants-in-chief of the king. To hold the great mass of the people in servile bonds was in their eyes a divine right. All legislation—they being the legislators—was based on this

assumption. The great body of serfs who cultivated their manors were their property, whom they could sell, and over whom they had even the power of life and death. These serfs had no rights against their lords, not even the right to marry or give their children in marriage without their lord's consent. They were often allowed a little land to cultivate, but anything they could save, and all their belongings, as well as themselves, were the property of their lords.

The villeins—a mild name for slaves—appear to have had some rights, but were bound fast to the manor and could be sold with the land like cattle or any other stock.¹ Besides these, there were the freemen, who held land direct from the king, or from great landlords under special charters or agreements, and subject to personal service, or annual money payments, or both. It was the great object of the nobles to reduce these freemen to vassalage on the principle which they sought to enforce that “every man must have a lord.” Altogether the system was a merciless one, under which the peasantry had neither rest nor hope.

The “Black Death,”² a few years before, had swept

¹ It is shown also that they could be sold without the land. Hallam (“Middle Ages,” Vol. III, p. 263) quotes several instances of villeins sold with their families and chattels, but without land. He also quotes a case where a man defended at law his right to the freehold of land that he held, but he failed because the prosecutor was able to prove that he held the land in villeinage, and the proof consisted in the fact that he—the prosecutor—had himself sold one of the defendant's sisters for four shillings. In a previous reign an ordinance was made “that there should be no more buying and selling of men in England, which was hitherto accustomed as if they had been kine or oxen.” But this ordinance was issued through the influence of some of the superior clergy, and was quite disregarded by the manorial magnates.

² The pestilence recurred in 1361 and again in 1369, but that of 1348 is known as the “Black Death.”

away, it is estimated, nearly one half of the population. The cultivators of the soil, thus reduced in numbers, were in demand everywhere. They naturally, in the face of the demand, sought to better their material condition. This was resented by the landlord class, who insisted on the old rates of payment and the old conditions of service.

Before the "Black Death" a large number of serfs had gained their freedom, some by flight, others by manumission. Now, however, labour being scarce, the dominant class sought to thrust these men back again into bondage. The landed aristocracy secured the passing of the most stringent laws and ordinances to compel the people to submit to their tyrannous will. The infamous "Statute of Labourers" was enacted in 1349,¹ the year after the great pestilence.

After the following preamble—"Because a great part of the people, and especially the workmen and servants, have late died of the pestilence, and seeing the necessity of the masters and scarcity of servants, who will not serve unless they receive excessive wages," etc., the Statute proceeds, "After deliberation with the prelates, the nobles and learned men assisting us of their mutual consent, it is ordained that every one, bond or free (with a few exceptions named), shall be bound to serve anyone that shall require him at the same wages as in the 20th of our reign" (in 1347). Anyone who refused was to be "committed to the next gaol, there to remain under strait keeping till he find surety to serve in the form aforesaid." The peasants, however, were stubborn. They sought by flight and other means to evade these cruel restrictions. But the feudal aristocracy were inexorable. In the

¹ 23 Edward III, chaps. i. to v.

following year (1350) another "Statute of Labourers" was passed.¹

After stating that the people had ignored the previous ordinance passed "by the assent of prelates, earls, barons, and others of his council to the great damage of the great men," this Statute makes provisions still more definite and severe "to refrain the malice of the said servants." The peasantry—bond and free—i.e. the great mass of the people—were restricted in their movements from one locality to another; their personal liberty touching the common incidents of life was curtailed, and their whole existence, their "bodies" and service, were to be reduced to an item which was to be the perquisite or property of a small ruling class.

The Act lays down minutely the maximum wages which the men, under threat of "grievous punishment," are to demand or receive—for haymaking, not more than 2d. per day; mowing, 5d. per acre or 5d. per day; reapers, 2d. to 5d., "without meat or drink or other courtesy to be demanded, given, or taken." The men are to be publicly sworn to obey these ordinances. "Those that refuse to take such oath or to perform that that they be sworn to, shall be put in the stocks by the said lords, stewards, bailiffs, etc., for three days or more or sent to the next gaol till they will justify themselves."

Still the peasantry were stubborn, and still the lords of the soil were inexorable. In 1360 another statute was passed,² the provisions of which were revolting to human feeling. It was headed "Punishment of labourers departing from their service into another

¹ 25 Edward III, chaps. i, ii, iii.

² 34 Edward III, chap. 10.

County." It enacted that anyone—bond or free—who should leave the service into which he had been forced, or should go into another locality, should be outlawed, should be hunted down from place to place, and when taken "he shall be burnt on the forehead with an iron made and formed to the letter F, in token of falsity."

It seems, however, that even these cruel measures were not successful enough to satisfy the manorial lords. In 1377, four years before the rebellion, another statute of the same kind was passed.¹ The preamble recites the "misbehaviour of villeins and land-tenants in withdrawing services and customs from their lords due as well of their body as of their tenure," that they declare themselves discharged of these burdens "by certain exemplifications made out of the book of domesday of the manor and their evil interpretation of the same," and that they "resist their lords to the great damage of their said lords." "Therefore," the Statute continues, "it is ordained and stablished that the lords which feel themselves grieved shall have special commission who shall be empowered to imprison the offenders who are indicted and shall not be released on bail or otherwise from prison without the assent of these lords till they be attainted or acquit."

In the "Rolls of Parliament" (Edward III, 1376, Vol. II, p. 340), full directions for enforcing this statute are set out. No one in any condition, rich or poor, on pain of fine, is to receive, employ, or harbour these "malicious riotous rebeales." Bailiffs, gaolers, constables, and all officials in hundreds, wapentakes, and burghs, "toutes parts universalment," are enjoined to

¹ 1 Richard II, chap. 6.

take their bodies and to imprison and chastise them. Every ingenious method is adopted to make their lives unbearable until they submit to the claims of their oppressors.

The persecuted husbandmen of all classes found a new vent for their sufferings in the form of popular songs which circulated throughout the country and became household words. These ballads show the miserable and oppressed condition of the rural population. Many of them are quaint, forcible, and pathetic in their language.¹ One or two examples will show their kind:—

“A Song of the Times”:

“All the land of England is moist with weeping. . . . The fraud of the rulers prevails; peace is trodden underfoot. . . . Right and law lie asleep. . . . The wealth of the rich is increased by exacting gifts; almost all the nobles spend their time in contriving evil; the mad esquires delight in malice. Lo! the rapacious men appear on every side.”

Song against the King's Taxes:

“He sins who takes the money of the poor without cause. . . . It is no trouble to the great to grant the King's tax; the simple must pay it all, which is contrary to God's law. . . . How well they perform good deeds out of the sweat of the poor. . . . They are proud; with other people's goods they hold great court. . . . Such tribute can in no manner last long; out of emptiness who can give? . . . People are reduced to such ill plight that they can give no more; I fear, if they had a leader, they would rise in rebellion.”

¹ “The Political Songs of England,” collected from various sources, and published by the Camden Society, 1839.

“ Song of the Husbandmen ” :—

“ I heard men on the earth make much lamentation. . . . They keep here no saying and sing no song. He who hath any goods expects not to keep them, but even the dearest we lose at last. It is grievous to lose where there is little. . . . The bailiff causes us to know evil. . . . The woodward has woe in keeping for us. . . . There may not arise with us or remain with us riches or repose. . . . Thus they rob the poor man who is of little value ; he must needs in sweat and labour waste away. . . . Thus they rob the poor and pick him full clean—the rich lord it without any right. . . . Thus we are hunted from hall to corner. . . . I must lay my pledge well if I will, or sell my corn while it is green grass. . . . Yet I shall be a foul churl, though they have the whole. . . . To seek silver for the king I sold my seed, wherefore my land lies fallow and learneth to sleep. . . . Since they fetched my fair cattle in my fold, when I think of my weal I nearly weep. . . . As good to perish at once as so to labour.”¹

“ Song of the Venality of Judges ” :

“ There are judges whom partiality and bribes seduce from justice ; that pay toll to the devil and serve him alone. . . . The ushers say to the poor who follow the Court, ‘ Poor man, why do you trouble your-

¹ The following is a specimen of the English language in those days :—

- “ Ich herde men upo mold make muche mon.”
 (I heard men on the earth make much lamentation.)
 “ He kepeth here no sawe ne no song sing.”
 (They keep here no saying and sing no song.)
 “ Thus me pileth the pore that is of lute pris.”
 (Thus they rob the poor who is of little value.)
 “ Nede in swot and in swynk synde mot swo.”
 (He must needs in sweat and labour waste away.)
 “ Forthi mi lond leye lith and leorneth to slepe.”
 (Wherefore my land lies fallow and learneth to sleep.)

self? Why do you wait here? Unless you have money to give to everybody in this Court you labour in vain. Why then, wretch, do you remain? If you have brought nothing you will stand altogether out of doors.' . . . If these (bribes) are not sent privately then they (Sheriffs) proceed as follows; whatever cattle they find are driven off to their own manors, and the owners themselves are put in confinement until they make satisfaction, so that they give double; then at length they are liberated."

The scenes of these cruelties and persecutions were neither in Eastern lands, nor among savage tribes, but in the fair villages, hamlets, and market towns of England. The victims—tracked and hunted from place to place like wild beasts; fastened in the stocks for days and nights, exposed to hunger and cold; kept in filthy prisons till they were subdued; their faces branded with hot irons; their peaceful homes and little homesteads broken up, and their wives and children subjected to untold misery;—were not the savages that some chroniclers have represented them to be, but frugal, hardworking English peasants, who only asked for some small degree of natural justice at the hands of the rapacious class who ruled them.

Courtly and monastic chroniclers of the time, while keenly alive to the discomforts of the aristocratic classes, had not a grain of sympathy—nothing but condemnation—for the peasants and their cause. Modern historians, for the most part, pass over these doings with a few platitudes of sympathy, or with a bare reference to the iniquitous statutes named, which few persons take the trouble to consult. Modern readers, however, must realize the state of things thus pictured before they can judge of the great revolt

which followed, and which proved to be a turning-point in the history of the English peasantry.

During these years of discomfort, allied with despair, discontent became intense and widespread, and the rural population in every part became ripe for an outbreak. They welcomed with open arms certain of the inferior clergy, wandering preachers, whose political sermons gave voice to their wrongs and sufferings. Chief and foremost among these humble and despised preachers was the "profligate priest," the "wicked incendiary" John Ball, who, in season and out of season, in market-place and churchyard, braving all consequences, taught self-help and deliverance to eager and sympathizing crowds. In spite of persecution, imprisonment, and excommunication, and with a full knowledge of his ultimate fate, this lone and homeless man, in the true spirit of a martyr, obeyed the dictates of something within him which he regarded as greater than himself. The ruling classes became speedily aware of the dangers of these teachings. They tried, but in vain, to stop them by securing a law inflicting heavy penalties for "telling horrible and false lies of prelates, dukes, earls, barons and other great men of the realm."¹

In this inflammable condition of the people the rebellion of Wat Tyler broke out. It is generally stated that a brutal assault made by a tax-collector on Wat Tyler's daughter was the cause of the outbreak. The peasantry and other cultivating classes were the beasts of burden, not only for work, but for money to maintain the extravagance of the corrupt ruling

¹ 2 Richard II, chap. 5.

classes.¹ More money was wanted, and a poll tax was decreed of a groat (fourpence) per head to be paid by all persons above the age of fifteen. No doubt this fresh extortion added fuel to the flames; but the cause of the revolt lay far deeper. Indeed, it is questionable if the incident of the killing of the tax-collector had anything to do with Wat Tyler. The matter is immaterial, but Stow in his "Chronicles" describes the occurrence as follows: "One of the Collectors of the grotes coming to the house of one John Tylar in Dartford (Wat Tyler belonged to Maidstone) demanded a grote from Tylar's wife, for herself, husband, servants and her daughter. She was willing to pay for all except her daughter, who, she said, was a child and not a woman." The collector denied this and committed an indecent assault on the girl, as it is stated he had done in other cases. "Thereupon," the chronicler continues, "great tumult ensued and the Tylar met the collector and killed him with his lathing staffe and everyone supported the said John Tylar," etc.

As to the subsequent proceedings of the "rebels" all the chroniclers are in general agreement. The extraordinary rapidity with which the rebellion spread throughout the English counties after the first outbreak at Dartford (5 June, 1381) shows how well

¹ Among the thirteen volumes of ancient documents—interesting in almost every page—which Lord Somers collected, is to be found a remonstrance bearing on this point addressed to Richard II. "The Commons of this realm have poured out goods and innumerable sums of money . . . have undergone such heavy taxes towards the maintenance of wars that they are reduced to such incredible poverty that they cannot so much as pay the rent for their farms, &c., &c. . . . All these mischiefs happen by reason of the King's evil ministers who have hitherto misgoverned both King and Kingdom, &c." "Somers Tracts," Vol. I.

the ground had been prepared and how general was the spirit of disaffection.

The Commons and villeins of Essex marched in a body to Mile End. The Kentish men, led by "those insolent rebels Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and one John Balle and their adherents with a rabble of near 100,000 men lay encamped for some time on Blackheath, a beautiful plain lying on the South side of Greenwich Park."¹ The king sent messengers to know the cause of their rising. They answered that "they were gathered for his safety to destroy those who were traitors to him and his kingdom." They asked that the king should come to see them at Blackheath. The men of Essex, who had encamped at Mile End, had made a similar demand, to which the king had wisely assented. At the interview the king granted their moderate demands, and the men of Essex disbanded and returned to their homes. Had the king, at first, met the Kentish men on Blackheath in a similar way, as it is said he was willing to do, it is most probable that the rebellion would have been ended; but he was swayed by the evil influence of those around him. The Archbishop who was Chancellor, and Sir Robert Hales the Treasurer, were foremost in persuading him not to go. For this "traitorous" counsel the men threatened them with death, a threat they carried out a few days afterwards.

Failing to see the king at Blackheath the rebel army marched to Southwark. "They passed through the citie and did no hurt. They took nothing from any man, but bought all things at a just price. And if they found any man with theft they beheaded him." They sought for the traitors, as they called the king's

¹ Hasted's "History of Kent," published 1778.

advisers. "Their cry was against the Duke of Lancaster and the ministers who held the king in durance, especially the Archbishop, the Chancellor, and Sir Robert Hales, the Treasurer."¹ They burnt and sacked the duke's palace—the Savoy. The gold and silver plate and other valuables found there they threw into the Thames, and the jewellery they destroyed. No man was allowed "on paine to lose his head, to take anything for his own use." One of their number having secreted a silver vessel, "they hurled him and the piece of plate into the fire, saying that they sought justice, and were not thieves and robbers."²

The poorer citizens of London sympathized with them, and threatened to burn the city if the gates were closed against them. Great excesses and crimes were committed, and those who had advised the king not to meet the rebels at Blackheath were caught and beheaded.

The king afterwards met the insurgents at Smithfield and told them that he had satisfied the men of Essex, and that he "would grant them the like form of peace if it would please them to accept thereof." Wat Tyler, however, demanded that the king's promises should be confirmed by letters and charters. It is recorded that "Wat Tyler their Captaine a crafty fellow of an excellent wit but lacking grace" bore himself insolently at this interview, and indulged in threats and made extreme demands. Walworth, the Mayor of London, stabbed him unawares; those who attended the king surrounded Tyler so that his followers, who were some distance off, should not see

¹ Stubbs' "Constitutional History," Vol. II, p. 457.

² Stow's "Chronicles of England."

what was going on. They dragged him from his horse and with their swords "thrust him through in divers places of his body so as he died there in his place."¹

For this act Walworth and his fellows were loaded with rewards, and their names handed down to posterity with honourable mention; but it was nevertheless a dastardly one. Wat Tyler was at the head, not of a mob, but an organized force. He was a leader in a position to treat, and to make terms, and to see that those terms were carried out. He came alone—without even a bodyguard—practically unarmed, to a parley arranged by the king himself and at his invitation. In this position his person, at least, should have been respected. Admitting the doubtful charge of insolence, his death under the circumstances was nothing less than a treacherous and cowardly murder, which should be regarded with horror rather than approbation. The force he led was under full discipline, but a discipline which was not the result of drill, but of absolute obedience to a trusted leader. The leader dead, and none to take his place, confusion and panic ensued; resistance was at an end and the insurgents fled.

The demands of the rebels were moderate and reasonable. As formulated they were: (1) That they should be free from servitude and bondage and from thenceforth there should be no bondmen; (2) That the king would give them a general pardon and "graunt them peace"; (3) That all men should be free to buy and sell in all the markets of the realme; (4) That no land in England holden in bondage or service should be holden but for 4d.

This 4d. per acre was not rent in the modern sense

¹ Sir John Baker's "Chronicles."

of the term, but—with certain services—the conditions on which the land was permanently held. By raising this sum—though he had no right to turn him out—a landlord could impoverish a peasant holder to any extent. Hence the demand made.

In Blomefield's "History of Norfolk," a most valuable local record, prices and other interesting particulars connected with the agriculture of the day are given.¹ From this and from other sources it appears that sixpence per acre was the average of this so-called rent of arable land and 3s. to 4s. per acre for meadow land. Hallam quotes, from accounts kept at a convent some years later, that the prices of wheat were from 4s. to 6s. per quarter, oxen from 12s. to 16s. each, sheep 1s. 2d. to 1s. 4d., eggs twenty-five for a penny, etc. But the enormous difference between the value of money then and now, must, of course, be taken into account.

The rising in Suffolk and Norfolk seems to have been of a less united character. Stow states that men went into Norfolk and Suffolk "to raise like commotions and to turn the hearts of the bondmen against their lords." Their captain was "a most ungracious priest John Wraw, who, instructed by Wat Tyler, easily assembled a multitude of the common people." Some of the leaders were taken, and there was the usual "hanging, drawing, and heading." The rebellion was finally put down by the Bishop of Norwich, "who took some of the rebels and struck off their heads and placed them on poles."²

¹ Blomefield's "History of Norfolk," Vol. 11, pp. 79, 80.

² The history and incidents of the outbreak in Norfolk are given in an interesting work, "Rising in East Anglia in 1381," by Edgar Powell. (University Press, Cambridge, 1896.)

All the old chroniclers agree in vilifying the insurgents. The vocabulary is exhausted to supply opprobrious terms to them. They are described as "filth, scum, traitors, clowns, and scoundrels." The peasants of Norfolk are "vile wretches and cruel traitors." (Holinshed.) "They follow one another like beasts." (Froissart.) As to the leaders of the peasantry, no words are too strong to blacken their characters and to belie their objects and aims. No condemnation is uttered of the oppression and wrongs that had become unbearable and had driven the people to revolt. The peasantry themselves had no chroniclers.

The Chronicles of Walsingham,¹ which were contemporary with the events recorded, are to a large extent the source from which later writers derived their information and founded their opinions. Now Walsingham was a monk of the priory of St. Albans. As one of the regular clergy he had—as his writings show—the bitterest hatred towards the inferior wandering priests, of whom John Ball was the most prominent. The abbot and monks of the priory were large landholders who seem to have enforced with the utmost severity their "rights" over the peasantry of all classes, and to be determined that "all tenants, whether free or not, should not claim any further liberties or privileges."²

¹ "Historia Anglicana," by Thomas Walsingham. I cannot find that these volumes have ever been translated into English. For a translation of Walsingham's statements, and of the quotations from his work, here used, I am indebted to the kindness of my friend Prof. Sonnenschein, of the Birmingham University.

² In those days, whatever they may have been later on, the monks were more or less popular. They held as tenants-in-chief of the king a very large portion of the soil of England, and were more lenient and considerate to those who held land under them than were the lay landlords. They recognized and practised the duty of relieving the poorer

John Ball declared that the priests had no such rights. The town-folk of St. Albans resisted. Grindecobbe, one of their number, a constant man, encouraged and led them on, assuring them that they would not lack support in the town, and that the people of the villages around would come to their assistance. The charges formulated against the abbot and monks of St. Albans were, "(1) injustice and tyranny against the peasantry, (2) oppression of the Commons, (3) retention of the wages of the poor and the enslaved." The leaders of the outbreak were arrested and would have been dealt with in the usual way, but the people of St. Albans issued a declaration that "if any of the men arrested were put to death one hundred of their opponents should be killed for each one of their friends so executed."¹

This state of things at St. Albans is referred to here to show how impossible it was for Walsingham—himself one of the monks of the abbey—to take anything but a partisan view of the proceedings he recorded; and therefore the views of the later chroniclers who adopted so largely Walsingham's account, should be regarded in this light.²

classes, for which object a considerable portion of the monastic revenues were set aside. St. Albans and one or two other religious communities seem to have been an exception to this rule. One at least of these was attacked by the insurgents on the avowed grounds that the monks had inclosed, and were inclosing, land belonging to the commoners.

¹ Walsingham's "Chronicles."

² At the trials of the prisoners at St. Albans, after the rebellion, no lawful jury could be found to convict, and it was only by severe threats and infamous jury-packing that convictions could be secured at all. Even then, writes Walsingham, "They would have preferred to give a false verdict." He evidently regarded any verdict, except that of guilty, as a false one.

Walsingham gives the story (repeated by other chroniclers) of the confession said to have been made by Jack Straw, "the ungratious priest," on the eve of his execution. According to that confession, one of the objects of the insurgents at Blackheath was to kill the king and all the knights, squires, and gentlemen who attended him. Jack Straw was taken and condemned to death by Walworth, the Mayor of London, who afterwards spoke to him in prison as follows: "John, behold thy death is at hand beyond all doubt and there is no way by which thou mayest escape, wherefore for thy soules health tell us to what end ye did assemble the commons? If ye doe it, it shall redounde to thy soul's health."

After this so-called confession he was beheaded and his head set on London Bridge alongside of the heads of Wat Tyler and many others. The whole story is unworthy of credence, first because it rests on the sole testimony of Walworth, the chief murderer of Tyler, a time-serving caitiff, who doubtless felt it necessary to invent some justification for the merciless reprisals he was adopting; and secondly, because it was contrary to the recorded action of the rebels.

If Wat Tyler had intended to kill the king, he could easily have done it at Smithfield. But loyalty to the king was preached everywhere, his banners were carried, and most of those who joined the ranks of the insurgents were required to take "an oath of allegiance to King Richard and to the Commons."¹

¹ Holinshed, in referring to Jack Straw's alleged confession, seems to have had some doubt as to its truth. "Sith," he says, "they that rote in those daies may happilie in that behalfe misse the truth in construing things according to their affections." Stubbs says, "His reported confession is too comprehensive to be veracious." ("Constitutional History," Vol. II, p. 492.)

During the progress of the outbreak the territorial party was panic-stricken. Local authorities took the side of the rebels, and the local forces could not be relied on to oppose them. Even in London, where the king's forces were stationed, the same state of things was found. "It is strange to consider," writes the chronicler, "in what fear the lords, knights, and gentlemen stood of these rude and base people. For there were 600 armed men and as many archers in the Tower, but there was not one that durst gainsay their doings."¹

On the news of Wat Tyler's death, which spread rapidly, the rebellion collapsed everywhere. Then terror gave place to revenge, and a series of reprisals was begun of a character too atrocious almost for belief. The charters of manumission, so solemnly conferred, were cancelled and the promises of pardon revoked.

Commissions were appointed to try all prisoners and others who had taken part in the rebellion or were suspected of having taken part in it. Sir Robert Tresilian, Chief Justice, was appointed head of one of these commissions. This man seems to have been a prototype of the infamous Judge Jefferies. Before him "above 1500 men were found guilty and in sundry places put to death." He received his deserts, however, a few years afterwards. He was sent to the Tower, "thence drawn to Tyburn, and there hanged." The judges at first employed the method of beheading the rustics "on account of the multitudes that had to be executed." But this method of capital punishment "did not correspond to such monstrous and manifold crimes," and they decided "to punish with hanging

¹ Holinshed's "Chronicles of England," Vol. II, p. 739.

and drawing," nine or ten being hanged on one beam.

John Ball was arrested and brought to trial at St. Albans. He "confessed to his abominable wickedness," and was convicted of having "monstrously outraged the King's Majesty" and sentenced to death. On 15 July, some weeks after Wat Tyler's murder, he was "hanged, drawn, and decapitated in the presence of the king, and his body having been quartered was sent to four cities of the realm." (Walsingham.)

The proceedings were all done in the king's name, but some of them were so fiendish that they could not possibly have been thought of by a boy of fifteen.¹ No doubt they were the acts of the minions in whose tutelage he was, and of the great magnates by whom he was surrounded, and who, when the danger was over, let loose their vengeance on those who had caused the trouble. All the leaders of the rebellion to a man were put to a cruel death, and they were regarded by the old chroniclers as men unfit to live.²

The proper method for the student of history to pursue is to discard the biassed opinions of these writers, to take the facts recorded and the inferences to be drawn from them, to mark the current events

¹ The friends and relations of those executed at St. Albans stealthily removed the bodies from the gibbets. Strict orders were sent to the bailiffs to cause chains to be made and to compel these people "to bring back the same bodies to the gallows and to hang them on these chaines so long as one piece might sticke to another." (Holinshed, Vol. II, p. 750). This appears to be the origin of hanging in chains.

² Walsingham gives, in order, the names of the principal leaders:— Wat Tyler, the chief; John Straw, John Wraw, a lewd and naughty priest; Helyer, John Kyrkely, John Stanlynge. Stow and other writers add: Alan Theder, Thomas Scotte, Radolf Rugge, Robert Westbrun, John Grindecobbe, and John Lettestre, captain of the Norfolk rebels.

and the conditions of the people, and then to weigh the whole in the scales of justice and humanity. Judged in this way, how different will the actions of these peasant leaders appear! Wat Tyler will stand out as a great historical figure. He was a patriot and a born leader of men. He was a strong character, and inspired confidence in his followers and fear in his opponents. When appealed to for help by the oppressed townsmen of St. Albans, he replied that "he would come, if necessary, with twenty thousand men at his back, provided always that the men of St. Albans would obey his orders to the letter," and further, that he would then "shave the beards of the abbot and prior and of the other monks"—in other words, that he would cut off their heads. (Walsingham.)

Another remarkable man in the revolt was William Grindcobbe, leader of the St. Albans contingent of Wat Tyler's army, a man of calm courage and absolute devotion to the cause of the oppressed peasantry. He got from the king a promise that a letter should be sent to the abbot of St. Albans ordering him to restore to the people those ancient rights and privileges of which they had been deprived. This letter was delivered to the abbot, who, under pressure, surrendered certain deeds in his keeping which conferred these rights and privileges. He also granted to the people a charter of freedom. After the defeat of the insurgents a demand was made, in the name of the king, that these deeds and this charter should be given back to the abbot. Grindcobbe encouraged the people to resist this demand, and for so doing he was imprisoned in Hertford jail. The authorities, however, through fear, released him on bail, and he

returned to St. Albans. Here he was in the power of his enemies, who offered to save his life on the condition that he would persuade his followers to surrender the documents in question. But he refused, and, addressing the people, among whom were those who had become his sureties, he besought them not to be influenced by his personal peril. "Fellow townsmen," he said, "you who have been now raised from long-standing oppression by a scanty measure of freedom, stand firm, I entreat you, so long as you shall be able to do so and have no fear on the score of my punishment; for if it is now my fate to die, I shall die in the cause of the liberty we have gained, deeming myself happy to be able to end my life by such a martyrdom. Act at this juncture just as you would have been bound to act if I had been beheaded yesterday at Hertford" (Walsingham, Vol. II, p. 27). Grindcobbe was afterwards executed, drawn, and quartered as a "malefactor." This obscure hero had climbed to the heights of that self-sacrifice which, in various forms and in different degrees, is the one great mean for the betterment of humankind. Had the incident happened in classic times, or farther back into antiquity, it would now no doubt be a subject treated by the professor in his class-room, but it is not the less magnificent because it is one of humble English life.

But the most remarkable figure in the rebellion—the most vilified, but the man to whom the great bodies of English peasantry and yeomanry of later times owed most—was John Ball, "the crazy profligate priest." In previous struggles, as we have said, the peasantry had striven only for improvement in their material condition, for some outlook and hope in their cruel lot.

Their aspirations never went beyond this. But in the villages throughout the country, in season and out of season, with his life in his hand, John Ball had for years been teaching and explaining to listening crowds a higher doctrine, strange and new to them—that of human liberty and the equality of human rights.

The written messages which this “hedge priest” sent to the people had an unbounded effect on those to whom they were addressed, and who perfectly understood the figurative allusions with which these messages abound. In a seemingly hopeless enterprise this poor preacher never lost heart, never gave an uncertain note or fell from his high ideal.¹

In all parts the poor peasantry received and pored over, with greedy and excited interest, such messages as the following :—

“John Ball gretyth you wele and doth gow to understande he hathe rungen your belle . . . stonde manlyche tojedyr in trewth and helpe ye trewth and trewth schal helpe gowe. Now regneth pride in pris and covetys is held wys, and lecherye withouten shame and glotonye withouten blame.” Again :—“Now nereth the day, for if the end be well then alle is well. Let Piers the plowman stay at home and dyght us corne and I will go with you and help that ye may be dyght your mete and your drynke that ye none fayle . . . for ye have grete nede to take God with youe in alle youre dedes. For now is time to be war.”

Some of these letters referred to imaginary persons,

¹ These curious letters are given by Walsingham and other chroniclers, but can be found together in their different versions in Lingard’s “History of England,” Vol. IV, pp. 58, 239, and in Sharon Turner’s “History of England,” Vol. IV, p. 580. The most curious version perhaps is that given in Knyghton’s Chronicle. See “Rolls Publication,” edited by Dr. Lumby.

“John the Miller,” “John the Carter,” etc., and are treated by the old chroniclers with great contempt. One writer refers to the message sent to the Commons of Essex as a “letter of nonsense sent by this incendiary priest to the rebel-rabble of Essex,” and as showing “how fit an orator he was for such an auditory, and what strength of persuasion lies in nonsense.”

The letter runs:—“John Sheep St. Mary’s Priest of York and now of Colchester greeteth well John Nameless, and John the Miller, and John the Carter and all manner of men and biddeth them beware of guile in the Borough and stand manlyke together in God’s name; and biddeth Piers Plowman go to his work and chastise Hob the Robber and take with you John Trewman and all his fellowes and no more; John the Miller ye ground small, small, small; the King’s son of Heaven shall pay for all. Beware or ye be woe, know your friend from your foe, have enough and say ho; and do well and better. Flee sin and seek peace and hold ye therein. And so biddeth John Trewman and all his fellowes.”

For his sermon to Wat Tyler’s great army of rustics on Blackheath, John Ball took his usual text, the democratic and oft-quoted distich:—

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?

“By what right,” the preacher urged, “are they whom we call lords greater folk than we? On what grounds have they deserved it? Why do they hold us in serfage? If we all came of the same father and mother, of Adam and Eve, how can they say or prove that they are better than we, if it be not that they make us gain for them by our toil what they spend in

their pride. They are clothed in velvet, and warm in their furs and their ermines, while we are covered with rags. They have wine and spices and fair bread, and we oat-cake and straw, and water to drink. They have leisure and fine houses; we have pain and labour, the rain and winds in the fields. And yet it is of us and of our toil that these men hold their state."¹

If love for his fellow-men, intense sympathy with their sufferings, self-sacrifice even unto death for ideas of human freedom constitute heroism, then John Ball stands out as a hero of the first rank, compared with whom the spurious claims of the so-called order of chivalry of that day are as dross to gold.

The old chroniclers seem to have taken it as a matter of course that the peasantry had brought the severe punishment on themselves by rebelling against the powerful classes of the day; that they had, in fact, merely paid the penalty for their misdeeds. But in these pages events are treated from the point of view of the peasantry and other cultivators of the soil who were, in fact, the nation.

No doubt unsuccessful rebellion carries with it consequences that have to be borne, and the actors in it must expect scant mercy. On the other hand, if a few thousand persons, having unbridled power, arrogate the right of keeping the great bulk of their fellow-men in bondage and inflicting on them intolerable misery, they, too, must accept the dangers of their position. All violence should be deplored, but it is futile for writers to affect a maundering surprise, and an unqualified indignation at events which, in the course of things, are bound to happen if the victims of

¹ Froissart's "Chronicles."

long-continued provocation and oppression once gain the upper hand.¹

It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of the ruling classes in these remote times. Hallam speaks of the peers of the realm as "a small body varying from about 50 to 80 persons." Green states, but does not give his authority, that "Under Edward II little more than 70 were commonly summoned to Parliament; little more than 40 were summoned under Edward III" (Vol. I, p. 457). That they were a very small number there is no doubt. In an old and rare book, referring to a later date, a good authority gives the whole number of peers—including the lords spiritual—at 203, and of these only forty were summoned to Parliament.²

To reckon the noble classes in the fourteenth century at 10 per cent of the population would be a high estimate, and to put the number of those who swayed legislation and were responsible for it at 5 per cent of the population, would be equally above the mark. But it is to the administration of the laws—which was under their control—rather than to the laws themselves, that the student must look. The proverb, "Those that administer govern," was never better illustrated than it was in those days. The barons were so powerful that they could make bad laws worse by the manner in which they were administered, and

¹ During the past few months our hearts have gone out in sympathy for men shot down for seeking an interview with their sovereign and for the brave priest who stood by them. We have felt for people led like sheep to the slaughter at the will of a shameless and criminal autocracy; surely we should have nothing but warm sympathy with Englishmen in their struggles against a still greater tyranny.

² "An exact Catalogue of the Nobility of England," by Robert Dale, Pursuivant and Deputy-Register of the College of Arms, 1697.

could ignore laws altogether if it suited their purpose to do so.

After all, the excesses committed during the short time the rebellion lasted—deplorable as they were—cannot be placed in the same scale with the daily sufferings, the brandings, the hangings, and other villainies, legal and illegal, inflicted on the peasantry by the dominant class.¹

Most of the leading men who suffered at the hands of the insurgents were those who had made themselves notorious for extortion and wrong-doing, or obnoxious by their evil counsels to the king or by their open and inveterate hostility to the people. The beheading of Sir John de Cavendish—regarded by some of the chroniclers with horror—was the result of his known zeal in maltreating the peasantry. “He had been granted an extra salary as a Justice for enforcing the Statute of Labourers in Essex.” (Powell.)

The present writer is no judge of an education founded on the literature and history of ancient nations; of old “republics” which were only republic in name; of “democratic” states in which the principle of democracy never existed; but he is convinced of the advantages that would accrue to the young from a closer study of the social and domestic history of their own country. The study of the struggles, continued for centuries, of the English peasantry; of their constant qualities and marvellous staying power as recorded in the old chronicles, is a fascinating one. Volumes have been written of the splendid deeds that

¹ Though London and the counties around lay for a time at the mercy of the insurgents, there is no case hinted at in which a woman was hurt. Compare this with Froissart’s account of the brutal doings of the “noble order” of chivalry after the capture of Limoges.

made for the expansion of England and for the building up of our Empire, but too little attention is given to those dark days of trial and suffering which developed, and made permanent, the indomitable qualities of our race which alone made those achievements possible.

The history of England has been too often written in the "drum and trumpet" style, and that of the English people too much neglected. Numberless books have been written, and the imagination racked, to idealize, in visionary style, the doubtful deeds of a class who were quite apart from the real life of the nation. Romancists deal with episodes in the careers of that class, adopt artificial standards of virtue and morals, and by their genius cast a glamour of greatness and nobility over deeds which, judged by a righteous standard, are little else than lawless ruffianism.

Froissart, a Frenchman who came to this country in 1394, wrote, in brilliant style, what he called the "Chronicles of England."¹ On these, and on similar writings, poets, painters, and romancists have exercised their gifts in so many ways, and so many forms, that a totally false idea is given of what England really was in those days. If some foreigner with facile pen, in the present day, were to describe in attractive style the doings of the turf, the sporting world, of high "Society," of adventurers living on their wits, of reckless speculators and financial gamblers, with an occasional scornful reference to the "unemployed," to Hyde Park riots and meetings in Trafalgar Square, he would hand down to posterity as true an account of the real England as Froissart gives of the England of his day.

¹"Chronicles of England," by Sir John Froissart.

Froissart was an aristocrat to the tips of his fingers, and, in common with his order, had not the remotest idea that the common people had any natural rights whatever. For the husbandmen—bond or free—to assert any rights was, in his view, a proof of their wickedness in questioning what was considered to be a divine order of things; accordingly he refers to the rebellion with contempt, and vilifies the actors in it. Except for this reference to Wat Tyler's revolt, his books are filled mainly with brilliant descriptions of predatory warfare, plots and counterplots, battles, sieges, intrigues of kings and nobles, scandals and gossips of courts, tournaments, etc. The terrible wars he describes were actuated by no patriotic motives or aims and secured no permanent good to the nation. They were mainly caused by the quarrels of kings and by dynastic squabbles. War was a trade. Knights and squires of the order of chivalry sold their swords to the highest bidder regardless of side or cause or the justness of the quarrel. Taking prisoners for the sake of ransom was a miserable traffic recognized by these warriors. Altogether it was a squalid business. The vaunted rules of chivalry, which this class professed to observe, imposed no obligation of honour or justice in dealing with the inferior classes. A man might treat the common people with any amount of cruelty, meanness, and deceit, and still be regarded as a chivalrous knight. Chivalry had no permanent effect in the formation of the national character except to inspire an exclusive class with a spirit of superiority and arrogance which has not wholly died out at the present time.

In short, Froissart's Chronicles, and others of the same type, refer only to the doings of a handful of men

and their hangers-on. Ever quarrelling and fighting among themselves they were united only on one point, namely, oppression of the cultivating classes. The cost of the pageantry and splendour described, of the castles and mansions raised (as of many a stately dwelling since) was all wrung out of the thew and sinew, the hard labour of the yeoman and the peasant, bond and free. Vivid accounts have been given of the exploits of the peasantry in other countries. Splendid dramas and poems have been written, in another country, on the deeds of Tell; but the field is still open, and the materials abundant, for some able writer by prose, verse, or drama, to bring home to the people of this country the feats of the peasant leaders throughout the centuries—those obscure heroes to whom the liberties of Englishmen are so largely due.

William Morris has done something in this direction—enough to show with what attractive interest a brilliant and sympathetic writer who looks below the surface can invest the subject.

In his charming idyll¹ he speaks of the "Fellowship," the freemasonry, which existed among the peasantry; the caution they exercised in those dangerous times; of the nay-words they employed when as strangers they met at the cross roads. These nay-words were not "mum" and "budget," but were equally well understood. A peasant with the terrible longbow in his hand would whisper to a stranger, "John the Miller that ground small, small, small," and the reply would come from the lips of the stranger, "The King's son of heaven shall pay for all." Straightway the bow fell on the shoulder, hands were

¹ "A Dream of John Ball," by William Morris.

grasped, and the men knew that they were of the "Fellowship." John Ball is pictured on the steps of the village cross, surrounded by a throng of people, whose "eyes and hearts were fixed on the dark figure," and on whom "a great expectation had fallen." The village bells were stopped so that he should not be interrupted. Then with "hands stretched out before him, one palm laid on the other," the preacher began:—

"Ho all ye good people! I am a priest of God, and in my day's work it cometh that I should tell ye what ye should do and what ye should forbear doing, and to that end I am come hither." He hears a voice warning him of his fate unless he desists from his work and saying, "The hemp for thee is sown and grown and heckled and spun, and lo there, the rope for thy gallows tree"; but he declares that the saints in heaven forbid him to forbear, for "he shall not fail, though he seem to fail to-day, but in days hereafter shall he and his work yet be alive, and men be holpen by them to strive again and yet again."

But, it may be asked, what good results came from the rebellion? It is true that at the first glance the rural population seemed to have gained nothing by the sacrifices they had made, but rather to have made their position worse than before. Every pledge given to the insurgents was broken, letters of pardon were recalled and all charters of manumission were cancelled. The men of Essex who had returned home quietly, content with the concessions made, were, if anything, treated with more savage cruelty than the insurgents from other parts. But their spirit, though damped, was not broken.

After the rebellion, in spite of the punishment they

had received, the "Commons of Essex decreed either to enjoy the liberty they had gotten by force or to die in fighting for the same." They sent special messengers to the king asking if "he thought good to permit them to enjoy their permitted liberty." The answer given to these messengers in the name of the king was a brutal and, seemingly, a hopeless one: "Miserable men, not worthy to live, doe ye require to be equal to your lords? Declare our answers to your fellowes on the king's behalf: husbandmen and bondmen they were, so shall they remain in bondage, not as before, but more vile beyond comparison . . . so that your service may be an example to posteritie."¹

Barons, prelates, and monastic communities were unanimous in the declaration that neither by "persuasion or violence" would they be deprived of the services of the serfs and villeins.

The most severe laws were passed after what Hallam calls "this tremendous rebellion." To prevent the recurrence of the rising it was enacted that even mere riots should be treated as treason punishable by death.² In appearance, but only in appearance, the outlook of the peasantry was more gloomy than ever.

Succeeding events showed that a mighty change had been wrought in the rural life of England. The rebellion had struck terror into the hearts of the landlord class, and dread lest the uprising should be

¹ Stow's "Chronicles," p. 292.

² See 5 Richard II, chap. vi: "Manumission releases and other bonds made in the last tumult by compulsion shall be void. . . ." "It shall be treason from henceforth to make or begin any manner of riot and rumour nor other like . . . all such deeds with any copies shall be restored so that they may not be used in any future time and all entries in lands and tenements all feoffments made in compulsion and menace shall be void."

renewed.¹ They saw for the first time the risks they ran in keeping the people in slavery. Above all, they realized the danger of having pitted against themselves the power and unflinching courage of these despised husbandmen—men of the same stuff—many of them no doubt the very men—who had fought at Crecy and Poitiers.

John Ball had sounded the death-knell of slavery in every form. The new ideas of personal liberty—so outrageous in the eyes of the manorial lords—spread far and wide and took deep root, and changed the whole character of the situation. From that time the conditions of the tenure of land steadily changed. The Statute of Labourers, with other obnoxious laws, became a dead letter. "From henceforth we find little notice taken of villeinage in Parliamentary records, and there seems to have been a rapid tendency towards its abolition." (Hallam.) The oppressive services demanded of the husbandmen were either greatly modified or were converted into annual money payments. The number of yeomanry rapidly increased. Emancipation of the bondmen largely added to the class of copyholders, a valuable class who, with the yeomen and peasant proprietors, became the mainstay of the nation. As already stated, these copyholders had an indefeasible title to the land, and could not be legally deprived of their holdings so long as they fulfilled the conditions inscribed in the manor rolls. These conditions included fines of various sorts, heriots, and other payments. Although the landlord could not dis-

¹ Lingard relates that even in Parliament "a new tax was refused on the ground that it might goad the people into a second rebellion." ("History of England," Vol. IV, p. 250.)

possess them legally, yet, as we have seen in previous chapters, he could so increase these exactions as to squeeze them off their holdings and reduce them to mere tenants, and finally, by the consolidation of farms, to put them out of the occupation of land altogether.

From this time the condition of rural life generally began to change, the boundaries of peasant existence became enlarged, and the personal character of the people was raised. Numbers of villeins and other bondmen, as they became free, went into the towns, where, by their industry and enterprise, they laid the foundation of the great middle class, from whose ranks came the lords of industry who were destined ultimately to leave in the background the lords of the soil.

We have dwelt at some length on Wat Tyler's rebellion, because it was an epoch in the rural life in England. It gave a fresh start, if not the first real start, in the creation—as a body with a distinct social and political power—of that great free peasantry and yeomanry of which England has had such good reason to be proud. The results of the rebellion fully justify the notable statement of one of the most able and judicious of our constitutional writers, that “this rising of the Commons is one of the most portentous phenomena to be found in the whole of our history.”¹

The peasant revolts which took place after Wat Tyler's time were of a different kind, and had different aims. The main object of Wat Tyler's rising had been achieved, and after that rising slavery in England soon died out. Thenceforth the struggle of the cultivating classes was for the retention of their

¹ Stubbs' "Constitutional History," Vol. II, p. 489.

rights in the soil. Wool rose in price, and sheep-farming became profitable. Land consequently became more and more valuable, and the manorial lords pursued a steady policy of getting it into their hands as private property. The struggle between the two classes was a bitter one, and was carried on almost without ceasing till the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, when, by the aid of a landlord parliament, the objects of the landed aristocracy were attained. "The manor won, the peasant lost."

A short review of the chief of these outbreaks will show, better than anything else, the difficulties the peasantry had to contend with, and the forces arrayed against them. About seventy years after Wat Tyler's revolt the great rebellion under Jack Cade broke out.¹ Perhaps no man, in all history, has been more ridiculously caricatured than this remarkable peasant leader. The plaster of calumny was, by his enemies, laid so thickly over his reputation and has become so time-hardened that it is difficult to break it off. His character, as portrayed by Shakespeare ("Henry the Sixth," Part II), has been generally accepted as true. He is there represented as a vagabond, plunderer, and a boasting clodpoll, a sort of slip-gibbet, who, at the head of an army of "rebellious hinds, the filth and scum of Kent," had, for his main object, to obtain such reforms as should secure that there "shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny," that the "three-hooped pot shall

¹ The object of Cade's rebellion was to secure political and economic as well as agrarian reforms, and on that account classes, other than the peasantry, joined the movement. Nevertheless, redress of land grievances was most prominent among the demands made by the insurgents.

have ten hoops," and that "it shall be a felony to drink small beer."

The name "Jack Cade" is, to this day, a byword denoting a low type of pillage, robbery, and everything else of a predatory character. But, if we take the facts contained in the old records, how different do the character of the man and the aims of his followers appear! The old historians, all in deadly opposition to Cade, are practically agreed as to the incidents of his rebellion. They show beyond dispute that he was a brave soldier and an able general, who fought, with a definite end in view, for the reform of the agrarian grievances under which the rural classes were suffering. He called himself Mortimer, and was known generally by that name throughout the rebellion. It was afterwards, in the proclamation setting a price on his head, that he was called Jack Cade.

"The Commons of Kent," says the chronicler,¹ "assembled in great numbers, having for Captaine John Cade, a certain young man of goodlie stature and right pregnant of wit. . . . They marched to Blackheath and there kept the field for more than a month. . . . The king sent notable men to the said Captaine to know the purpose and cause of the insurrection." The reply sent back was in the form of a "Bill of requisites, by them made, of things to be reformed wherein was nothing contained but seemed reasonable."

This Bill was composed of a number of items. Item six ran as follows:—"Though divers of the

¹ Holinshed's "Chronicles," Vol. III, p. 220. A much earlier chronicler in 1516 (Cade's rising was in 1450), referring to the interview which the king's messengers had with Cade, says, "They faude him right discrete in his answerys; how be it they could not cause hym to lay downe his people and submyt hym vnto the kinge's grace." (Fabyan's "Chronicle.")

poor people and Commons of the Realme have so great right, truth, and perfect title to their land, yet by untrue claymes of enfeffement into divers states, genteles, and the King's menial servants in maintenance, against the right, the true owners dare not have hould claim nor pursue their right." (Stow, p. 388.)

The Bill expresses complete loyalty to the king, but demands justice against the "traitors" by whom he is surrounded. Item five asks that "all the extortions used daily among the common people be layed down." It refers to the "taking of wheat and other grains, beef, mutton, and other victuals, without the provision of our sovereign lord," and asks that "they may no longer bear it."

This account is confirmed by another writer of repute, Stowe the antiquary (not Stow the chronicler), who left special memoranda on the subject in his own handwriting.¹ He gives full particulars of "a proclamation" made by Jack Cade and "ye rebelles in Kent." They trust, the rebels say, "our sovereign lorde the Kyng will remedy the grievances of the pore Commyns of England, or else we shall dye therefore." They complain that they cannot come near the king's person without bribery. They wish it to be known that they "wyll not robbe, ne reve, ne stell, but these defautes be amended and then we will go home," for "his commyns may no longer bere it." If redress is given—the proclamation concludes—"we shall be all weye redy to defend our countre from all nations with our owne goods and to go with our

¹ This MS. is published by the Camden Society. New Series, Vol. XXVIII. "Historical Memoranda," by John Stowe. Fabyan, referring to the "Bill of Petitions" presented to the king, says that it showed "injureys and oppressions the poore cōmons suffred by suche as were about the kyng a few persones in nombre."

sovereigne lorde where he wyll commande us as his true ligemen."

But the king's advisers counselled him to refuse these demands and to put down the rebels by force. Accordingly "the King sent certain Lords to suppress them, but their men told their Lords that they would not fight against them that labour to amende the commonweale. . . . Then the King himself went against the Kentishmen with fifteen thousand men well prepared for the warre." But Cade, by skilful strategy, around Sevenoaks, evaded this force and the king returned to London. Another army was then sent against him under the command of Sir John and Sir Humphrey Stafford. This force, by Cade's able manœuvring, and by the courage of his men, was defeated in battle, and the two generals slain.

Cade then marched to Blackheath, and certain nobles were sent to negotiate with him, who found him "discrete in his answers," but determined not to lay down his arms until his demands were granted. He then marched to Southwark and entered the city. He issued a proclamation to the effect that "no man under payne of death should rob or take anything without paying therefore. By reason whereof he wanne the hearts of the Commons."

Cade was a strong man, who meant his orders to be obeyed. He "publicly executed some of his followers, and particularly a petty Captaine, named Paris, who had done things contrary to his Proclamation."

After severe fighting and heavy losses on both sides, the Chancellor of England sent a messenger "to the Captaine," with a general pardon for himself and his men, whereupon he and his people withdrew. Cade, however, like Wat Tyler, and all other peasant leaders,

distrusted the promises of those in power, and with good reason, for they were never meant to be fulfilled. He tried in vain to keep his followers together, but they disbanded, though he warned them what would happen. Shakespeare makes him say, "Do you believe him? (the messenger). Will you needs be hanged with your pardon about your necks?"

Cade then became a fugitive with a few followers, and immediately a proclamation was issued charging him with various crimes, "revoking the charter of pardon, and offering rewards to anyone who should take him quicke or dead, or any who are with him." A few days afterwards he was taken and killed. "His head was set on London Bridge and his quarters sent to divers places in Kent," and a large number of his followers were executed.

The chroniclers give an account of the alleged crimes and excesses committed by the insurgents, and speak in the strongest terms of the wickedness of Cade's character. All this may be true, partly true, or not true at all, but in any case it in no way affects the cause and objects of the rebellion.

In most of the revolts the rage of the peasantry was specially directed against the lawyers, and for good reason. It was by the aid of the lawyers and the subtleties of baron-made law that the peasants were continually deprived of their rights in the land by the manorial lords.¹ It was a lamentable thing "that, of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment," and that parchment, "when scribbled o'er, should undo a man." ("Henry the Sixth," Part II.)

¹ Among other works see "Rights of Common," by Joshua Williams; "History of the Law of Real Property," by Kenelm C. Digby. Both are extremely technical; the latter can only be understood by juris-

The spirit of Sir Giles Overreach was prevalent in a variety of forms. "These trespasses will draw on suits, and suits expenses which I can spare, but will soon beggar him. . . . He frights men out of their estates and breaks through all law nets as if they were cobwebs."¹

Instances abound, in the old records, of the free tenants being deprived of their lands and commoners of their commons, by process of law. As an illustration of one of the methods, a case is given in Britton's "History of Wiltshire,"² in which the lord of the manor, by litigation lengthened out until the means of the commoners became exhausted, succeeded in confiscating the land in dispute as well as other property. In this case the commoners and free tenantry, being beaten at law, sent a petition to Parliament stating that the lord of the manor was too powerful for them, and that "the said free tenants were not able to wage law any longer; for one of their number was thereby forced to sell all his land (to the value of £500) with following the suits in law, and many others were thereby impoverished and were thereby forced to yield up their rights and take a lease of the said common, of the said Sir Francis Englefield for the term of his life. . . . We have not so much as a foot of common left us, and are thereby grown so in poverty unless your Honourable House enact something for us that we may enjoy our rights again."

It is necessary to dwell on these proceedings in prudents. A glance at them, however, is useful, as showing the complexity of feudal legislation and the small chance the peasants had in contending against acute lawyers with wealthy landlords for clients.

¹ Massinger's "A New Way to Pay Old Debts."

² Quoted by Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice in an article on "Enclosures," "Nineteenth Century," December, 1886.

order to realize the steady and unswerving manner in which the manorial lords were pursuing their policy. The peasantry and yeomanry could get no help from Parliament, because the legislature was controlled by feudal influence. The king and the best men of his executive were powerless, because the baronial power was too strong. It is true they succeeded in passing laws—some of them severe—to check the evil, but these laws were disobeyed or evaded. As Bishop Latimer preached, "We have good statutes made for the Common-welth as touching comeners, enclosers, etc. but in the end there cometh nothing forth." Numbers of remonstrances were addressed to successive governments, especially by some of the superior clergy.

We have already referred to Bishop Latimer's fruitless warnings. Another sermon has been preserved and handed down to us, in which the preacher, in a very pathetic strain of eloquence, boldly describes to the king and his court the crying evils inflicted on the rural population.¹

"Be the poor man's cause never so manifest, the rich shall, for money, find six or seven counsellors that shall stand with subtleties and sophisms to cloak an evil matter and hide a known truth. . . . Such boldness have these covetous cormorants that now their robberies, extortion and open oppression have no end nor limits, no banks can keep in their violence. As for turning poor men out of their holdings they take it for no offence, but say their land is their own, and they turn them out of their shrouds like mice. Thousands in England, through such, beg now from

¹ Sermon preached in the court at Greenwich before the king, Edward VI, 1552, by Bernard Gilpin. See "Life of Gilpin," by his son William Gilpin, Vicar of Boldre, near Lyminster (3rd edition, 1780).

door to door which have kept honest houses. . . . So many mighty Nimrods in England that hunt for possessions and lordships that poor men are daily hunted out of their livings. There is no covert or den can keep them safe. They have such quick-smelling hounds they can lie in London and turn men out of their farms and tenements an hundred, some two hundred miles off. When wicked Ahab hunted after Naboth's vineyard he could not, though he were a king, obtain that prey till cursed Jezebel took the matter in hand, so hard a thing it was then to wring a man from his father's inheritance which now a mean man will take in hand."

It is further necessary in an account of the peasants of England to dwell on these proceedings because so many writers have treated these peasant revolts as though they arose from political causes. But if the events which took place prior to the risings are examined, it will be found that agrarian grievances were the chief cause of them all, though increased political liberties were sometimes among the results.

The rebellions of the year 1549 were of this order. The Duke of Somerset, Protector of the young king Edward VI, took a serious view of the public danger likely to accrue from these continual encroachments on the rights of the peasantry, and was well known to have practical sympathy with the despoiled husbandmen.

In any account of the peasantry of England the Duke of Somerset should have an honourable place. During different reigns many were found, of all degrees, to protest against the evil practices referred to, but the Protector, in an unprecedented manner, pitted his great power, as the virtual ruler of the country,

against the power of the landed aristocracy, in an endeavour to stop, if possible, the decay of England's rural population.

Political offences and court intrigues are usually given as the cause of the Protector's fall. No doubt these were the nominal means by which his ruin was wrought. It was on the charge of felony that he was convicted and condemned to death, but the forces behind and underneath which made the prosecution successful were undoubtedly agrarian. The landed aristocracy, and especially the "new nobility" (the "new men" to whom the spoils of the Church had fallen), were alarmed at the policy of protecting the peasantry and yeomanry which the Protector had adopted. Their evil practices of confiscation would be checked, and restitution be demanded if that policy were carried out. In their eyes, therefore, the action of the Protector was an offence to be neither condoned nor forgiven. These were the motives which led them to support, with all their great strength, the intrigues of the Earl of Warwick (afterwards Duke of Northumberland), the bitter and vindictive enemy of Somerset, whose place he wanted and whose ruin he was determined to effect, and to use every means to that end.

It must be admitted that the action of the Protector was an earnest of his intentions. On his own authority, without consulting his colleagues, he first issued a proclamation, couched in strong terms, demanding that "they who had enclosed any lands accustomed to lie open, should, upon a certain pain, before a day assigned, lay them open again." This proceeding "highly incensed the offenders."

His next step was nothing less than a declaration of

war against the whole of the feudal aristocracy. It was a determined attack on their settled policy and dearest interests. He appointed an Extraordinary Commission to inquire into the whole subject. The reference to that Commission is a lengthy document drafted in precise, thorough, and even aggressive terms.¹ The recital of a few of the heads of it may be interesting to those who have not studied the domestic history of the English cultivating classes, that is, of the English people as apart from the history of the higher orders.

The Commissioners were instructed to inquire into the questions of decayed towns; of houses of husbandry pulled down through inclosures; of pasture turned into tillage; of the excessive fines and raising of rents whereby the holders were driven from the soil ("which must abate"), etc. etc.

"Ye shall put away all fear," the Reference ran, "for you will be defended against the Devil, the world and private profit, so you may be sure they will suffer no person to do you injury. . . . Do as becometh honest men, declare the truth and nothing but the truth. . . . In what ye go about have no favour or leave unrepresented those that ye know to have offended."

¹ "Memorials Ecclesiastical and Civil of the Reign of Edward VI," by John Strype, M.A. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1822.

Strype, who began to write towards the end of the seventeenth century, was a painstaking and an industrious collector of original State papers, charters, etc. The above work contains copies of these. Books I and II give in full, documents relating to the Duke of Somerset; his policy with regard to inclosures; his intense sympathy with the peasantry; his reluctance to punish them for revolts which he regarded as almost justifiable; and the warnings he received from friends as to the dangers he ran in pursuing his policy. Full copies are also given of his Proclamation; of the Reference to the Commission; of the Report of the Commissioners, etc.

But the barons were too powerful to submit to these measures without retaliation. Referring to the sequel, Strype writes (p. 237):—

“The Protector had by this time lost himself among the nobility and gentry, for, being of a gentle and good nature, he loved and pitied the poorer sort, too much oppressed by the rich and particularly by that covetous practice of inclosures whereby the cattle of the poor were shut out of their ancient benefit of feeding in common . . . which made the Protector somewhat sharp upon those of the higher rank and quality.”

Altogether, reading those numerous, lengthy, and—most of them—original papers, it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that the Protector's fall and fate were brought about mainly by the intense hatred of the lords, caused by his agrarian policy. Among the counts in the indictment against him at his trial, there were three which, no doubt, in the eyes of the peers who tried him, contained the greatest possible offences and which contributed largely to his condemnation.

These counts are :—

“1. You caused a proclamation to be made concerning inclosures, whereby the common people have made divers insurrections and levied open war and spoiled divers of the king's subjects, which proclamation went forth against the will of the whole Council.

“2. Also you caused a Commission to be made out concerning inclosing of commons, decaying cottages, giving the Commission power to determine and hear such causes to the subversion of the laws of the realme, whereby much sedition, insurrection, and rebellion have arisen among the King's subjects.

"3. Also, you said that the lords of Parliament were loth to incline themselves to reformation of inclosures and other things; therefore the people had good cause to reform the things themselves."¹

The people throughout the whole country loved him as the one man among the ruling classes who sympathized with them and tried to serve them. At his execution, later on, a multitude attended and showed great grief. They wept aloud as they listened to his last speech, addressed to them as his "dearly beloved friends."²

The report of the Commission appointed by the Protector revealed a deplorable state of things as regards the peasantry throughout the country, and it also showed up the relentless action of the manorial lords. "So great was the power of the provincial nobility in the counties, and so weak the protection and helping hand of the central government, that, in many places, the witnesses who were summoned did not dare to appear, and in others those who had given truthful depositions were persecuted in various ways by the landlords."³

As might be expected, nothing came from the labours and the report of the Commission, except a petition to the king. John Hales, a zealous member of the Commission, proposed to the king "a general pardon for all that had happened—for the benefit of

¹ Holinshed's "Chronicles," Vol. III, pp. 1019, 1020.

² Holinshed calls him (Vol. III, p. 1035) "this worthie and gentle duke." Hallam refers to him as "the popular and well-natured Duke of Somerset, more estimable at least than any other statesman employed under the king" ("Constitutional History," Vol. I, p. 38).

³ For particulars of the Report of this Commission see "Land Community of the Middle Ages," by Dr. Nasse. Translation published by Macmillan, 1871.

rich inclosers as well as of the poor sufferers—in the hope that the rich violaters of the law would amend.” (Strype.) He also introduced three Bills in Parliament to remedy the evils by curtailing the powers of the landlords. On their rejection Hales bitterly complained “that the sheep were entrusted to the care of the wolf.”

The appointment and report of the Commission gave great hope and joy to the rural population, but when they found that no results followed, disturbances broke out among them, and the great peasant rebellion, led by Robert Kett, a yeoman as well as a tanner, immediately followed.¹

Froude, taking a sentimental and an artificial view, describes the advantages connected with the existence of an exclusive system of landownership,² and is not likely, therefore, to be unjustly severe on the landlord class. But he recites the state of things which existed after the failure of the Commission and on the eve of Kett's rebellion with a severity that can hardly be increased, and in language that cannot be improved upon.

“There was,” he writes, “a gathering of people for an annual festival at Wymondham, in Norfolk (where Kett lived). The crowd was large, and the men who were there brought together found themselves possessed of one general feeling—a feeling of burning indignation at the un-English conduct of the gentlemen. The peasant whose pigs and cow and poultry had been sold, or had died because the commons were

¹ Although Robert Kett was a tanner, he held three manors in Norfolk, and, being a man of good speech and taking manner, he was readily accepted by the people as a leader. (“Kennett's History.”)

² “Short Studies on Great Subjects,” 3rd series, by J. A. Froude. Longmans, 1879.

gone where they had fed—the yeoman dispossessed of his farm; the farm servant out of employment, because where ten ploughs had turned the soil, one shepherd now watched the grazing of the flocks; the artisan smarting under famine prices which the change of culture had brought with it;—all these were united in suffering; while the gentlemen were doubling, trebling, quadrupling their incomes with their sheep-farms, and adorning their persons and their houses with splendour hitherto unknown.”¹

The story of this rebellion has been often told. Holinshed, of all the chroniclers, describes the revolt in the most bitter terms of condemnation, and smirches the character of the insurgents with an acerbity that is almost grotesque. Following, mainly, his long and full account, the events of the rebellion may be condensed as follows:—In July, 1549, the peasantry assembled—sixteen thousand “ungracious unthrifths”—and entered on their “wicked enterprise.” Having formed a camp at Moushold, near Norwich, and fortified it, they scoured the country around, destroyed inclosures, filled in ditches, levelled fences, etc. Kett formed a representative council, whose duty was to regulate the affairs of the camp, to keep strict order, and to punish offenders. He appointed special squads of men with authority to range over the country and bring in cattle, food, and other supplies which were to be taken from the “gentlemen,” their enemies, but nothing was to be touched which belonged to the peasantry or other honest cultivators of the soil. Regular council meetings were held under an oak tree, “called afterwards the Tree of Reformation.” Here matters concerning the government of the camp

¹ Froude's “History of England,” Vol. V, p. 201.

were disposed of and all disputes settled. Before this tribunal were brought numbers of "gentlemen" who were inclosers of the people's land. Demands were strongly made that some of the most notorious of these should be hanged, but in no case would Kett allow a murder to be committed or any punishment awarded except imprisonment.

The camp was open to all comers. A chaplain and other officers were appointed. Neighbouring clergymen came regularly and joined the men in "common prayer under the oak tree." They preached to them and "tried to persuade them from their wicked attempts." The Government became alarmed, and the king sent a herald to proclaim a free pardon to all who would lay down their arms and go home. But "that wicked caitiff, Kett, dissuaded them. . . . Kings, he said, were wont to send pardons to traitors and wicked persons, not to innocent and just men."

Kett's power increased; his following is described as a multitude of "unthrifths and rascalls." Lord Northampton, with a force of horsemen, "a great number of knights, esquires, and gentlemen, and a band of Italian mercenaries under Captain Malesta," was sent into Norfolk to suppress the rebellion. It appears that throughout the rebellion the only man the insurgents murdered was an Italian officer. "This," says the chronicler, is "what was to be expected at these cruel traitors' hands—putting such a gentleman and worthy soldier to death for whose ransom, if they had demanded it, they might have had no small portion of monie." The rebels at midnight attacked the city of Norwich, and after desperate fighting, continued till "their hands were scarce able to hold up their weapons," they were repulsed

with the loss of 300 men. Next day a herald with a trumpeter was sent to the insurgents with the offer of a free pardon if they would lay down their arms. They refused this and renewed the attack and entered the city, where "many bloudie conflicts" took place, in which many were killed and wounded on both sides. Lord Sheffield was slain, "though he pulled off his head-piece and declared who he was and offered largely to the vilans if they would have saved his life."

Lord Northampton being defeated, retreated from the city and returned to London. Kett then made preparations to meet a powerful army under the Earl of Warwick, Somerset's great rival, which he heard was coming against him. The rebels were "men not slack to make themselves strong and ready to abide all the hazard that the fortune of war might bring."

The Earl of Warwick soon arrived at Wymondham with his army and "diverse men of honour and of great worship as lords, knights, squires, and gentlemen." Norwich was summoned to surrender. A herald with trumpeters was again sent with an offer of pardon "out of the exceeding greatness of the king's bountifull mercie and clemencie." The offer was refused. It was distrusted as having "no other end but to bring them to destruction."

Warwick then assaulted the city and drove out the rebels with great slaughter on both sides. During the conflict "threescore were taken and incontinently executed according to martial law." The insurgents immediately attacked the city again and took some pieces of the king's artillery (and other munitions of war), which they turned against the city and "blew down Bishop's-gate and much of the walls." The Earl of Warwick was in great straits, and his followers

urged him to leave the city, but he refused to do so. His position was saved by the timely arrival of a large body of trained, well-armed, foreign mercenaries.¹

A few days later a pitched battle was fought, when, after severe fighting in which the "Almans (foreigners) were prominent" and much slaughter, the insurgents were routed and put to flight, and "their grande Capitaine Kett galloped away as fast as his hosse would bear him." A number of the insurgents, however, were hemmed in and could not escape. An offer of pardon was sent to them if they would lay down their arms. They distrusted and refused the offer, declaring that "it meant but a subtle practice to bring them into the hands of their adversaries who had halters prepared for them, . . . they would rather die like men than be strangled at the wils and pleasures of their mortall enemies." Warwick, however, on receipt of this reply, pledged his word of honour for their safety and the men surrendered.

Next day a number of the "principal abettors and chiefest procurers of all the mischiefe were hanged on the oke of reformation" and "some others of them were drawn, hanged and quartered and their heads and quarters set up in public places for a terror to others." The Earl of Warwick was strongly urged to continue the executions, but he refused to do so, and said, "Shall we not at length show some mercie? Is there no place for pardon? What shall we do, shall we hold the plough ourselves, plaie the carters, and labour the ground with oure owne hands?"²

¹ German lansquenets and Italian free-lances—soldiers who hired themselves to the highest bidder for their services.

² In a note to a short interesting poem by an anonymous writer published in 1869 (Bumpus) it is stated: "So inveterate was the feeling of

The brave and constant Kett and his brother were captured, and after being kept for some months in prison in London, Robert—the leader—was hanged in chains on the top of Norwich Castle, and his brother William on the steeple of Wymondham Church.

Risings took place about the same time in different parts of the country, the revolt in the western counties being specially formidable. These rebellions in the west are generally ascribed to religious disaffection. This is only true in a small degree. The reformed religion had just been confirmed by Act of Parliament and was distasteful to many who preferred the old faith. The rebellion was therefore joined by "certain squires and gentlemen and many priests." The demands put forward, mostly referring to religion, "were hammered up in the name of the people by these religious mutineers." But with the peasantry agrarian grievances were to the front, and "above all enclosures must down."

Strong forces under the command of Lord Russell and Lord Grey were sent by the king to suppress these outbreaks, and after many conflicts—with varying results and much bloodshed—the rebels were finally routed, most of them slain, and their leaders and many others executed."¹

After the rebellion was crushed the usual cruelties were inflicted on those who had taken part in the out-

the landholders in Norfolk against the rebels, that after 3500 had been massacred in Duffins-dale and another 300 had been hanged, they positively asked for more executions."

¹ The most desperate fighting took place close to the present writer's birthplace and no doubt his forefathers had the honour of taking part in the struggle. Fifty or sixty years ago traditions of these conflicts still survived in the villages. In many labourers' families (including the writer's family) traditions also lingered of their forefathers having been despoiled of their lands by the methods described.

break and on many who had not. The whole west of England was under martial law. "It is memorable," writes a chronicler, "what sport the Provost-Marshal made, by virtue of his office, upon men in misery."¹ Among other instances of this "sport," mentioned by nearly all the chroniclers, is one which illustrates the spirit of vengeance which prevailed.

The Mayor of Bodmin, Boyer by name, a commoner, was instructed by the Provost-Marshal, Sir William Kingston, to set up a pair of gallows, as an execution must take place that day. At the same time the Provost sent word to say that he would come and dine with the Mayor, who accordingly made "great provision to receive him." . . . "After dinner the Provost-Marshal, taking the Mayor by the hand, entreated him to lead him to the place where the gallows were, which when he beheld, he asked the Mayor if he thought them to be strong enough. Yes (said the Mayor), doubtless they were. Well then (said the Provost), get you up speedily, for they are provided for you. I hope—answered the Mayor—you mean not as you speak. In faith—said the Provost—there is no remedy, for you have been a busie Rebel. And so, without respite or defence, he was hanged in death."

It is a noteworthy fact that the old writers, in recording such an act as this, express no indignation, not even surprise, at its vile and dishonourable character. One of them dismisses the incident with the mild comment that it was "a most uncourteous part for a guest to offer to his host."²

¹ Sir Richard Baker's "Chronicles," p. 305.

² Froude, in his "History of England," seems unwilling to believe this story, but only for the reason that the Provost-Marshal was a friend of Hooker, and therefore not likely to do such an act as this. But unfortunately there seems to be little room for doubt. The old chroniclers give

Thus the rebellion in the west of England, like all other peasant outbreaks, was drowned in blood. It must be remembered, however, that these brave men were conquered, not by English soldiers, but by foreign mercenaries.

There are one or two things connected with these uprisings that are worthy of notice—first, the skill, powers of organization, strength and determination of the peasant leaders, and the confidence they inspired in the minds of their followers; secondly, the dogged courage and endurance of the men, which warrant the description given of them as the “finest peasantry in the world.”

We have already seen the brave mettle of the army of rustics in the east, led by Kett. The “rebels” in the western counties were of the same quality. They were united to a man, and had no michers among them. In one of the fiercest of the fights they were so surrounded that “they could not by any means escape, but must yield or fight. The one they would not, and the other they prevailed not. Valiantly and stoutly they stood to their tackle, and would not give over so long as life and limb lasted, yet in the end they were overthrown, and few or none left alive. Great was the slaughter, and cruel was the fight.”¹

a circumstantial account of the occurrence. Before repeating it, however, I consulted a Cornish antiquary, who seemed to have no doubt about the matter. An account of it is given in the “Life and Reign of Edward VI,” by Sir John Hayward, 1630; also in Carew’s “Survey of Cornwall,” 4th edition, 1811. The first edition was published in 1602, only a comparatively short time after the transaction. Besides the evidence, there is the fact that such a crime as this was in accordance with the brutal treatment inflicted by those in power at the time on the so-called “rebels.” The foul deed, in the eyes of his peers, cast no blot on the escutcheon of the “noble knight” who committed it.

¹ Holinshed, Vol. III, p. 957.

Many of them poorly armed, all of them without defensive armour, they faced without fear the well-equipped, well-trained mercenary soldiers who fought against them. Referring to the battle of Clist Heath, the chronicler writes: "Such was the stoutness of these men, that Lord Grey reported himself that he never in all the wars that he had been in did know the like."¹

The agrarian rebellions of 1549 were the last that took place of a national character. Smaller disturbances of a local kind, of which few particulars are given, were continual, while the feelings of anger and injustice on the part of the peasantry were continuous. A formidable outbreak took place in the midland counties so late as 1607, which at one time bid fair to extend throughout the country, but it was promptly suppressed. The peasants assembled together in different places in large numbers.²

"These riotous persons bent all their strength to level and lay open inclosures without exercising any manner of theft or violence upon any man's person, goods or cattell and wheresoever they came they were

¹ Holinshed, Vol. III, p. 957.

In reading of the doughty deeds of the lords, knights, and squires, it must be borne in mind that their bodies were cased in plate armour, and that in a conflict with the peasantry they ran but few risks—fewer perhaps than those to which men are liable in the hunting-field and the steeple-chase.

"The poor husbandmen were obliged to come to the field of battle with such arms as they had; and it was no uncommon thing to see a few of these knights and squires ride over and put to flight hundreds of them, for the gentry were clothed in complete armour, so that they could receive little hurt, and the poor peasantry had scarce clothes sufficient to cover them."—"Tales of a Grandfather," Sir Walter Scott.

² In the quiet little village of Hillmorton, Warwickshire, about 3000 men gathered together to regain their rights by throwing down inclosures. The population of the whole of the parish of Hillmorton (about 3000 acres) is now, according to the last census, only 1243.

generally received by the neere inhabitants who sent them not only many carts with victuall but also good store of spades and shovells for speedy performance of their enterprise.”¹

They had heard of the large number of townships and villages which had been depopulated and had decayed, and their declared object was “the prevention of further depopulation, the increase and continuance of tillage to relieve their wives and families. . . . Sir Edward Coke, Lord Chief Justice, with other learned judges and discrete justices, was sent to do justice on the levellers. . . . Some of these were executed for high treason in opposing themselves against the King’s forces.”

No apology is needed for dwelling at some length on these peasant revolts, because it is only by a study of them that the origin and growth of the present English land system can be understood. Apologists for that system, and a certain order of economists, preach the specious and—to them—the satisfying doctrine that the disappearance of the great peasant and yeoman classes in England was caused by the action of economic laws. But the history of the peasant revolts shows the untenable character, the utter absurdity, of any such doctrine as that.

It is stated that the revolts during the year 1549, which extended almost all over the country, “involved the destruction of 10,000 brave Englishmen by the arms of foreigners.” This was but an instalment of the cost of building up our present land system. The account is still open. The state of agriculture and the social condition of masses of the people of England

¹ Stow’s “Chronicles,” p. 890.

at the present time are an assessment, so to speak, of the national damage accruing from the creation and retention of our land system and a gauge of the price we are still paying for it.

For centuries the rural population was prosperous and well to do, and if they had been justly treated they would have remained happy and contented. They possessed to the full those qualities of thrift, frugality, and industry, which are always allied to cultivating ownership—qualities which writers so often declare are wanting in the labouring classes of to-day.

The decayed market towns and grass-grown villages of the present time were in former times teeming with people. Some of our small villages were important places. The number and large size of the country churches, the homesteads and substantial yeomen farmhouses which still remain, testify to the vigorous character of country life in England. The village sports and games, which were no doubt rough, and sometimes rather cruel, possessed, nevertheless, the great merit that the people themselves took part in them. The modern notion of paying people to play for one had not arisen. The men and women were of fine physique, healthy and strong, with whom in this respect our town-bred population cannot vie.

In a village of "Merrie England" in those days things went suently and well till the fatal time arrived when the manorial lord began to inclose the commons and to take other proceedings with regard to the land. Then the despairing villagers were despoiled, their efforts to save themselves ignored or defeated, and the decay of the parish set in.¹

¹ A very interesting account of the rural economy which existed in those times is given in Fitzherbert's "Boke of Husbandrie." The English Text Society (1882). Reprinted from the edition 1554. Edited by the Rev. W. W. Skeat.

In previous chapters the agrarian policy of the landed aristocracy has been traced down to modern times, and the economic and social effect of that policy has been described. It remains now in this account of the English peasantry to inquire how the peasant fared under that policy after he ceased to be a real peasant (a man possessing land or rights in land) and became a mere wage-receiving labourer. There has been much correspondence lately in the Press on the subject of "The Deserted Village." That correspondence seems to have left the question pretty much where it was, for the simple reason that the writers have ignored the root cause of the depopulation they deplore, instead of making it the basis of their discussion.

The charming and pathetic poem from which they borrow the very heading of their letters, was written with the sole object of describing the policy which caused the depopulation of our country-sides.

In a letter (1770) to Sir Joshua Reynolds—to whom the poem was inscribed—Goldsmith writes:—

"I have taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege, and all my views and enquiries have led me to believe those miseries real which I here attempt to display. . . . In regretting the depopulation of the country, I inveigh against the increase of our luxuries; and here also I expect the shout of modern politicians against me."

A few lines will recall the object and meaning of the poem. Looking at the idyll by the light of our present experience, we shall see that the insight of the poet was truer than the arguments of the political economist.

“ Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
 Thy sports are fled and all thy charms withdrawn ;
 Amidst thy bowers the tyrant’s hand is seen,
 And desolation saddens all thy green :
 One only master grasps the whole domain,
 And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain ;

• • • • •
 Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
 Where wealth accumulates and men decay :
 Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade ;
 A breath can make them as a breath has made :
 But a bold peasantry, their country’s pride,
 When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

• • • • •
 Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen who survey
 The rich man’s joys increase, the poor’s decay,
 ’Tis yours to judge, how wide the limits stand
 Between a splendid and a happy land.

• • • • •
 If to some common’s fenceless limits strayed,
 He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,
 Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
 And even the bare worn common is denied.”¹

¹ “The Deserted Village.”

In that gem of English literature, Gray’s “Elegy,” is pictured the ideal of village life ; the “short and simple annals of the poor” who keep on “the even tenour of their way,” and “over whose tombs no trophies raise.” The poem calms like a soft lullaby the doubts and misgivings as to the actual state of rural life. But it was Crabbe who, following Goldsmith, described in realistic verse the miserable condition to which the rural population had been reduced. It was his poem “The Village” that no doubt led later writers—Carlyle and others—to deal with the subject. Crabbe’s village is a place

“ Where Plenty smiles—alas ! she smiles for few—
 And those who taste not, yet behold her store,
 Are as the slaves that dig the golden ore,
 The wealth around them makes them doubly poor.”

“The Village” (1783).

At the time Goldsmith wrote the process was becoming more and more rapid by which the real peasantry were reduced to mere labourers. The story of the English agricultural labourers is one of the saddest in our history. Until they, as a class, became emancipated by flight from the land no pen can exaggerate their sufferings and the lowness of their condition. There were numbers of rural labourers in every country, but in no country but ours were they a class apart, a caste, a permanent part of a land system composed of landlords, tenants, and labourers. Our landless peasantry became a unique class, and their counterpart could be found in no other country in Europe, In all but the name they were worse off than serfs of olden times, for serfs, though slaves, had plenty of food, generally land to cultivate, and dwellings which they regarded practically as their own. It was sound economy for a feudal lord to keep his serfs—like his horses—in a condition fit for work.¹

¹ In times of famine, which often occurred, "freemen from above, could and did descend into serfdom" for the sake of food and shelter. "The English Village Community," Seebohm.

CHAPTER XII

PEASANT REVOLTS (*continued*)

A REVIEW of the "rebellions" of the English peasantry would be incomplete without some reference to the movement of the labourers led by Joseph Arch in the seventies of last century. This uprising was not, like previous outbreaks, a struggle for the retention of rights in the land, because the divorce of the peasantry from the soil had been completed some years before. It was nevertheless a revolt—a revolt of that which is a portent for any nation—a landless peasantry—against conditions of life that had become unbearable.

The year 1872 must be looked upon as an epoch in the history of the agricultural labourer. The nation as a whole had been rapidly increasing in wealth, but the condition of the labourer had been steadily on the down grade.¹ The attention of influential men became more and more fixed on this blot on our social life. The continental Press, now and again, commented with much sarcasm on the shocking condition of the rural population in "the richest country of Europe," and compared it with the different state of things which existed in most of the continental States.

The town workmen, by Trade Unions and other combinations, had secured better things for themselves. The severe penal laws against such combinations were partially repealed in 1824, and Trade Unions became legally recognized in 1871. The changes in the rela-

¹ The alleged betterment of the condition of the agricultural labourer by the fiscal policy adopted in 1846 will be dealt with later on.

tionship between employers and employed caused by the increase of machinery, and the development of the factory system were such as to make these combinations absolutely necessary to enable the workman to protect himself from the increasing power of the large capitalist. These unions, on the whole, have worked well, and, in spite of some abuses which may exist in connection with them, they have proved beneficial, both to employers and employed.¹

The spirit of combination had been quietly spreading, even among the rural labourers. Their eyes were becoming open to the power of union as a means for bargaining with employers in a manner individuals could not do, and of bettering their lot generally. A man was necessary to voice the new feeling and to lead it, as a man is always necessary to concentrate the forces of any social or political movement. In 1872 the man appeared. At an open-air meeting held under a chestnut-tree at Wellesbourne, a village in Warwickshire, Joseph Arch began a movement which was destined to become far-reaching and to have a permanent effect on the character of English labourers.

Arch himself was a fine representative of the English peasant. Honest, energetic, of good character, and with a great gift of rude oratory that always swayed his audience, he entered into the struggle with the single aim of bettering the condition of his fellow-labourers, whose sufferings he knew so well. He had passed through the bitter experience himself and had discharged special family obligations with a courage

¹ A well-written statement on the subject of Trade Unions is to be found in "Conflicts of Capital and Labour," by George Howell. For a more complete account of trade combination, see "History of Trade Unionism," by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and "Problems of Modern Industry," by the same authors (Longmans, 1902).

and an independence worthy of respect and admiration.

In March, 1872, the "Warwickshire Agricultural Labourers' Union" was formed. The movement spread so rapidly that at the end of May a great gathering of delegates from all parts of the country was held at Leamington, and the "National Union of Agricultural Labourers" was formed.¹ The meetings of delegates and friends were presided over by the late George Dixon, M.P. for Birmingham, and the Hon. Auberon Herbert. Arch was elected president, and Henry Taylor was made secretary. An executive committee was appointed, composed of twelve labourers. It was decided to have a "consultative committee of gentlemen, with no power to vote, but for consultation and advice." Trustees were also nominated in whose names the funds of the Unions were to be invested.

The movement received a large amount of financial support from outsiders, from men who were convinced that something should be done to deal with the low depths of destitution into which the labourers were sunk.²

The combination was a legal one and its aims were moderate. Arch held out hopes to the men that, by union, they would secure sixteen shillings per week,

¹ The present writer took part in these inaugural meetings. He was elected a member of the committee, which, with the executive committee, met at Leamington once a fortnight. He was also appointed a trustee for the funds of the Union. The only other surviving trustee is Mr. Edward Jenkins (author of "Ginx's Baby"). Mr. Jenkins for many years did good work for the Union. A newspaper was started, which secured a great circulation under the conduct of Matthew Vincent, who, by his able and sympathetic writings, placed before the public in a plain and skilful manner the conditions of the men and the objects of the Union.

² The trustees had for some time many thousands of pounds in their hands, but the strikes, lock-outs, migrations, and other expenses made great inroads on the funds, and finally exhausted them.

with a working day reduced to nine and a half hours, exclusive of meal-times. These were not extravagant demands, and in the circumstances should have won the sympathy of all men. In any case the labourers should have been treated fairly in their efforts to better themselves by legal and orderly methods. But it is impossible to exaggerate the frantic opposition with which the movement was met by the territorial party.¹

Efforts were made by employers to stamp out the Union by "lock-outs," by agreements among themselves not to employ Union men, and by other means, all showing the most bitter feeling. Threats and torrents of abuse were launched on men for refusing to leave the Union. In numerous cases labourers had the brutal choice put before them either to give up the Union or to quit their employment and be ejected from their cottages. Respectable, industrious men, who had dwelt in cottages for many years and had paid their rents regularly, were turned out at a week's notice for refusal to leave the Union. Arch himself was denounced as a setter of class against class and as an "apostle of arson." While denouncing this legal and peaceable combination among the men, farmers and landlords were themselves forming associations for "protecting the interests of employers of agricultural labourers." One rule of these associations was that no member should employ a labourer belonging to the Union unless he was already a hired servant. "The farmers are beginning to retaliate on the Union, which they are determined to extinguish. As a body,

¹ There were a few, but only a few, worthy exceptions among landlords and farmers. One landlord, Mr. J. A. Campbell, of Coventry, joined the Union, and became a member of the committee.

the farmers are resolutely opposed to the Union, which they regard as a most dangerous confederation. Some have already discharged all their labourers who have joined the Union, and other unionists are under notice to leave."¹

But in spite of this opposition the movement spread through the counties with great rapidity. An immense number of meetings was held throughout the country. The present writer attended a great many of them, and can vouch for the moderation, common sense, good feeling, and simple speech of the poor half-starved labourers. Their speeches were always pithy, simple, and to the point. "They wanted only to state their case fairly to the country and let the country judge." The remembrance of these gatherings adds poignancy to the regret that these fine, tough, stalwart men, homely healthy women, and their numerous families—the real human "pedigree stock" of the nation—should have disappeared, and left our country-sides almost a desert.

An account of one or two of these gatherings will show the character of them all.

At a meeting held at Lyneham Green, near Yeovil, in the midst of heavy rain, there were 600 labourers and women present. Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, a warm sympathizer with the men, was in the chair. Among the speakers was a labourer, Absolom Blackman, who said that he had a wife and five children, and his wages were 10s. a week. He had to pay 50s. a year for his cottage, 4d. a week to a benefit society, and 5½d. to a clothing club. Out of what was left there were seven persons to keep. "He should be glad to know," he said, "how 'twas done, for he didn't. He

¹ "Times," 25 March, 1872.

had lived hard to get on, but the more he tried, the farther he got behind."

Henry Iles said that he was lucky in renting an acre of land at £3 the acre, though farmers were renting better land close by at 37s.; but it had enabled him to raise himself above dependence on the farmer and to bring up eight children, three of whom were now out at service.

Ann Atter said that her husband had been getting 9s. a week; but now he was a milker, worked on Sundays, and got 12s. They had to pay £3 a year house-rent, and it had often gone to her heart when she had "only a bit of bread with nothing on't to be paid out among the children."

At a meeting held in the village of Montacute, in Somersetshire, William Chard, a grey-headed but stalwart labourer, said he had 10s. a week when he married. Since then he had been getting 8s., now raised to 9s. with cider. He had eight children, and had to pay 1s. 6d. per week house-rent. "He did not get 3d. worth of meat from one year's end to another."

Amelia Boot said she had fifteen children. Her husband got 7s. a week when they married, and was now getting 8s.

At a meeting of 200 labourers at Marlborough Mr. Royce, the chairman, said that the "labourers suffered profound misery. They never tasted meat for months. They ate what dogs would turn away from."

The tyrannous opposition to the Union became at last a scandal. Men holding meetings were prosecuted, on the charge of obstructing the highway. Sixteen women and girls were sentenced by magistrates (two clergymen) to imprisonment with hard

labour for "intimidating" two labourers imported into the neighbourhood to supply the places of men who were on strike for an increase of wages.¹

The country was roused by these harsh proceedings. Sympathy and financial help were given to the men by many classes of the community, and a greater impetus than ever was given to the progress of the Union. At the next annual meeting, in May, 1873, it was reported that there were about a thousand branches formed, with over 70,000 members.

Arch's influence over the men in those times was unbounded, and they would have gone in any direction he wished them to go. But in spite of all provocation, he discouraged everything in the form of retaliation. He and the Consultative Committee were at one in the desire to conduct the movement in the way of law and order. "I am not here," he preached to the men, "to advocate rowdyism or anything like that." The great work, he said, was to be done, "not in an un-English or unlawful manner." But in spite of his moderation and of the justice of the claims he made, he was met by the territorial party in the same spirit of hatred and implacable opposition as that in which the peasant leaders of old were met; and had he lived in their times, doubtless he would have shared their fate.

The country clergy of the day, who knew so well the starving condition of the labourers, unfortunately missed a great opportunity of showing sympathy with them in their legitimate efforts to help themselves. The great majority of the clergy stood aloof from the

¹ The Press was unanimous in condemnation of the sentence. The "Times" declared that the course taken was "extremely harsh and singularly ill-advised. . . . Such a sentence staggered the poor women; and well it might, for it staggered the whole country."

movement altogether, but a large number of them showed a bitter hostility to it.¹

The Union was carried on vigorously for some years, but the difficulties in the way of forming a permanent combination among agricultural labourers were very great, and proved to be insuperable. It was not like dealing with men working together in large numbers, in mines, factories, and other industries, who could continually meet together and discuss matters, and so become united in purpose and action.

The rural labourers were so sparsely scattered in villages, hamlets, roadsides, and on single farms, that occasions of meeting in numbers were few; the common help and spur which numbers give were wanting, and the strength which fellowship begets was therefore lacking among them.

Besides these difficulties there were the continued and determined efforts of their masters to stamp out the Union by every means that could be adopted. These efforts had, to a very large extent, the desired effect when directed against men who for so long a time had been in a servile condition, and who as a class had hitherto been in a state of hopeless submission to their lot. So, after some years' existence, the National Labourers' Union died out.

But the Union—like earlier uprisings—though defeated, was by no means a failure or fruitless of results. During the years of its existence the labourer learnt to

¹ There were some worthy exceptions. Prominent among them was the late Canon Girdlestone, who for years had taken great interest in the men. The present writer had much correspondence with this good man touching plans for helping the labourers. "My heart aches," he wrote, "when I think of their condition." The late Cardinal Manning (then Archbishop) heartily sided with the men, and appeared on their platforms.

look beyond his village; he acquired new ideas, a glimmer of independence, and above all, he became capable of active discontent with his lot, without which it was impossible to help him.¹

It is difficult to find sufficient reason for the bitter feeling described above towards men whose sufferings and degraded lot were so well known. It was not from money reasons, for agricultural depression had not then become severe: rents were high, wheat was 57s. per quarter, barley 37s., and at the same time the skilled toilers on the land, with their families, were starving on 10s. per week. It was not through intentional cruelty, for the village squire and the "Lady Bountiful," in the old feudal way, were generally kind, and often very generous to the individual labourer and his family, but it was always in the form of charity and in the spirit of patronage. The real offence of these poor hirelings was that they should assume to be of the same clay as their superiors, and should actually assert that they had some rights of their own.

The farmer, too, as a rule, was kind to his men so long as they were content, or appeared to be content, with their station, and did his behests; but for these men—these hereditary bondsmen—to assume the right to make terms, or to strike, created as much astonishment and resentment in his mind as if the horses on his farm had assumed the like. Hence the statement made by so many witnesses before the Royal Commissions on agriculture, that the action of the Union and the teaching of the delegates had "destroyed the good relationship which had previously

¹ Even as regards wages, evidence is given that up to 1876 at least 3s. per week had been gained on the old rate prior to the movement. See Brasseley's "Work and Wages," p. 139.

existed between the employers and the employed." These statements are no doubt true, but their real meaning is that the labourers were no longer willing to submit to the hard and miserable conditions which employers sought to impose upon them. One result of the movement was that migration, with and without the assistance of the Union, rapidly increased.¹

The transactions connected with the Agricultural Labourers' Union illustrate the thoroughness with which the old peasantry had—by our land system—been reduced to a servile caste.

The changes in the ranks of the contending parties in the struggle of 1872 are worthy of notice. In previous outbreaks the cultivators of the soil of all classes were found in one camp, and the landlord class in the other. In 1872 the labourer stood alone, and had arrayed against him both landlord and farmer. The farmer was no longer an independent yeoman cultivator. In 1872 he had no Compensation Act to protect him. Practically all he put on the land was the landlord's, on the "good understanding" with whom he was absolutely dependent. He was but a yearly tenant, paying a competitive rent which was often so high that in order to make a sufficient profit for himself he had to keep his labour bill at a starvation rate. Hence his resistance to what he called the "excessive demands" of the labourer. In these circumstances it is absurd to affect surprise that the agricultural labourer fled from a system in which—though the real cultivator of the soil—he was but an outcast. Accordingly, during the three decades of years (1871–1901) nearly 400,000

¹ The funds of the Union were spent, to a considerable extent, in assisting labourers to migrate. In one day alone (24 June, 1872) forty agricultural labourers, with their wives and families, were sent from South Wales to take situations provided for them in the north.

labourers left the great calling of agriculture and disappeared into the towns. These, with wives and children, represented probably above two million persons.

In the olden times the higher clergy bearded the baronial magnates, even in the king's court, and in their presence, and rebuked them for their unjust treatment of the tillers of the ground. In these modern times, politically and socially, the clergy are more or less allied to the territorial order. Their kindness towards the labouring classes, as a rule, is in the form of charity—charity, the practice of which is ever increasing, and which, as opposed to self-help, bids fair to become the curse of the English people.

Since the revolt of 1872 the relations between farmers and their men have changed. Labourers are now scarce, are largely of the casual class, and less dependent on their employers. But even now the old feeling is seen in places and on occasions where it can be safely shown.

In a letter received from a country clergyman (1905) the following appears: "I am obliged sorrowfully to admit that very many of the clergy do exhibit a lamentable lack of true and active sympathy with the aspirations and wants of the rural population. They lean far too much to the side of the squire and to big farmers. Huge farms have been the bane of England. I have long been convinced of this fact by my own past experience in a rural parish in —, where most of the land is in the hands of one large farmer, who treats the labourers like bond-servants. Recently a young labourer told the farmer he meant to quit the village: instantly the farmer said he would turn the young man's father out of his cottage if he

did leave the place. Poor men in such circumstances dare not move a finger for themselves. They dare not apply for land or make use of Acts of Parliament."

In such cases as this it would seem to be the duty of parish parsons—no matter who were offended—to stand between the oppressor and the oppressed.

At a recent Church Congress "The Village Question" was appropriately introduced by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, but the discussion on it—compared with the gravity of the subject—was of a poor and superficial kind. Judging from the short report of his speech, Earl Nelson was the only speaker who touched the root of the matter. He proposed, as far as can be gathered from the report, that men should own the cottages they dwelt in and the land they tilled. There is no doubt that in this direction alone lies the remedy for the depopulation of the rural districts. The need for such a remedy is expressed in a wise and far-sighted manner in the following extract:—

"He assured his father that it would never be well for England until this order of the peasantry was restored to its pristine condition; not merely in physical comfort, for that must vary according to the economic circumstances of the time, like that of every class; but to its condition in all those moral attributes which make a recognised rank in a nation."—"Coningsby" (Lord Beaconsfield).

CHAPTER XIII

PEASANT REVOLTS (*continued*)

IT remains now to refer to the attempts, legislative and voluntary, which have been made in modern times to restore in some small way the connection of the labourer with the soil. The few and stinted efforts made to give back land to the rural population are in marked contrast to the continuous energy shown in depriving them of it. These efforts took the form of granting, at a rent, allotments of land to the rural population. The granting of allotments has always been described as a generous policy, and great credit is claimed for it. But looking at the question with labourers' eyes and from the labourers' standpoint, the practice after all is only a loan to the peasantry of an instrument which had originally been filched from them.

The question of allotments, which gained so much attention in the eighties of last century, was by no means a new one. By a return issued 1873 it was shown that, without reckoning land attached to cottages, there were about a quarter of a million allotments in England and Wales under one acre each, most of them below a quarter of an acre.¹

An association of land and glebe owners was formed for the express purpose of extending the allotment system.² Several Bills were introduced during last century for the purpose of supplying labourers with land,

¹ "Return of Allotments and Small Holdings." Board of Agriculture, C. 6144.

² See "Landlords and Allotments," by the Earl of Onslow, Hon. Sec. to the Association. (Longmans, 1886.)

but these and all other efforts were on the voluntary system. The policy of withholding from the labourers any rights in the land was steadily continued.¹

Even those who were most liberal in granting allotments were opposed to any legislation which would give the labourer the shadow of a right to demand them. He was to be kept dependent, in this respect, on the goodwill of his employers, who, as a class, too often objected to his having land at all.

Even the Statute of Queen Elizabeth, which required that every cottage that was built should have four acres of land attached to it, had been quietly repealed.²

In 1845 Mr. Cowper (afterwards Lord Mount Temple) brought in a Field Gardens Bill for the legal provision of allotments, but it failed to pass. In introducing the Bill, Mr. Cowper put forward the old arguments at that time so well known and so fruitless. He referred to the time when, as he said, "all labourers above the condition of serfs had land in their own occupation, and in addition to this had common rights over the waste tracts." Referring to the voluntary system, he said, "A great number of non-resident landed proprietors did not take the trouble to establish allotments." He stated his belief that a generation would pass away before there would be, by voluntary action, a general allotment of garden ground to the rural labourers.³

¹ No notice is here taken of a number of allotment measures passed at different times in connection with the Poor-law.

² Unrestrained by any measure of this kind, the speculative builder, by erecting rows of unsightly cottages with little or no land attached to them, has destroyed the beauty and rural character of many of our old English villages.

³ Hansard, Vol. VII, p. 308.

The Bill was strongly opposed by the representatives of the manufacturing class, who held that the voluntary system was sufficient to supply all the allotments that were needed. In this opposition they were consistent. They had never lifted a voice against the spoliation of the peasantry. They taunted the landlords with the miserable condition of the rural labourers, and, at the same time, were, as a class, indifferent to the shocking state of things in their own factories, in which their workpeople were labouring long hours for small wages, under unhealthy conditions, while children of tender years were worked almost to death. Cheap labour, and plenty of it for the price paid, was the policy of the manufacturing classes during the free-trade agitation and after it. It was on this ground that the mill-owners, as a body, strongly opposed the Factory Acts.¹

The territorial parties were notably inconsistent in the display of interest with regard to allotments. Their action was totally at variance with the interest shown. During the years when the fruitless discussion was going on in the House as to whether or not the labourers should have plots of land, generally at a good rent, to enable them to eke out the semi-starvation rations which alone their miserable wages allowed, Parliament was year after year actively engaged in carrying inclosure acts which destroyed the remaining rights of the rural population in the soil.

¹ "When children of the tenderest years were employed fourteen or fifteen hours a day, and often all night; when factory cripples were a specific class of deformities constantly to be seen in the manufacturing districts; and when human life was held in small comparison to commercial profits."—"Speeches of the Earl of Shaftesbury," Preface. (Chapman & Hall, 1868.)

The "Allotments Extension Act" was probably the first measure passed which contained direct compulsory clauses. The Bill was first introduced by Sir Charles Dilke in 1874, but it did not pass. It was again brought forward in 1875, when, after discussion, it was rejected.

The present writer introduced what was practically the same Bill in 1882, when it was fortunately passed into law.¹ This piece of legislation was small, but it was important, because it gave the labourer for the first time certain legal rights in the land, though only to rent it. The Act provides that trustees of certain charity lands, held for the benefit of the poor, should offer them in allotments to cottagers and labourers at fair rents and terms. The Act gives the men a legal claim on these lands. But most of the local trustees were opposed to the measure; many of them put every difficulty in the way of its operation, and some ignored it altogether. The Charity Commissioners of the time, whose duty it was to enforce the Act, showed themselves unfriendly to it, so unfriendly that they sanctioned the action of the trustees, who frequently preferred to sell the land rather than be forced to let it to the labourers.

Subsequently, however, largely by pressure, the Act became more operative; and as it was estimated that no less than a quarter of a million of acres came within its scope, the labourers and others were much benefited by it.²

¹ The credit for this Act is due to Mr. Howard Evans and Mr. Theodore Dodd, who were ever in sympathy with the men. See also the writings of a man who has done yeoman's service in the labourer's cause, the present Dean of Ely. See specially "The Land and the Labourers" (C. W. Stubbs).

² For particulars of the lukewarmness of the Charity Commissioners

Later on the present writer introduced a "Peasant Proprietary and Acquisition of Land by Occupiers Bill," and an "Allotments and Small Holdings Bill," but these measures made no progress in the House, though public opinion outside was rapidly strengthening in favour of the principle contained in them.¹

The time had arrived, however, when the political status of the labourers was to be changed. The Franchise Bill, which became law in December, 1884, extended household franchise to the counties. The labourers acquired the rights of citizenship, and henceforth became an object of attention on the part of different political parties. But the effect of the Act would have been nullified by the law which disqualified any man who had received from the parish medical relief of any kind for himself or his family. As the majority of the labourers—in some localities nine-tenths of them—were compelled, through their extreme poverty, to receive this relief in some form or another, an alteration of the law was necessary if they

with regard to the Act and the opposition to the legal rights of the cottagers on the part of country trustees, see Report of Select Commission on the Charitable Trusts Acts, 1884, No. 306, and Report of Select Committee on Endowed Schools Acts, 1886-1887, No. 120.

¹ It was in a speech in support of these Bills that the phrase "Three acres and a cow" was used. The exact words were that "He," the writer, "hoped that the day would come when every labourer who wanted them might have his three acres and a cow." All the statements made afterwards as to providing the labourers with cows, etc., were, of course, amusing political inventions. There was nothing original about the phrase. It was quite a natural one to use in support of a measure which provided, among other things, three acres of pasture land, that quantity being generally reckoned as sufficient to support a cow. But it attracted a great deal of attention. A large number of letters were received from home and foreign correspondents, some of them declaring that the phrase had been used by German writers; that its equivalent was to be found in Virgil; that Sir John Sinclair had used it early in the century; that Jeremy Bentham was the real author of it; etc. etc.

were not to be deprived of the franchise. But time was pressing, as the overseers were already preparing the voting lists and omitting the names of all those who had during the year received medical relief.

The present writer, in June, 1885, brought in a Bill to remove this disqualification. The measure was, however, withdrawn on a promise being given by the Government to introduce a Bill to deal with the matter. But the Bill, when introduced, was found to give relief only in cases where drugs and other medicines were supplied.

It was evident that this was not enough, because in such times as childbirth and other cases of illness, and in cases of accident, not only medicine, but surgical appliances, medical comforts, nursing, and other things were wanted, which labourers out of their scanty wages could not possibly provide. Accordingly the present writer moved that the following clause be added to the Bill: "The term medical or surgical assistance in this Act shall include all medical and surgical attendance and all matters and things supplied by or on the recommendation of the medical officer having authority to give such attendance or recommendation at the expense of any poor-rate."

There was the bitterest opposition to the clause, especially on the part of the so-called "political economists," on both sides of the House. These theorists, by dilatory motions and by obstruction, did all that lay in their power to defeat the measure. They were ready to brand poverty as a crime, and to punish it by depriving the poor of the first rights of citizenship. "I have no fear," said one of them, "of universal suffrage, but I have great fear of giving

political power to those who are pensioners of the State.”¹

Fortunately, however, common sense and justice prevailed. The clause was carried by a large majority, and the Bill became law towards the end of the session, and the labourers were enabled to vote in the general election which took place in November of the same year (1885).

In the following year, however, an event occurred which, though it bore no immediate fruit, yet doubtless had subsequently a great effect on the question under consideration. On 26 January, 1886, at the opening of the session, an Amendment to the Address was moved in favour of allotments and small holdings. This Amendment was carried and the Government defeated. But though a Liberal Ministry came into office on this question, though it came into power on the backs of the labourers, so to speak, no attempt whatever was made to deal with it. The question was set aside and entirely ignored in order to deal with the question of Home Rule for Ireland. It would be difficult to find in all political history a

¹ The doctrines of these pedants, now happily “banished to Saturn,” are aptly described by a distinguished novelist and poet in the following passages:—

“REV. DR. FOLLIOTT: But pray, sir, what is political economy?”

“MACQUEDY: Political economy is to the State what domestic economy is to the family.

“REV. DR. FOLLIOTT: No such thing, sir. In the family there is a *paterfamilias* who regulates the distribution, and takes care that there be no such thing in the household as one dying of hunger, while another dies of surfeit. In the State it is all hunger at one end and all surfeit at the other. . . . There are two great classes of men: those who produce much and consume little; and those who consume much and produce nothing . . . to take as much as I can get, and pay no more than I can help. . . . There, sir, is political economy in a nutshell.”

“Crochet Castle,” by Thomas Love Peacock.

greater betrayal than this of the interests of a deserving and long-suffering class of men.¹

In 1886 the Allotments and Small Holdings Bill was again introduced, when it was discussed and "talked out." In 1887 the "Allotments" part of the Bill, with some modifications, was embodied in a measure brought in by Lord Salisbury's Government. The Bill was subjected to lengthy discussions, and its passing was endangered by dilatory amendments moved by the Opposition. The Government, however, persevered, and the Bill became law towards the end of the session. The principle of compulsion was retained, which was a great advance in the question.²

Much has been said in depreciation of this Act from the fact that the compulsory clauses have only to a small extent been put into operation. But the compulsory clauses were only intended to be used as a last resort; and the local authorities, to whom the administration of the Act was entrusted, were directed to secure land, whenever possible, by voluntary arrangement. There is no doubt that this Act has been very successful in securing allotments for the men wherever a demand existed. It is difficult to gauge exactly the measure of its success, but by comparing the number of allotments given in the Government return for 1886 with that given in a similar return for 1890, we find that the number had enormously increased during

¹ The terms of the Amendment as drafted by the present writer were as follows: "But this House humbly expresses its regret that no measures are announced by Her Majesty for the present relief of these classes, and especially for affording facilities to agricultural labourers and others in the rural districts, to obtain allotments and small holdings on equitable terms as to rent and security of tenure."

² For the drafting of the original Bill the present writer was indebted to Sir Robert Reid, M.P. for the Dumfries burghs.

that short time, and there can be no reasonable doubt that this increase was due mainly to the provisions of the Act.¹

The Small Holdings part of the Bill of 1886 was not dealt with in the year (1887) when the allotments part was passed into law, but the Government appointed a Select Committee to consider the question. This Committee, of which Mr. Chamberlain was chairman, reported in 1890 in favour of the proposals of the Small Holdings Bill, "with such alterations as in their opinion would add to their value and secure the practical success of the scheme."² In 1892, Mr. Chaplin, President of the Board of Agriculture, on behalf of the Government, introduced a Small Holdings Bill based on this report, which Bill was passed into law the same year.³

The last piece of legislation dealing with labourers and the land was the Local Government Act, 1894, introduced by Sir Henry Fowler. Under that Act a Parish Council is empowered to hire or purchase land by agreement and let the same in allotments not exceeding one acre of arable and three acres of pasture, or four acres of pasture, to one person. The Parish Council has no power to take land compulsorily; but in case they are unable to acquire it on reasonable terms by agreement, they may apply to the County Council, who may, if they think fit, cause a

¹ In 1886 the number of allotments under one acre was 353,821; in 1890, 448,586. Since 1890 the increase has been equally rapid, so that it might be said that the demand for allotments is now fairly well supplied. These returns deal with England and Wales only. They refer to detached allotments, and do not include gardens and other ground attached to cottages.

² Report of the Select Committee on Small Holdings, 1890, No. 223.

³ The provisions of this Act and its operation will be fully described in a later chapter, "Land Hunger and Peasant Proprietary."

public inquiry to be made, and if satisfied that a demand exists which cannot be supplied by voluntary arrangement, may provide a provisional order for the purchase of special land under the provisions of the Lands Clauses Acts which relate to the taking of land otherwise than by agreement. In case the County Council decline to act, the Parish Council may appeal to the Local Government Board, and the Board, after a further local inquiry at which owners, occupiers, and all concerned are represented, may, if they think fit, overrule the decision of the County Council, and make a provisional order for the purchase of the land required. These proceedings, however, are so cumbrous, and the expenses connected with a forced purchase—including compensation to landlord and tenant for severance, etc.—are so heavy, that the compulsory clauses of the Act, like those of the Allotments Act of 1887, have rarely been put in force.

The provision of allotments and small holdings under the several Acts named has no doubt added largely to the comfort of the labourers who still remain on the land. In many cases the possession of allotments—even as tenants—has been the deciding factor in keeping them from migrating. But the Small Holdings Act of 1892 is the only one of the measures referred to that has had the effect—so far as its limited operation goes—of anchoring the men permanently on the soil. Allotments alone have few attractions for the younger men, or for the more enterprising among those of older years. Hence it is that the steady flow of men and women from country to town continues practically unchecked.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the scanty

legislation up to the present time, though good as far as it goes, is altogether insufficient to secure the desirable objects of arresting the decline of the rural population and of restoring the people to the land. The Purchase of Land Bill under consideration is a measure of far wider scope. In the following pages further arguments will be brought forward in its support, and further evidence to show its pressing importance and practical character.¹

¹ Sir Henry Fowler's Act referred to above is 56 & 57 Vict. c. 73—“An Act to make further provisions for the Local Government of England and Wales” (5 March, 1894).

Up to 31 March, 1902, only 270 acres of land had been acquired under sec. 10, which deals with the compulsory hiring of land. Sec. 9, which relates to the compulsory purchase of land, had not been used at all.

CHAPTER XIV
YEOMAN PROPRIETARY,
OR OCCUPYING OWNERSHIP

THE system of occupying ownership, as it exists in other countries, has been the subject of much imperfect and often ignorant criticism on the part of many writers at home. An impression is given that the system involves questions of small farms as against large ones; of continual subdivision of holdings, of cutting the land "up into patches"; of a "*morcellement* of the soil," etc. As a matter of fact, in continental countries all kinds of tenure, and holdings of almost every size, exist. There are large estates which the landlords themselves cultivate, and other large estates, of which they cultivate a part and let the rest. There are farmers, peasants, and labourers who rent, as well as those who own, the soil they cultivate.¹

It is true there are very few of what in England would be called large farms. But that arises from the conviction, on the part of continental agriculturists, that large farms are not so profitable and productive as smaller ones.² The different sizes and kinds of

¹ In some parts of the east of Europe large estates and the tenant system still exist; and where they do exist, agriculture is in a bad state.

² Those who wish to know the arguments which, in France, have led to this conviction should read "*Des systèmes de culture en France et de leur Influence sur l'Économie sociale*" (M. Passy). M. Passy was an ex-Minister of Finance; a landowner and a distinguished writer on rural

holdings dovetail in, one with another, and form together a prosperous system of cultivation. But it is the principle of *ownership* that dominates the whole system and is the secret of its success. This principle governs the rural economy of France. It is the one which all agriculturists in that country, without exception, recognize as the most effective for getting the most out of the soil. What is equally important—it is the principle that determines the character of the land legislation of the country.¹ French writers vary slightly in their estimates of the actual number of proprietors of agricultural land in France. M. de Lavergne, one of the best authorities, gives the approximate number as follows:—²

50,000 great proprietors with average holdings	
of 750 acres	= 37,500,000 acres.
500,000 middle-class proprietors with average	
holdings of 75 acres	= 37,500,000 „
5,000,000 small proprietors with average holdings	
of 7½ acres	= <u>37,500,000</u> „
<hr/> 5,550,000	<hr/> 112,500,000 acres.

The French Civil Code was issued by Napoleon during the first decade of years of the last century.³

economy. His book contains the most exhaustive arguments as to the relative advantages of large and small farms, and also as to the social and economic effects of the division of land in France.

¹ The present writer deals specially with France because he has a more intimate personal knowledge of that country and of its rural economy than of other foreign countries. His remarks, however, are equally applicable to the other countries which have adopted the French Civil Code.

² “*Économie Rurale de la France*,” M. L. de Lavergne. This is reckoning the hectare at 2½ English acres. The exact equivalent is 2.471 acres, or about 2 acres, 1 rood, 35 perches.

³ Although the Code was issued by Napoleon, and called by his name, its provisions were based on the “*Code Rurale 1791*” of M. de Lamer-ville, a name now forgotten, who was a Deputy of the Noblesse de Berri to the States-General, and who was also a practical agriculturist.

For a long time afterwards the new system introduced under it was fiercely discussed. Even in France a large party was strongly opposed to it. All those who looked with regret at the disappearance of the old state of things before the Revolution, urged that small ownerships and the division of the soil as provided by the Code would lead to the ruin of France. They argued that the ultimate effect would be that the land would be cut up into little squares like a vast chessboard, on each square of which would be a family living in a "*petite case*" (little hut or nigger's cabin) and toiling for a mere existence. This party became strong enough to cause a Bill to be introduced in the French Chamber (1826) the object of which was to stop the division of land and to go back a great way towards the old methods of cultivation. The Bill was, however, defeated. Facts showed that the principles of the Code, so far from producing the evils named, were rapidly adding to the agricultural prosperity of France, by attracting to the land the resources and energies of the nation. As to the social effect—"The Code had sensibly reduced the number of the poor and of the unemployed. The labourers had gained ground in welfare and self-respect. Each portion of the land that had passed into their hands had made them a guarantee for social order."¹

During the period referred to, the discussion was equally active and general in England; but the British political and agricultural economists were strongly in favour of the English system. Only poets and sentimentalists, they said, could be in favour of that of the French. These writers de-

¹ Passy, "Des systèmes de culture, etc.," 2nd edition, p. 19.

clared that small cultivators must go on without money or instruction, that they would be unable to adopt improvements, and that their operations would leave no surplus products. The English system, on the contrary, was held to be more profitable, more economical in the matter of labour, and more calculated to secure a larger surplus yield for the use of the community. The social side of the question was not much considered.

These objectors ventured upon the most positive foretellings as to the ruinous effect which the application of the Civil Code would ultimately have on the agriculture of France. It was predicted that in "fifty years the land of France would become a pauper warren." McCulloch wrote:¹ "The law is radically bad and bids fair in no lengthened period to reduce the agriculturists of France to a condition little, if at all, better than those of Ireland."

In 1893, when more than the "fifty years" had passed away, the president of the oldest and largest agricultural society in France, in his address at the annual meeting, dealt specially with these predictions. He referred by name to some of these British economists, and showed how completely their prophecies had been falsified. It was the labourer in England, he said, who had been driven off the land to seek other employment or to emigrate, while the French peasant remained on his own holding of land, "which he made fertile by stubborn industry, and on which he lived happy and free." "The report," he said, "will show you that the cultivator is as free as the soil he cultivates; the rural labourer is well fed, well housed, and well clad. . . . It will show you how

¹ McCulloch's "Principles of Political Economy."

the peasant, thanks to the savings he can make, can easily go through the greatest crisis in agriculture. . . . It will show you that the average production of wheat has been so raised as to triple the bread supply of France. . . . The peasant becomes more and more the proprietor of the soil he cultivates, is one of the most solid pillars on which social order rests, and his savings constitute the financial power of France.”

The president goes on to state that this progress is far from being finished, and after referring to the vast increase which had taken place in stock and other produce, he concludes by saying: “Our society knows that the fortune of the country depends on agricultural prosperity, while to increase the well-being of all classes of the rural population is the surest means for the Government to secure the stability of our institutions and to increase the strength of the nation.”¹

This is not an address on agriculture given by an amateur to a debating society. It is the utterance of an eminent rural economist to an association of the first rank, composed of practical agriculturists and of distinguished scientific men. One notable feature in the address is that all classes of cultivators are reckoned of equal importance. If there is any difference shown, it is in the form of extra consideration for those classes which by our own agricultural societies are left out of account altogether—namely, the labourers and the small cultivators.

Fortunately, we possess information by which the

¹ The address and the report itself should be read by all interested in the subject, and specially by those prejudiced in favour of the landlord and tenant system. They are published in pamphlet form by Chamerot, Rue des Saints-Pères, Paris, and entitled “Discours de M. Tisserand, Président de la Société Nationale d’Agriculture.”

working of the two systems—English and French—can be traced throughout a long period of years. At the end of that period the contrast between the results of the two systems, both from an economic and a social point of view, is very striking.

Arthur Young, who is regarded, even by French writers, as the best authority on the condition of agriculture in France at the time he wrote, gives a most deplorable account of it. ("Young's Travels in France, 1787, 1788, 1789.") Nearly one hundred years after Arthur Young wrote, another Englishman—George Gibson Richardson—who knew France well, and who was equally observant and equally qualified, gave us detailed descriptions of the condition of French agriculture. His book¹ is dedicated to one of the best writers on French rural economy—Leonce de Lavergne—who warmly acknowledged "the important service rendered to French agriculture" by Mr. Richardson. The book in question is specially instructive from the fact that the author went over the districts visited by Arthur Young and applied his practical knowledge to a careful examination of those districts. He recites Young's description of the miserable state of agriculture in a given district, and then describes the state of things which he—Richardson—found in that district. A comparison can thus be made between the conditions of agriculture at two periods, with an interval of about one hundred years.

The facts, figures, and descriptions given show the marvellous and steady progress made in France since the present system was adopted. It is interesting to note the variety—both as regards size and tenure—of

¹ "Corn- and Cattle-producing Districts in France," by George Gibson Richardson.

the holdings which exist in France. To take one or two examples. In the Département of Seine-et-Marne (about the same area as that of Norfolk) Mr. Richardson states that there are many large estates, and that farms of several hundred acres each, let at high rents, are not uncommon; but he adds: "This occupation by large landowners by no means excludes the small. There are as many as 10,000 owners cultivating their own soil, and living by it, and 13,000 labourers out of a total of 26,000 who are also landowners."

The Department of Seine-et-Oise (about the same area as that of the North Riding of Yorkshire) is described as a "country of large estates," but there are "12,000 owners who work their own land and do nothing else, and there are as many labourers—that is more than half of this class—who are also landowners."

In contrast to this, in Franche Comté (with an area about equal to that of the whole of Yorkshire) "farm labourers seem hardly to exist, as only 2000 are returned." One-fourth of the county is covered with forest, but there are 92,000 holdings, of which 50,000 are under 12 acres, and not 800 of 100 acres and over in the whole province. In the higher districts, each village has an important quantity of common land, which allows some stock to be kept, but which does not count in the individual holding. There are some villages which appear to have made some appropriation of the common land, as each householder has an almost equal portion.

La Brie, a wheat-producing district, nearly forty miles square, has few towns, but the "country swarms with villages, hamlets, farmsteads, and country seats."

Mr. Richardson refers to the steady rise in the

value of land in France, and gives particulars of the rapid increase in stock, horses, etc. He makes some noteworthy comparisons between the corn growth of France and that of the United Kingdom.

At the time he wrote (1877) $37\frac{1}{2}$ million acres, or more than one-fourth (nearly three-tenths) of the whole area of France, were sown with corn of one sort or another. In the corresponding year the land sown with corn of all kinds in Great Britain and Ireland was 11 million acres, or one-seventh of the whole area of the United Kingdom. In that year there were $23\frac{1}{2}$ million acres, or above one-sixth of the whole territory of France, sown with wheat and rye, which are articles wholly available for human food. In the United Kingdom there were, in the same year, only 3,600,000 acres, or about one-twenty-second part of the whole area, sown with wheat and rye. To compare the figures given by Mr. Richardson with those recently given by the Board of Agriculture, is to bring vividly home to us how rapidly, as a nation, we are losing the power to feed ourselves.

According to the French statistics last issued by the Board of Agriculture, there were in France, in 1901, above 35 million acres, or considerably more than one-fourth of the whole country, under corn crops of one sort or another, while in the United Kingdom the acreage under similar crops, in the same year, had fallen to less than $8\frac{1}{2}$ million, or about one-ninth of the whole country. Taking wheat and rye alone (as being human food), the area in France under these crops in 1901 was $20\frac{1}{4}$ million acres, or just under one-sixth of the whole country, while in the United Kingdom in the same year the acreage under these

two cereals had fallen to 1,813,907 acres, or about one forty-third part of the whole area.

The exact proportions for that year (1901) were :—

	<i>France.</i>	<i>United Kingdom.</i>
Total Area ¹ . . .	130,765,000 ...	77,682,516 acres.
Corn Crops of all kinds . . .	35,111,247 ...	8,476,876 acres.
Wheat and Rye . . .	20,268,610 ...	1,813,907 acres.

It thus appears that while France, so far as cereals are concerned, is practically a self-feeding country, the British nation has become absolutely dependent on other countries for this kind of food.

Turning to "*la petite culture*"—small cultivation—we find the same results. The intensive cultivation, enterprise, and economy always allied to a peasant proprietary have enabled France—after supplying her own tables—to export to this country enormous and ever-increasing quantities of the smaller articles of food scheduled on a previous page. As regards her home consumption, foods which are comparative luxuries with the mass of the people of this country form, on account of their cheapness, the ordinary fare of the people of France. Mr. Richardson on this head remarks: "Hardly a meal is ever eaten in France at any table above the very poorest without eggs and poultry forming part," and as to milk, after referring to its sale as a source of steady weekly income, he says: "Milk will always be of great importance in French farming; it is an article whose benefit makes itself felt daily and weekly; the daily

¹ Mr. Richardson gives as the whole area of France, 132,000,000 acres; the Board of Trade, 130,765,000 acres. The value of the cereals of all kinds imported into France in the year 1904 was only £4,432,000. Consular Reports, "Trade with France," 2682-35 (1905).

nourishment of the family of the small farmer depends largely upon it.”¹

Nothing is wasted by the small cultivator, and no kind of produce is neglected. Mr. Richardson illustrates this fact among other ways by stating that a sum of £60,000 per annum is “gathered from beehives in one department alone, which is a pure gift of Nature, realized without cost, and as the reward of a little care.”

The superior cooking of the French peasant woman is one of the results of the thrift always practised by peasant proprietors, and which is not likely to be acquired by a proletariat. The late Sir Henry Thompson, in his useful book, speaks of the cheap, tasty, and highly nutritious meals produced by the “French peasant’s wife, who turns everything to account in a manner quite incomprehensible to the English woman. . . . To the pot of the peasant, who wastes nothing whatever, all things are welcome; and every atom of nutritive material goes into it, to which are always added herbs, vegetables, etc.”²

The comparison drawn between the two systems is an apt one, because the original positions of the cultivators in the two countries were alike in principle. Peasant proprietary existed both in France and England. In England it was crushed out by the

¹ Travellers in rural France know that at small inns in the villages, fowls, eggs, vegetables, omelettes, etc., can, as a rule, be readily obtained at cheap rates and well cooked.

² “Food and Feeding,” 6th edition, 1891. By Sir Henry Thompson. No girl should be allowed to leave our elementary schools without some practical knowledge of cooking—cooking, not with expensive apparatus, but with simple utensils. “Tetler them by the teeth” is a good proverb for all housewives, especially for those of the middle and poorer classes, who would find that meals, however scanty, if well cooked, are a great home-attraction for their men-kind.

methods we have described. In France it remained, but the tyrannies and oppression practised by the landed aristocracy of that country made the peasants' lives miserable almost beyond endurance.

The Revolution, as far as the peasantry were concerned, was in no sense a political one. Mr. John Morley, speaking of the state of affairs after the death of Louis XV. (1774), and of the "mortal paralysis" with which the existing political system was smitten, says: "No substantial reconstruction was possible, because all the evils came from the sinister influence of the nobles, the clergy, or the financiers; and these classes, informally bound together against the common weal, were too strong for either the sovereign or the ablest minister to thrust aside."¹

But the French cultivators had not political insight enough to understand this combination; they only knew that their condition was one of deep wretchedness. The Revolution in their eyes was simply a war against their immediate oppressors. Their cry was "*Guerre aux Chateaux, Paix aux Chaumières!*" (War against the Mansions; Peace to the Cottages)! They saw in the Revolution a way of freeing themselves from the yoke of misery that galled and worried them in every incident of their lives. The "rights" and "privileges" of the seigneurs were so numerous that they dogged the peasant at every step. The "*Droit de colombier*"—to wit, the exclusive right of the lord to keep countless pigeons, which fed on the

¹ "Critical Miscellanies," first series. John Morley.

In a previous reign (Louis XIV.) a great minister, referring to these classes, told the king: "Their tables and their stables consume the patrimony of the poor, and if in the midst of their plenty they cast their eyes on a poor wretch, they command he should be taken out of their sight instead of taking pity on him." (Colbert.)

peasants' land and ate his scanty grain, was a source of continual loss and grievance. The lord had the exclusive right to all game; he had unlimited rabbit warrens, of which the peasants had to pay the cost. The poor men, under heavy penalties, were forbidden to touch pigeons, rabbits, or game, though they were impoverished by them.

Worst of all was the hated *corvée*. The lord had the right to compel the peasants to make roads, to lay out and ornament his grounds, gardens, etc. This right was enforced vigorously, even at harvest and other times when the peasants' own land needed attention. The peasants were compelled to grind their corn in the lord's mill and to pay any price asked for the grinding. Their bread had to be baked in the lord's bakery, while both mill and oven had been built by their forced labour. No wonder that the deep hatred of the oppressors pent up for ages in the hearts of these poor cultivators showed itself in violence and excesses when once set free by the Revolution. But from the peasants' point of view these excesses, and even the horrors and brutalities of the whole Revolution, pale before those which the peasantry had endured for centuries.¹ Volumes have been written to describe the excesses of the peasantry at this time, the sufferings of high-born women and well-nurtured children, and the burnings of stately mansions where ease, wealth, and luxury had reigned. Our sympathies

¹ A short but vivid description of the manifold character of the oppression which the French peasantry suffered is given in "The Meaning of History," by Frederic Harrison. One of the best accounts of the general political and social state of France before the Revolution is to be found in De Tocqueville's "L'Ancien Régime," edited by G. W. Headlam, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1904. Books ii and iii deal with the rural population.

no doubt are naturally roused on reading the painful details of personal sufferings of this class—the landed nobility. But their sudden change of fortune and all their trials were brought about by the complete breakdown of a wicked system which they had relentlessly upheld by the most cruel means and which they looked upon as permanent. Hence it is necessary that the other side of the picture should be shown, so that our sympathies may be properly balanced and—what is more important—the character of the peasantry vindicated.

Carlyle describes the “general overturn” in lurid terms: “The Traveller,” he says, “walking up hill, bridle in hand, overtakes a poor woman; the image, as such commonly are, of drudgery and scarcity; looking sixty years of age though she is not yet twenty-eight. They have seven children, her poor drudge and she: a farm, with one cow, which helps to make the children soup; also one little horse, or garron. They have rents and quit-rents; hens to pay to this Seigneur; oat-sacks to that; King’s taxes, Statute labour, Church taxes, taxes enough;—and think the times inexpressible. She has heard that somewhere, in some manner, something is to be done for the poor: ‘God send it soon; for the dues and taxes crush us down. . . .’ Five full-grown millions of such gaunt figures, with their haggard faces; in woollen jupes, with copper-studded leather girths and high sabots, starting up to ask, as in forest-warnings, their washed Upper classes, after long unreviewed centuries, virtually this question: How have ye treated; how have you taught us, fed us and led us, while we toiled for you? The answer can be read in flames over the nightly summer-sky. This is the feeding and leading we

have had of you; Emptiness of pocket, of stomach, of head and of heart. Behold there is nothing in us, nothing but what Nature gives her wild children of the desert. Ferocity and Appetite; Strength grounded on Hunger."¹

Dr. Arnold, referring to the destruction of the feudal tyranny of the nobility and great men, writes:—

“In my opinion this blessing is enough to compensate the evils of the French Revolution; for the good endures while the effects of the massacres and devastations are passing away. . . . I am sure that we have too much of the oligarchical spirit in England (both in Church and State), and that these one-eyed, the political economists, encourage this by their language about national wealth.”²

The Revolution of 1789 did not therefore, as is so often stated, create a peasant proprietary, which, in fact, existed before the outbreak. What the Revolution did was, first, to free the peasant from his bonds and then, through the provisions of the Civil Code, to put hope into his life by securing to him the fruits of his own industry and thrift. From that time the career of the French tillers of the soil has been one of increasing comfort and prosperity.

A writer who knows France well, and has closely studied the condition of the rural population, speaks of the “unique position of the French peasant, no other country in the world showing his compeer. . . . From generation to generation the rural population of France has been materially and morally progressive. At the present day 63 per cent of the inhabitants of

¹ Carlyle's “French Revolution.”

² “Life and Correspondence of Dr. Arnold,” by Arthur Penrhyn Stanley.

Communes numbering two thousand souls, occupy houses of their own, etc."¹

In his book on this subject, M. de Lavergne not only gives the history of French agriculture from the year 1789, but gives a full description of its condition during many years before the Revolution, because he says "it is a question before all to seek the effects of the Revolution of 1789 on our rural economy, and it is impossible to fairly state these effects without going back to the causes."²

It is urged by the apologists for the English system of agriculture that this satisfactory state of things in France is mainly due to soil and climate. As to climate, that of course is the same as it was when agriculture was in the deplorable condition described by Arthur Young; but the climate, no doubt, enables certain articles—such as some kinds of fruit, flowers, and vegetables—to be produced earlier than they can be produced in England.

With regard to the soil, the land of France, though of much higher value on account of its intensive cultivation and consequent superior productiveness, is but little, if anything, more suitable for general farming, or for the growth of the smaller articles of food (taking them as a whole) than is the land of this country. But, as has been pointed out, the remarks and comparison made apply not only to France, but to those other countries in which a similar system prevails. The conditions of both soil and climate in some of these—Belgium, Holland, and Denmark, for example—are less favourable to all-round cultivation than are those of England. M. de Laveleye, in a letter to the present

¹ "Home Life in France," Miss Betham Edwards, Methuen, 1905.

² "Économie Rurale de la France," M. de Lavergne. 3rd edition.

writer, states that the soil of Flanders was originally pure sand, and that it has been brought into its present fertile condition by the labour and efforts of the peasantry.

It is further argued that the progress of agriculture in France is due to protection. But on examination this will be found not to be the case. Protection in France has varied very much. Up to 1853 there were duties on a sliding scale imposed on the importation of corn; but up to 1849 protection existed also in England, and high prices prevailed for several years after its abolition.

From 1853 to the time (1877) Mr. Richardson wrote his account of the flourishing state of agriculture in France, imports of wheat into that country were practically free, and continued to be so up to 1884. In 1885 the effect of foreign imports began to be severely felt, and the French agriculturists, who—thanks to their system—were so largely synonymous with the French people, determined to defend their great industry from the ruinous effects of foreign competition. In that year 5s. 2d. per quarter import duty was put on foreign wheat. In the succeeding years that duty was increased, till in 1894 it was fixed at 12s. 2d., at which sum it has since remained.

It is curious to notice, in passing, the large extent to which the price of wheat is governed by causes quite apart from protection. During the eighteen years (1885–1902) in which the duty on wheat imported into France was from 5s. 2d. to 12s. 2d. per quarter, the official average price in that country was 13s. per quarter less than during the previous eighteen years, when the duty was only 1s. 1d.

Again, taking the nine years (1894–1902) during

which the higher duty of 12s. 2d. was imposed, the official average price was 35s. 6d., or 6s. 6d. per quarter less than during the previous nine years, when the lower duties of 5s. 2d. to 8s. 9d. were levied.¹

It is clear from the foregoing facts that the steady improvement of agriculture in France and its comparative prosperity referred to (up to 1885), cannot be ascribed to soil, climate, or protection. It can only be accounted for by the system of cultivation which exists there—a system based on what has been justly termed “the omnipotent principle—the magic—of ownership.”

No doubt over-sea agriculturists supply this country with wheat a few shillings per quarter less than the French people pay for their own home-grown product. Our foreign loaf is therefore slightly cheaper than their French loaf; but in a later chapter other factors will be brought into consideration, and an attempt will be made to show that we really purchase our so-called “cheap loaf” at a ruinous cost.

The French people have not adopted the curse of cheapness as the governing principle in their rural economy. They look on the productive side of the question. Instead of saving a small sum per quarter by the purchase of foreign grain, they prefer to pay a higher price for their own; the difference being—so to speak—an investment in their own land-bank which bears a tenfold interest. They bring their own people and their own soil together, and the result in wealth is marvellous, not only in the form of money, but in that of a prosperous rural population.

Their huge national debt, nearly two-thirds bigger than that of England, is said to be more largely held

¹ These calculations are worked out from the figures given in the “Statistical Tables of the Board of Trade” (1903, Cd. 1761).

by the cultivators of the soil than by any other class in France. Mr. Richardson states: "Within the last twenty years fund-holders in country places have increased more than tenfold." No official information as to the proportion held by these classes at the present time appears to be available, but in France it is generally accepted as a fact that the peasant proprietors own an immense part of the government stock. The fact is continually referred to as a great proof of the wide diffusion of wealth, and as a guarantee for the stability of the nation.

M. Tisserand, President of the Agricultural Society already referred to, states that the French look upon the soil as the true source of wealth, and on agriculture as the chief industry, "on the prosperity of which the fortunes of the country depend." Their thriving and numerous rural population, he adds, "is one of the most solid pillars on which social order rests," and their savings "constitute the financial power of France."

These statements are not flights of oratory, but are based on sad experience. It was the rural population that pulled the country through its darkest national troubles. If France, when worsted in her conflict with Germany, had had nothing but trade and commerce to fall back upon, ruin must have followed. It was her multitude of thriving cultivators that enabled her, not only to pay off so quickly the 200 millions mulct imposed by her adversary, but, after the devastations of a great war, to recover her position and prosperity in such a rapid and marvellous manner.¹

¹ The indemnity at first demanded was 240 millions. The English Ministry made friendly representations to the German Government as to the excessive character of this demand, and the amount was finally reduced to 200 millions. For particulars see Parliamentary Papers, "Franco-German War," No. 3 (1871).

CHAPTER XV

LAND HUNGER AND PEASANT PROPRIETARY

IT is frequently stated—chiefly by those who do not believe in peasant proprietary, or are prejudiced against it—that there is no demand for small holdings. The favourite phrase is “there is no land hunger” among the people of this country.

After ages of successful efforts to squeeze the peasantry off the land and to destroy every link that connected them personally with the soil, there is a fine irony in the statement that there is “no land hunger in England.” It is a statement which, if true, is a sad proof of the completeness with which the work has been done. But it is happily not true. In all other countries in Europe the affection for the land is great, even among the poorest. “Our backs are the lords’,” said the Russian serfs, “but the land is our own.”

With the common people of England, no doubt through the causes referred to, the idea of having a personal share in the soil has very nearly died out. But if a way back were offered on practical and easy conditions, the “land hunger” now latent would be seen to exist, not only among those who still remain on the soil, but among thousands of the former rural population now dwelling in the towns.

In former times the yeoman farmer, the peasant proprietor, and the commoner, lived side by side as

parts of a system. The farmer mainly relied on the other two classes for the labour required on his farm. A letter written in 1785 by one of the class of yeomanry—so numerous at the time—illustrates a common practice. It states:—

“I have now several cottagers at my farm whom I have constantly employed for some years past, and who enjoy the rights of common in the manner I have described. These labourers I take a pleasure in encouraging. . . . I have also an advantage in it, because I can more safely rely on the industry and integrity of such as have some degree of prosperity and character to lose, and who have some distant prospect some time or other of becoming farmers themselves, than the poor devil who is destitute of every kind of property and whose only hope is to be able to work and gain a subsistence from day to day as a slave as long as he lives.”¹

In later times, however, the farmer, being himself reduced to a tenant and pressed by his necessities, objected to the labourer owning land, but wanted all his time and energy in return for a weekly wage. The territorial classes, whatever may be said to the contrary, as far as action goes, retain the same objection to the present day. This is shown by the lukewarm manner in which legislative proposals for giving land to the men are always met. The Allotment Bill received scant support, and had been some years before the House before it became law in 1887. It required seven years of effort before the Small Holdings Act of 1892 was passed. The objection referred to is markedly shown by the manner in which this Act has been treated by County Councils up to the

¹ “Observations on Enclosures of Waste Lands,” 1785.

present time.¹ The alleged failure of this measure is continually quoted in support of the statement that there is no demand for land.

The administration of the Act was placed in the hands of County Councils, and no doubt the Government, in doing so, intended the measure to be effective. Lord Onslow, speaking at Glasgow, said :—

“We thought that if we placed it in the power of the County Councils to hire land, and to create small holdings, the result would be that there would be a very large number of applications and a very considerable increase. But if you look at the return to Parliament you will see that what I might call the small holdings movement, through the local authorities, is conspicuous by its failure. I am certainly one of those who, for many years past, have been very desirous of seeing an increase in the number of small holdings, both in this country and in England. I do not think we have gone altogether the right way about it in our well-meant endeavours to increase the number of our small holdings.” (Speech at a meeting of the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture, 26 October, 1904.)

The County Councils—with some exceptions which will be noticed—have practically ignored the duty placed upon them. For the most part they have not even appointed advisory committees to consider the

¹ Under this Act County Councils are enabled to purchase land, divide it into small holdings not exceeding fifty acres in extent, nor exceeding £50 in annual value, and to sell or let such holdings to suitable persons who will themselves cultivate them. The purchaser is required to pay down one-fifth of the purchase money and to pay the balance by half-yearly instalments (including interest and sinking fund) during a term of years not exceeding fifty. The County Council may, if they think fit, allow one-fourth of the purchase money to remain unpaid as a perpetual rent-charge on the holding. They may, in consideration of permanent improvements made by the owner, postpone the annual payment for any time not exceeding five years.

question, which, under the fifth clause of the Act, it was made compulsory for them to do. The reasons for this are not far to seek. Members of County Councils, in the rural counties, do not in this respect represent the agricultural labourers. They are mostly of the territorial class—of the old quarter sessions type. They are kindly disposed towards the labourers, and would do what they think is good for them, but always as labourers. They have not as yet accepted the idea that the creation of a class of land-owning peasants would be good for agriculture itself, as well as for the community.

No one who knew the real labourers expected that, on the passing of the Act, there would be a rush on their part for the possession of land. The hope was, that County Councils would, of their own motion, have made inquiries into the subject as the Act required them to do, have paid attention to petitions, even to a single petition, as the Act enjoined, and generally have shown a real desire to make the measure a success.

In continental countries, measures for bettering the position of the cultivating classes were adopted for social, economic, and political reasons. But these measures have always been (except in the case of France) initiated and carried out, often under great difficulties, by classes above those whom they were designed to benefit. This must be the case in England, and if schemes for repeopling the land are to be successful, it is not enough to pass good Acts of Parliament for the benefit of the poorer classes of the rural population, there must also be a determination to put them into force by those whose duty it is to administer them.

Agricultural labourers of the old type, of whom happily there are many left—are for the most part still under the influence of past times, when they were regarded by their “betters” as a separate caste. They are reserved, and often suspicious. Speak to them about the provisions of the Small Holdings Act, and they will listen with a quiet disbelief that anything is really intended for their benefit in that direction.¹ In this feeling they are right; for during the ten years since the Act was passed—with the few exceptions to be referred to—the measure has been practically ignored by the authorities who were appointed to administer it. And yet there is hardly a clergyman, in any rural parish, who could not put his finger on men who would make good use of a piece of land if they had it as their own.

For the foregoing reasons the administration of the Land Purchase Bill is placed in the hands of the Board of Agriculture instead of those of Local Authorities.

Among professional men and others of the non-agricultural classes living in rural districts there is a large amount of dissatisfaction, and even alarm, at the state of things which there exists. But these feelings, for obvious reasons, cannot in many instances be openly expressed.

Among other communications bearing on this point,

¹ To quote one of many examples that could be given of this general feeling. The writer a short time ago was speaking to a countryman about the Act in question, and the following is the substance of the replies he received. The man knew something of the Act. The county councillor of the district, whom he only knew by name, had never spoken about it. “You see,” said the man, “I have managed to get a bit of land” (he had four acres, at £5 per acre), “and it is not for the like of us to make a bother. I am only a yearly tenant, and if I had to leave the land there would be a dozen men after it.”

which the present writer has received, is a letter (7 June, 1904) from a solicitor living in a market town, who has a large country practice. After expressing the pressing necessity for something to be done for the rural districts, he says :—

“I am greatly interested in the Land Purchase Bill now before Parliament, and I trust it will be passed. I have no doubt that the first part of the Bill will be largely adopted. . . . With regard to the second part (peasant proprietary), I am sorry to say that I have no confidence in the County Council being the advisory committee under Clause 19. Every election of that body must necessarily see it constituted more of men of means—chiefly landowners (in rural districts)—and they will, I fear, hinder every endeavour to make that part of the Act an active force in the country. The County Councils have each year more work to do, and few but men of independent means can afford to serve. They will soon cease to be representative. . . . Excuse my going into all these details, but I feel very strongly on the matter, and I only wish it were enacted that no man should be capable of holding in England more than 2000 acres of land other than moorland or woodland.”

It must also be admitted that there are difficulties in the way of the administration of a peasant proprietary Act by County Councils—difficulties which would not affect a central authority. Numerous applications are received from one, two, or more persons in a locality for land, sometimes for specified plots suitable to them as regards quality and situation. But it is difficult for County Councils to meet the requirements contained in these separate applications. On the other hand, to purchase an estate and divide it into small holdings, in the hope

that they will be taken up, is regarded by most County Councils as a land speculation on which—out of regard for the rates—they are not warranted to enter.

This view of the case is put in a very clear and practical manner by the Clerk to the East Sussex County Council. He states :—

“The Small Holdings Act of 1892 contemplates that a tract of agricultural land, suitable for small holdings of from one to fifty acres, should be purchased, placed on the Land Registry, divided into lots, and disposed of at such prices as will recoup the cost of purchase and adaptation. There are, probably, not many places where there is such an unsatisfied demand for small holdings, and where at the same time there are estates in the market on such terms, that the Council may with anything like safety purchase an estate in reliance upon being able to part with all the plots at cost prices, and therefore it is scarcely surprising that the Act has not been much resorted to.”

He goes on to say that, unless purchasers for the holdings can be secured in advance, the proceeding contains an element of risk to which guardians of the county rates are naturally slow to resort.

Reports of some of the County Councils show that there is a genuine demand for land. In a memorandum of the Warwickshire County Council it is stated :—

“The bulk of the petitioners were men who were doing well with their allotments. . . . Some of the more energetic of them desired, and would be able to manage, large holdings. All the labourers contemplated ploughing the land and consuming the produce,

keeping pigs chiefly for manure-making purposes. The demand for more allotment land has considerably increased, owing to the agricultural depression, which has seriously curtailed the employment of labour, and has left the men with time on their hands, which might profitably be employed in cultivating more land on their own account."

All this goes to show that, while a local authority is the best agency for supplying local demands for small allotments, the provision of small holdings for the creation of a peasant proprietary is a national concern, which can best be carried out by a central authority having funds at its command for that special purpose.

The large portion—20 per cent—of the purchase-money required to be paid in a lump sum, necessarily prevents poor men from buying a holding, however suitable they may be as cultivators. Much of the land, therefore, bought by County Councils has been let instead of sold. This is the next best thing to purchase, because a man renting under a local authority is in quite a different position from one renting under a private owner. The rent he pays is, as a rule, a fair one, and is not likely to be raised on his own improvements. Moreover, his tenure is a fairly secure one so long as he cultivates the land and pays his rent.

Taking into consideration all these adverse circumstances, the Small Holdings Act cannot fairly be described as a failure. Up to the end of 1902, eight County Councils in England and Wales had put the Act into operation.¹ They had, at that date, acquired a total area of 569 acres of land for the

¹ See Parliamentary Paper No. 192, Session 1903.

purpose of small holdings. This is not a large result from an Act which has been in existence ten years, but it is sufficient to show what can be done under it, and that it is a workable measure. It will also be found, on examination, that it has been successful in the places where men of the non-territorial class have been on the Councils, men free from prejudice and who, from social and political considerations, have taken a wide view of the question.

This was the case in Worcestershire, where the County Council have put the Act in force with unqualified success. Mr. Willis Bund (barrister-at-law), Chairman of the County Council, took the wise and public-spirited view that as Parliament had placed the administration of the Act in the hands of local authorities, it was the bounden duty of those authorities to carry it out to the best of their ability; and there is no doubt that his view had great influence with the Council. It was two members of the Council—Mr. E. J. Bigwood and Mr. Frank Smith, both members of firms of estate agents and auctioneers in Birmingham—who suggested and pushed forward the purchase of the land for the purpose of small holdings.¹

It may safely be said, therefore, that but for the presence of this class of men on the County Council, the experiment of creating a peasant proprietary in Worcestershire—if tried at all—would not have been carried out with the same vigour and—what is all-important—with the same personal belief in the principle it contained.

¹ See "County Council Times," December, 1904. Mr. Frank Smith is chairman of the Small Holdings Committee of the County Council, and was for many years hon. secretary of the Rural Labourers' League, the object of which is to promote all measures for the improvement of rural life.

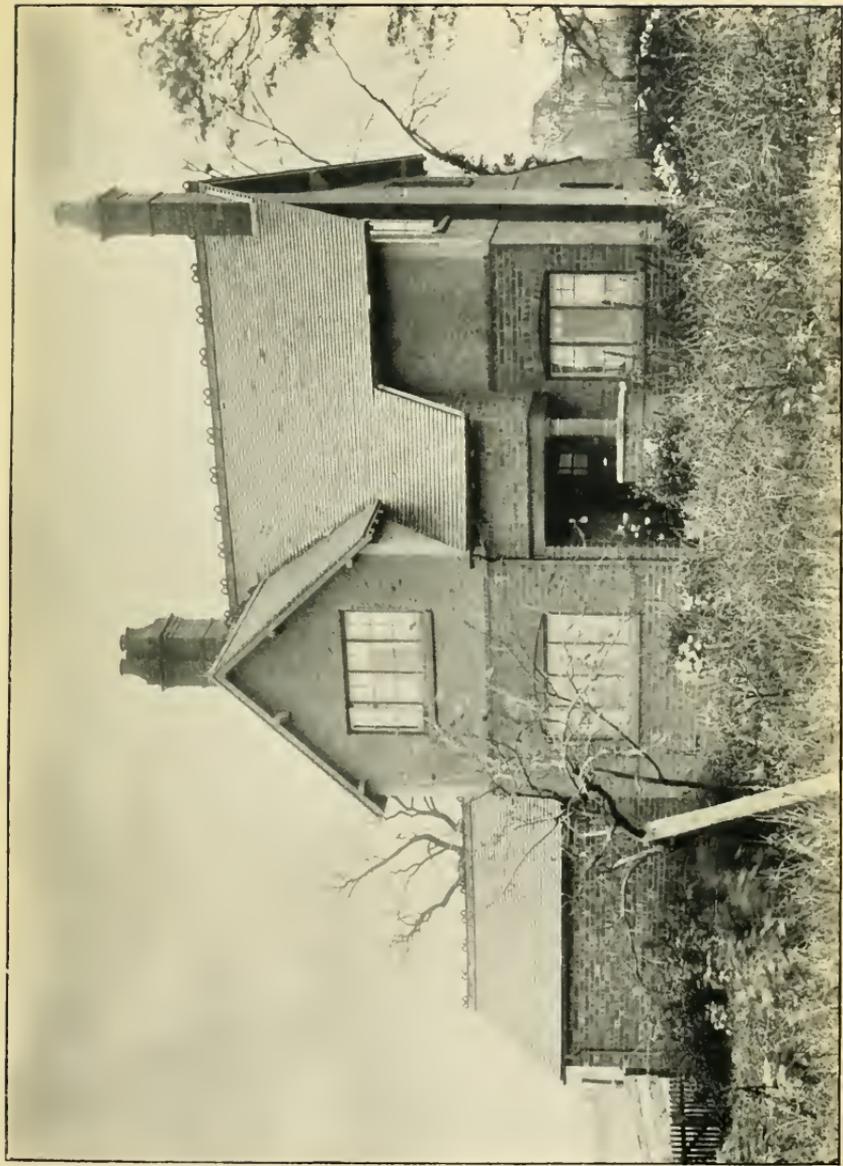
There can be no doubt that an Act which has been so successful in one county could, if the same means and the same spirit were adopted, be carried out with equal success in other counties.

Some particulars of this small colony of peasant proprietors are worthy of being noticed.¹

On the passing of the Small Holdings Act of 1892 the Worcester County Council—mainly through the influence of the members of the Council referred to—bought the “Woodrow Farm,” which is close to the village of Catshill, in the parish of North Bromsgrove, and about twelve miles from Birmingham. The farm contains about 146 acres, and the purchase-price was £33 per acre, including the timber. The Council divided the land into thirty-two small holdings, ranging in size from just over three acres to about nine. The expense of dividing the land by fences, etc., amounting to £287, was duly apportioned among the holdings. There were numerous applicants for the plots, and the Small Holdings Committee of the Council were enabled to select suitable men. Some of the applicants were men who had left the locality through want of employment, but desired to come back when there was a prospect of getting land to cultivate. The selling price of each holding was settled, and the purchaser was required to pay down one-fifth of the amount. The sale was then completed, and the purchaser became the registered freeholder of the land, subject to the payment of an annual instalment for a certain number of years.

¹ The present writer is indebted to the courtesy of Mr. S. Thornely, Clerk to the County Council, for photographs, together with the information respecting the financial business arrangements connected with the undertaking. Other particulars given are the result of repeated visits to the colony, and of personal knowledge of the men.

FIRST COTTAGE BUILT ON THE ESTATE



Photo, Lewis, Evansgrove.]

W. J. POWELL, 8 acres 6 r. 4 p.

It was found that some of the men, though very suitable for the work, were not able to pay down the required one-fifth of the purchase-money. To meet these cases the Small Holdings Committee very wisely allowed an extension of time—two or three years—during which the fifth had to be paid. When it was paid the purchase was completed and the land legally transferred.

The terms of repayment are based on a 4 per cent rate of interest, and the instalments, to be collected half-yearly, are fixed at such an amount, including interest and sinking fund, as will pay back the whole of the money advanced by the County Council in forty years.

Though the village of Catshill is hard by, it was found that cottages on the estate were in many cases necessary for the comfort of the men and their families. But in the Act there are difficulties in the way of providing cottages.¹ But the Committee overcame these difficulties, and the County Council finally decided not to build themselves, but to advance three-fourths of the cost of a cottage and outbuildings, provided that the remaining fourth were paid by the holder and that the plans were approved by the county surveyor and the medical officer of health.

The amount of the instalments, interest (4 per cent), and sinking fund, is so calculated that the advances for the cottages—regardless of the time they were built—shall be all repaid at the same date as the repayments for the land are completed. Up to the present time nine cottages have been built, which,

¹ By an amending Bill now before Parliament—if passed—the above difficulties would be removed. Local authorities would be able, if they thought fit, to advance to suitable men the whole of the purchase-money.

with the land around them, form comfortable and attractive little homesteads.

Mr. S. Thornely (clerk to the County Council), referring to these buildings, states :—

“Very good houses, consisting of a good kitchen and living-room, with back kitchen and larder and three good bedrooms, with necessary outbuildings, including stable, tool-house, copper for boiling pig food, and generally two pigsties, have been erected, and the contracted price has averaged £286, excluding hauling.”¹

The men engage their own architects and, no doubt, examine the contracts and watch the progress of the building of their own homes. This in itself is a useful training in business affairs. The advisers of the County Council seem to be careful men, and to have taken ample precautions that the ratepayers should not lose by “land speculation.” The interest charged and the amount of instalments are, in the words of Mr. Thornely, “worked out with a view to leave a fair profit to the county ratepayers.”

It may be stated, roughly, that the men pay, on an average, £40 per acre for the land—exclusive of the buildings—and that their annual payments (reckoning 4 per cent on the fifth paid down) are about £2 per acre.

These are full prices for land that was, when bought, of an indifferent, if not a poor quality. But the annual payment per acre is much less than the men would have to pay as tenants under private persons, besides which, they are owners of the soil, and at the end of forty years all payments will cease.

¹ See “County Council Times,” December, 1904. Article by Mr. Thornely.

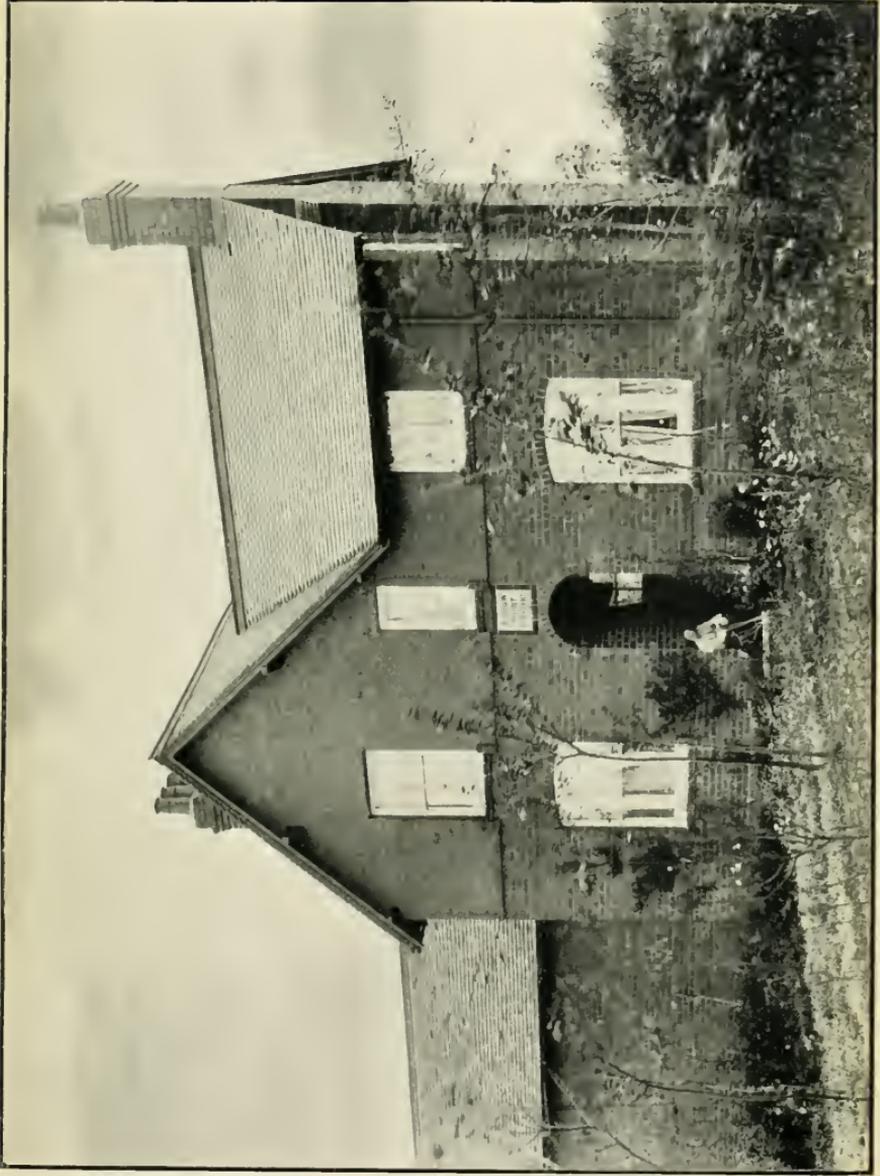


Photo. Lewis, Bromsgerve.

BENJAMIN WALDRON.

It is evident, however, that the Board of Agriculture, basing their charges on $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent, instead of 4 per cent, could supply land at a much lower cost than local authorities (for the reasons given) are able or disposed to do. But, after some years' experience of the experiment, the clerk of the County Council is able to say :—

“Hitherto it has been an all-round success, and there are no arrears whatever in the payment of the half-yearly instalments. . . . The men are thrifty, sober, and industrious as a class, and the women are, if anything, better than the men.”¹

This is not the only effort which the Worcester local authorities have made to retain working-men on the land. Some years ago the North Bromsgrove Urban District Council, of which Mr. Frank Smith is a member, acting under the Allotments Act, 1887, acquired a field of forty-three acres (the Horse Course). This field, which adjoins the Woodrow Farm above referred to, was divided into allotments of from a quarter of an acre to one acre each, which were let at reasonable rents. Several of the tenants, who subsequently became peasant proprietors on the Woodrow Farm, were enabled to pay down the required fifth of the purchase price by money made (in addition to other earnings) out of these allotments. The allotment was, in fact, a stepping-stone to the larger holding. Further, some land, situate in Perryfields, consisting of forty-seven acres, had for some years been let on lease as allotments by a private owner. These fields were recently offered for sale, and the men, fearing that

¹ One of the holders has already repaid the County Council the whole of the money advanced, although forty years is the time allowed for repayment.

by a change of ownership they would lose the land, applied to the County Council to secure it for them. The Council thereupon bought the land, at a cost of £3000, and when the lease has expired—in two or three years—it will be sold to applicants under the provisions of the Small Holdings Act, 1892. About ten years ago, in another part of the county, the Council took, on a lease of twenty-one years, forty-eight acres of glebe land, which they have also let in allotments.

But the benefits conferred on the peasants and others at Catshill are not confined to them. They extend to the shopkeepers, manufacturers, and others. Take a homely illustration of the process. These men before they were placed on the land came into a town—say to Birmingham—to seek employment. The reply of employers to their applications was: “We don’t want your labour; we have no vacancies.” These same men now come into the same locality, and their application is in a different form. “You did not want our labour. Do you want our produce—fruit, vegetables, flowers, etc.?” The reply now is, “Yes, we did not want your labour, but we are in daily need of your produce, and will take as much as you can bring,”¹

To carry on the illustration, the men receive the money for their produce, but do not put it into a stocking. They straightway lay out most of it in clothes, boots, groceries, spades, implements, and such other requirements as their new position makes necessary. Their horses have to be shod, carts and harness

¹ Of course, the men do not always sell direct to the consumer, but to the middle-man or the retail dealer. This, however, does not affect the principle of the illustration.

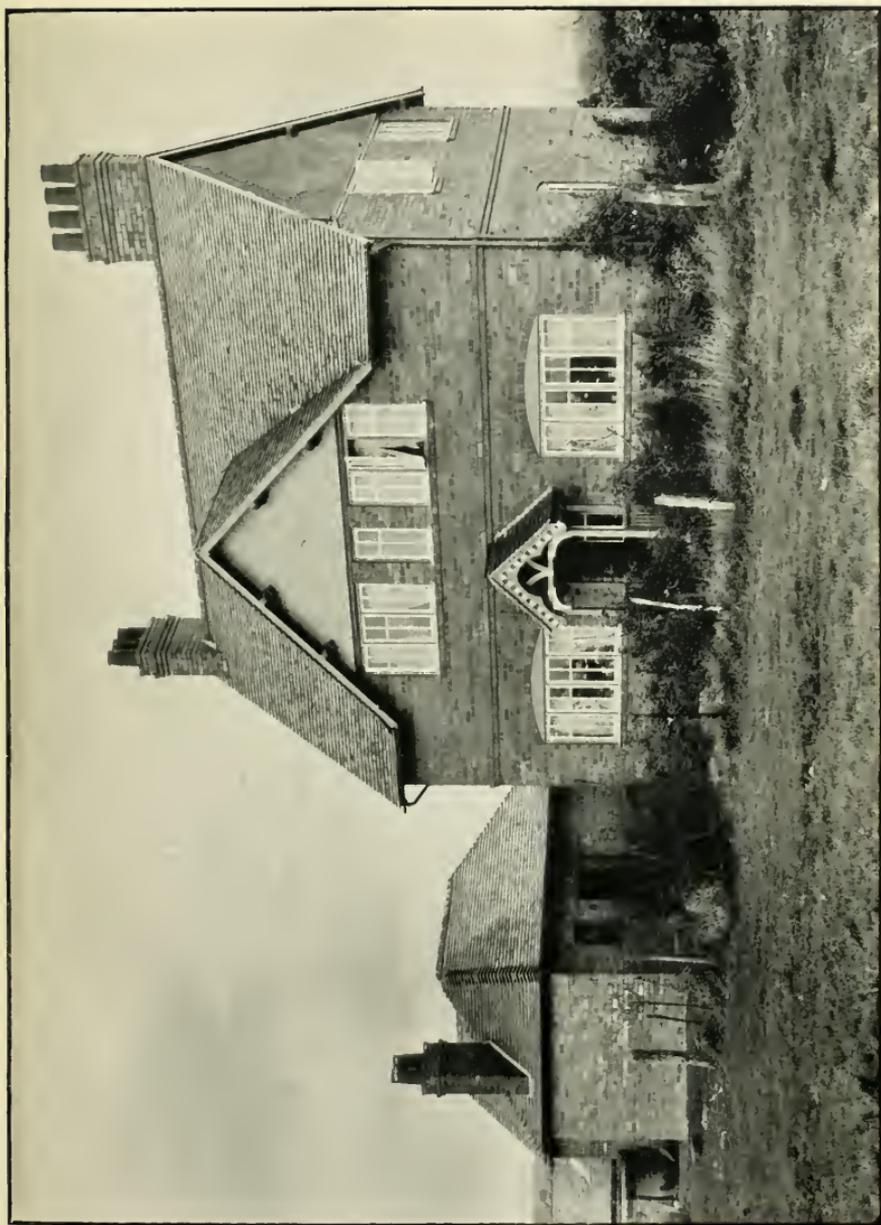


Photo. Lewis, Bromsgrove.

WILLIAM BINNER, 3 acres 1 r. 38 p.

made and mended, and in some cases small luxuries, and house and family adornments, are indulged in, and as a consequence the tradesman, shopkeeper, and manufacturer are directly benefited.

This is no fancy picture. Catshill is a place where the decayed industry of nail-making was once carried on. The men sought employment in the manner described, and they were for a long time in a state of extreme poverty for want of it. The present writer has for years past known the locality and the decaying condition of the trade in it. He now knows personally many of those who belong to the colony. They are a fine lot of men, such as we want more of. They work hard, some of them very hard, but they are independent, well housed, have plenty of food, with good digestions, and their minds are healthily occupied in planning further improvements on their little freeholds. Recently they have taken to flower-growing. At his last visit the writer saw heaps of chrysanthemums tied in bunches by the women and children ready for a very early start in the morning for the market towns.

Further, the labour question is here being solved. Instead of the distress and charges on the poor-rate, which previously existed, there is not, at the present time, the writer is informed, an able-bodied pauper in the whole parish, while the rateable value of the land is considerably increased. Formerly this Woodrow Farm was occupied, with small success, by a single tenant, and very few labourers employed. Now there is on it a colony of families. One of these small holders, who has bought additional land outside the estate (but altogether under thirty acres), received in a single year £600 for produce raised on his holdings. In the same year he paid £240 for labour,

in addition to that of his own family. There is no mystery about this great yield of produce. It has ever been the result, both in ancient and modern times, of that intensive cultivation and heavy manuring of the land almost invariably found in connection with small farming and peasant proprietary.¹

The men of this colony, with their own horses and carts, draw manure from the towns, and the quantity they place on their land is enormous. In a single year, it is stated, above 500 tons were placed on the 43 acres of allotments referred to (the Horse Course), and far more in proportion on a six-acre holding on the Woodrow Farm.

There is another feature connected with occupying ownership which the political economist does not reckon because it has no money value. Every man's happiness in life depends largely on the interest and pleasure he takes in his occupation. Nothing can exceed the satisfaction a peasant proprietor gets from his work. It is a pleasure to him to toil heavily in order to make his holding—his own homestead—a success.

It is evident that the 5 per cent duty which Mr. Chamberlain proposes to levy on the imports of

¹ "C. Furius Chrisimus, a freedman, gathered from a very small farm far larger harvests than his neighbours reaped off large estates, and so became an object of great ill-will, on the ground that he was attracting their crops on to his land by witchcraft. Whereupon he was cited for trial before the Curule Aedile. When the time came for him to come up for sentence, he brought his rustic implements into the Forum, leading in with them his strong, healthy household, well cared for and clad, his iron work excellently made, etc. Then he said: 'My sorceries, Romans, are these, and yet I cannot display before you or bring into the Forum my early watchings, vigils, and the sweat of my brow.' Whereupon he was acquitted. For of a truth, cultivation depends on the amount of work put into it."—Pliny, "Natural History," Book XVIII, Chap. VII, VIII.

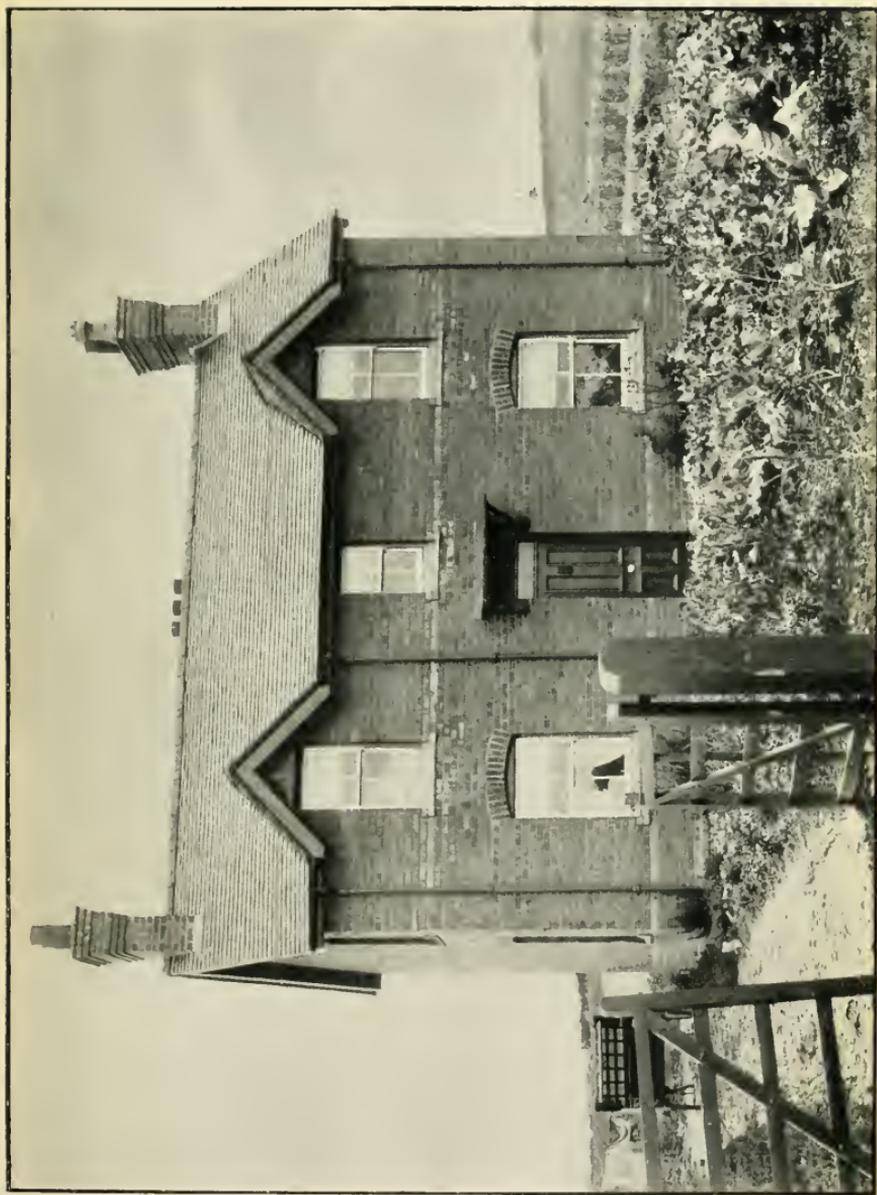
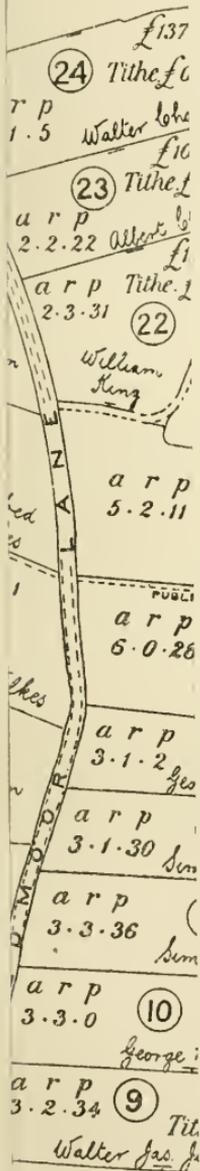


Photo. Lewis, Bronsgrove.]

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CATSHILL

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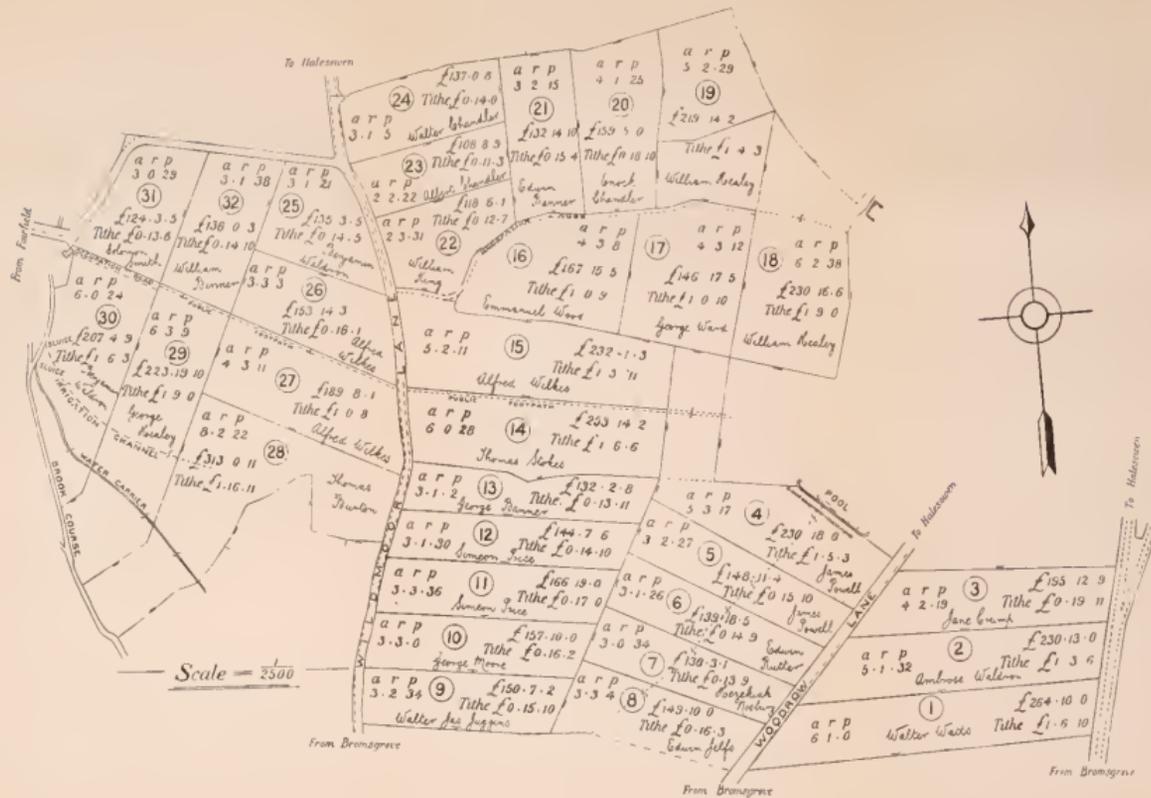


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— WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL —

LAND AT CATSHILL DIVIDED INTO SMALL HOLDINGS

UNDER THE SMALL HOLDINGS ACT 1892.



foreign produce would be of great benefit to small proprietors. This is not the place to discuss the question whether an import duty falls on the foreign importer or the home consumer, but in any case the foreigner would have to pay a toll—which he ought to pay—for access to our markets, which are at present open to him free of all charge.

And here, at the risk of repetition, we must again remind the reader that these small holders are not competing with one another for a limited trade. Men in the labour market—at the dock gates or elsewhere—are waiting and striving to get some of the limited number of jobs to be had. But the peasant proprietor competes with none except the foreigner who is in the same line. Looking at the demand, the supply from Catshill is but as a drop in the bucket. Were there some hundreds of colonies of small proprietors, in different parts of the country, they could supply but a small portion, comparatively, of those smaller articles of food which are now obtained from abroad.

To further illustrate the "land hunger" which exists in this country, the operations of the Small Holdings Association may be quoted. This Association was formed in 1902 and then bought an estate in Surrey—the Cudworth Estate—comprising 376 acres. The land was divided into holdings varying from three to twenty-five acres, and cottages were built on many of them. These holdings were offered for sale on such terms as were calculated to yield a reasonable profit on the whole outlay. The undertaking being worked on commercial lines, the terms offered, both as to price and repayment, were of course less favourable than those contained in the second part of the Land Purchase Bill.

The purchaser was required to pay down 10 per cent of the purchase-money, the balance with interest to be repaid in twenty half-yearly instalments. Nevertheless, the directors, in answer to their advertisement, received applications from 1200 persons, from whom they selected twenty-five, the number then required. At the end of last year all the land had been sold with the exception of seventy-eight acres, fifteen acres of which are wood and six acres retained for the manor house. Sixteen cottages up to that time had been built.¹

This experiment appears to be very promising, but it is, as yet, too young to show how it will finally succeed. It can hardly be expected that it will be so successful—from a money point of view—as similar experiments carried on on the more favourable terms the State can offer. It is mentioned here mainly to show the great demand which exists for ownerships of small holdings of land.

It must be remembered that though such a vast number of people have been driven from our countryside, they, or their sons or sons' sons, still exist in the large centres of industry. Many of them have acquired small means and—tired of the competition and grind of town life—would willingly go back to the land if the opportunities referred to were offered to them.²

¹ The directors are Mr. James Tomkinson, M.P. (chairman), Mr. John Spear, M.P., Mr. S. R. Whitley, and Mr. James Long. Mr. Long, whose personal knowledge of small cultivation at home and in most continental countries is probably unsurpassed, is the managing director.

² The mere report of the introduction of the Bill has brought numerous inquiries from men of different classes, such as hauliers, small cab proprietors, coachmen, gardeners, caretakers, etc., all of them brought up on the land. These men have a knowledge of cultivation, they possess a little money, and would gladly return to country life on the condi-

Besides the labourers there are tradesmen, and those with partial occupation, in our villages and small country towns who would gladly become owners under the terms named, and would be among the best of cultivators.¹

In short, the statement that there is no "land hunger" in England is happily not borne out by facts. If a government were to adopt—not in a perfunctory manner, but as a national policy—measures for a systematic supply of small holdings in different districts, the demand (the land hunger) which exists would be speedily revealed. In this way alone, gradually, can that desirable element in our social life, a peasant proprietary, be restored.

In the meantime, individual support given to any movement (Garden Cities, Small Holdings Associations, or any other agency) which has for its object to place families permanently on the soil, is a patriotic act. A contribution to this object is of tenfold more value than that given to many forms of relief of

tions named. Many of these applications are most interesting and contain particulars which show their genuine character.

About twelve years ago a small company of three or four men hired from Lord Carrington 650 acres of land in Lincolnshire on a 21 years' lease, at a rental of £1018 a year. The company, of which Mr. R. Winfrey is the chairman and leading member, divided the land into small holdings. There was not only a demand, but an actual craving for the land on the part of the labourers in the district. The holdings were all taken up, and the men are doing well. The supply of land on fair terms, in this case as it has done in other cases, disclosed the great demand that existed. For particulars see "The Creation of Small Holdings in Lincolnshire and Norfolk," by J. H. Diggle (Foster and Bird, King's Lynn).

¹ On the occasion of a visit of the present writer to a small place in Gloucestershire a man spoke to him on this point. He said: "I am a wheelwright, and trade is bad with me. One of my two sons has just left for Gloucester to seek work. Had I a small holding of my own I could have kept my family together. We could have filled up spare time on the land and done very comfortably."

poverty. The one is too often a mere palliative, if not an evil; the other goes to the root of the distress.

There is another aspect of the question which, from a social point of view especially, is well worthy of consideration. Young women of the middle and of what are called the "leisured" classes, have of late years shown a praiseworthy desire to enter on a career of their own in which they can be self-dependent. With that aim they undertake literary, clerical, commercial, and other work. Many of them are now found in agricultural schools and colleges, qualifying themselves by scientific and practical training to become agriculturists. There is, in fact, a new profession being created for women. This is very satisfactory, for no calling can be more attractive, healthy, or profitable than that of horticulture and the lighter branches of agriculture. Women are well suited for dairy work, for poultry- and bee-keeping, for fruit- and flower-growing, and market gardening.

In a report of one of the agricultural schools, it is stated that many of these girl-students had secured "good situations in connection with the home farms of the nobility and gentry."¹ But to fill situations is

¹ For particulars of the after-careers of young women who have received practical training in agricultural subjects, see "Report of the Horticultural College, Swanley," Kent, 1904.

Speaking of the work done at the Studley Castle College, Warwickshire, Lady Warwick said: "The record of past students since the foundation in 1898 showed that of the total of the fully trained students who had passed through the hostel, 50 per cent were earning their own livelihood." ("The Woman's Agricultural Times," No. 3, 1905.)

Lady Warwick writes: "The many posts on our books waiting to be filled by trained women prove that there is an outlet for educated women in a life which to many accustomed to country surroundings is more congenial than that in cities as clerks, typists, and teachers. . . . A girl can with proper training lead a sound healthy life, and make at least enough money to live upon and keep a home for herself." ("Times," 11 September, 1905.)

not sufficient. By a system of small ownerships a way would be opened up for women to carry on these industries on their own account. Only a small capital would be required for the purpose, there would be small risk, while a home and a sound country life would be secured. A large number of educated women, settling on the land for a career, would form a valuable social element in our rural life. The demand for the produce of holdings large and small, which could be managed by women, is practically unlimited. Fruit and vegetables we import annually to the value of about five millions sterling; cheese above seven millions. England, fitted by nature to be perhaps the best butter-producing country in Europe, pays to the foreigner the enormous sum of above twenty million sterling each year for butter, half of which comes from that country of small holders, Denmark—a country only about half the size, and with about half the population, of Ireland.

In poultry-farming—an occupation suitable for women—there is almost an unbounded scope. In 1904 we imported poultry to the value of upwards of one million sterling, and of eggs nearly seven millions.

It is difficult to grasp the extent of an industry when expressed by such large sums. It might be realized somewhat by a statement of the fact that our average daily imports of eggs throughout the year (Sundays included) are about six and a half millions in number. When we remember that during some months in the year English new-laid eggs realize in our cities as much as two shillings per dozen, and that the prices of poultry are fairly good, it seems evident that this industry, if carried on in an improved and a scientific

manner, could be made a profitable one, and certainly it is one capable of almost indefinite extension.¹

The cultivation of tomatoes, which we import to the value of above one million sterling per annum, is also suitable for women. The same may also be said with regard to the keeping and rearing of rabbits, the annual imports of which are valued at more than three-quarters of a million pounds.²

¹ The average price of eggs throughout the year 1904 in the whole of Ireland was 6s. 7½d. per great hundred (120). "Agricultural Statistics," Ireland, Cd. 2598, 1905.

² An experienced agriculturist writes: "In my opinion the idea of work (by women) on the farm being degrading is a bit of foolish sentimentality. . . . There is a good deal of light work on an allotment, and even a woman who has two or three children can often find an hour or two for weeding or gathering crops and benefit her health by outdoor exercise. . . . I do not hesitate to say that the success of the small holding system will be to a great extent dependent upon the co-operation of labourers' wives and families." ("A Study of Small Holdings," by W. E. Bear.) In connection with this point an interesting incident happened during the visit of the British Dairy Farmers' Association to France in 1903. On visiting a creamery in the Department of Eure, a woman was seen working in an adjoining field with a harrow and a fine pair of horses. I was asked by the farmers present, "Would you like to see English women toiling on the land in this way?" I replied, "Let us make inquiries into the case." We found that the woman, a widow, was tilling her own land (20 acres). The horses and implements were her own, as well as the house she lived in. She was strong, healthy, and intelligent, and evidently a good cultivator. We learnt from the manager of the creamery that she was well-to-do, and had money in the funds. I then answered the farmers' question to the effect that I wished we had many in England working on the land under these conditions, instead of toiling for wages in factories and workshops; to which most of the farmers assented. These visits to other countries by practical men are the best means of overcoming insular prejudices. An excursion of the same Association was made in a previous year to Switzerland. During the journey, peasant proprietary, "three acres and a cow," etc., were the subjects of hostile criticism and much merriment. At the end of a week's sojourn in the country a farmer, who farmed in England above 1100 acres, expressed to me his astonishment at what he had seen, and wound up by saying, "I have come to the conclusion that I will never again say a word against peasant proprietary."

It is a well-worn argument that the foreign peasant proprietor succeeds because he is more thrifty and frugal than our own labourers. But his thrift and frugality are the result, not the cause, of his position. Adam Smith remarks: "A person who can acquire no property can have no other interest but to eat as much, and to labour as little, as possible."

No doubt the continental peasant has a rooted habit of thrift, which too often degenerates into the vice of avarice. For the sake of adding to his savings he very often practises an extreme penuriousness and self-denial. The dilapidated condition of his working-dress, with that of his family, is too often taken by the casual traveller as a sign of poverty and want, which it is not.

This superficial view is one of the causes of the misunderstanding which, to a large extent, exists in this country as to the condition of the peasantry on the Continent. The present writer has, on some occasions, accompanied these ill-clad peasants to their homes, where a different state of things was found. On Sundays and fête-days these same people appear in their holiday clothes, the men in ill-fitting but substantial suits, and the women—in some parts of Europe—in their picturesque native costumes, with head-gear of silver ornaments, etc.

A few years ago he watched the proceedings in a well-attended market in a small town in Switzerland. Among the notes made on the spot he finds the following: "These shabby-looking peasants are buying and selling cows, sheep, goats, pigs, etc. etc. When paying for their purchases they produce old, well-worn pocket-books with rolls of bank-notes, and shabby purses well filled with cash. This shows the

substantial position of men whom a casual observer would pronounce to be not worth a penny."

On this aspect of the question John Stuart Mill ("Political Economy") states: "It (peasant proprietary) is no less propitious to the moral virtue of prudence, temperance, and self-control. Day labourers, where the labouring class mainly consist of them, are usually improvident. They spend carelessly to the full extent of their means and let the future shift for itself. . . . The tendency of peasant proprietors is to the contrary extreme; to take even too much thought for to-morrow."

The late Lord Wantage, whose opinions on another point have been already quoted, in his evidence before the Small Holdings Committee, 1889, strongly advocated "a large extension of freehold small holdings." Even from an economic point of view he contended they were good, because they yielded produce much larger, and in some cases twice as much as that got from large farms. But besides the economic, he gave his opinion that "there were strong political reasons why efforts should be made to multiply the owners of land." In reply to Question 1834 he said:—

"I may remind you of what M. Thiers said about small holders. He said that 'every acre of land in the hands of a small holder furnishes a musket for the protection of property.' That was M. Thiers' view of the advantages of small holders as you get them in France. There is no more staunch and conservative set of men than the present farmers of France, and I have no doubt they have saved the country frequently,"

The evidence of Mr. Elias Squarey before the same Committee is very valuable, not only on account of his

general experience, but of his close personal knowledge of the class at present existing in considerable numbers in the south of England. They were, he said, industrious and flourishing men who passed through agricultural depression better than the larger farmers did, and, he added, "they were good for every one." Mr. Squarey, however, was not in favour of the creation of this class by means of State aid, but his objection was one of principle only. He told the Committee that he would be happy to "see any experiment result successfully," and said: "I should like to see the creation of a million small holdings in England."

But it is hopeless to expect that, under our present system of land tenure, there can be any considerable increase in the number of peasant proprietors except by the means of State aid. In cases where men hold a few acres of land as tenants—and there are large numbers who do—their rents are very heavy as compared with those paid by large farmers. These high rents can only be paid by extra produce got off the soil through the untiring industry of the cultivators. The men are, in fact, working for rent. There may be cases where such men—under special circumstances—are charged farmers' rents, plus any outlay made by the owner, but the present writer, during a long experience, has found that, as a rule, these small holders pay from twice to four times as much as the large farmer pays, and in some cases still more. Some time ago he visited two small holdings in a midland county. One of them, about six acres, was rented by two men at five pounds per acre. It was exceedingly well cultivated, bearing crops of beans, peas, potatoes, winter onions, and cabbages. As a contrast, on the other side of the road, there was a field (part of a farm)

about twice the size, which was in a most foul condition, being covered with thistles and other rubbish. Now, supposing that the farmer paid one pound per acre rent, and that he and the small holder each grew one acre, say, of peas, the latter would be handicapped to the extent of four pounds for a single acre, which is a profit in itself. The other case was that of a man who held three acres at three pounds per acre, while a large farm practically adjoining was let at seven-and-sixpence per acre. So that the small man in this case was charged eight times the rent the farmer paid.

The "land hunger" must indeed be great to induce men to pay such large rents and to think themselves fortunate in being able to get land at all. No doubt the six acres the two men rented at five pounds per acre were worth five times as much per acre as the adjoining field. But it was the industry and skill of the men that made it so, and the question naturally arises, Why should their industry and skill be taxed to the extent of £24 per annum? The position is best illustrated by thus stating individual cases, provided that the cases are not solitary ones, but are representative of a large class which exists.

In any scheme for the re-creation of a peasant proprietary such men as these should be sought out and encouraged in every way. They should be dealt with in the same spirit as recruiting and other means of national defence are dealt with, not altogether for the benefit of the men themselves, but for the good and safety of the country. Were these cultivators thus looked upon and their children properly educated and had prospects connected with the soil provided for them, there can be little doubt that migration to

the towns would cease and the current of migration would be turned the other way.

Schemes for emigrating men and for placing them on the land at a cost of £300 per family are looked upon with favour, but schemes for helping these quiet, unobtrusive self-helpers receive scant attention.

Denmark is frequently quoted as an example of what might be done in England in the way of small cultivation, co-operation, etc. But it is impossible to do in England what is carried out successfully in Denmark, because the two systems are totally different. In Denmark every encouragement and assistance is given to small holders. Consolidation of holdings into large farms is forbidden by law. A little under 5 per cent of the whole annual revenue of the country is devoted to the improvement of agriculture. If the same proportion of the annual revenue of the United Kingdom were used for the same purpose, about seven millions sterling would be placed at the disposal of the Board of Agriculture, instead of the poor sum of about £136,000.

Those who wish to see what can be done in the way of intensive culture by small holders should visit the Channel Islands and examine the farms there. The islands are only seventy-five square miles in area, but had a population at the last census of nearly 100,000 persons, being far more thickly populated than any other country in Europe. The people are prosperous, and their prosperity arises almost wholly from the superior yield of the soil. From notes taken on the spot a few years ago a typical Channel Island farmer may be thus described:—

“Mr. — is a hale, cheery-looking man. His house is a good one and comfortably furnished. In one

of the two sitting-rooms there is to be noticed an ample supply of books. The farm is one of forty-five acres, which is above the average size. The farmer dresses as an ordinary labourer, works on the land, and is assisted by his wife, son, and one hired man. He has twenty-five head of stock and three horses. He manures the land heavily, using large quantities of seaweed, besides stable and artificial manure. Cow-houses and outbuildings are plain and good, and great care is taken of the liquid manure, which is all drawn into a large tank underground, from which it is pumped up as required. The cows when in the field are tethered. This makes extra work, as they have to be shifted two or three times a day; but it is economical, as it prevents trampling down the grass and obliges the cattle to eat the inferior grass as well as the best, etc. Peasant proprietors here, as elsewhere, know the meaning of the old Spanish proverb that 'a cow has five mouths.'"

During a visit of the British Dairy Farmers' Association to the Channel Islands in May, 1905, an address was given before the Association by Mr. Collenette on the subject of cultivation in Guernsey. In this interesting paper it is stated that the land in the island capable of cultivation is less than twelve thousand acres; that this acreage is cultivated by eighteen hundred persons, the average size of the holdings being about six and a half acres. If the average were equal to the average size of farms in England, then the whole of the island would be in the hands of about 200 farmers instead of 1800.

The high price of land is stated as a proof of the success of agriculture in Guernsey. Inferior land is worth £80 per acre, and good farm land £100 to

£150. The yield per acre of all produce is larger—in some cases very much larger—than in England. This is accounted for by the intensity of the culture of the soil of Guernsey. After giving due weight to the small difference in climate and to other considerations, Mr. Collenette sums up his very exhaustive treatment of the subject by saying :—

“The real reasons of Guernsey’s success are to be found in the smallness of the holdings and the energy of the men.”¹

Taking the opinions of the most eminent writers in every country on the subject, and the actual experience and results of the different systems of cultivation throughout the world, it is clear that if peasant farming is again to have sway in the rural economy of England, it must be based on *ownership*. As Adam Smith puts it: “A small proprietor, however, who knows every part of his little territory, who views it with all the affection which property, especially small property, naturally inspires, and who upon that account takes pleasure not only in cultivating but in adorning it, is generally of all improvers the most industrious, the most intelligent, and the most successful.”—“Wealth of Nations” (Vol. II, p. 137, 11th edition, 1805).

¹ These and other notes were taken at the meeting, but the whole address, which is a lengthy one, is now printed and published in pamphlet form—“Agriculture and Horticulture,” by A. Collenette, Consulting Agricultural Chemist. (Fredk. Clarke, Guernsey.)

CHAPTER XVI

RISKS TO THE STATE AND OTHER OBJECTIONS

HAVING described the provisions of the two parts of the Land Purchase Bill (Occupying Ownership and Peasant Proprietary), it becomes necessary to see how the provisions of the Bill, if put into operation, would affect, not only the parties immediately concerned, but the interests of the general community, and also to consider some of the objections to the measure which have been put forward.

It has recently been stated by a prominent member of the present Ministry that the "Land Purchase Bill would involve too great a risk to the State for the Government to undertake." It can hardly be expected that this statement will be regarded as satisfactory or final. In dealing with the question of risk there is one consideration which claims a foremost place, namely, the position of the country in the time of war. If it can be shown that the probable, or even the possible result of the operation of the Bill would be to increase the supply of home-grown food so that it would be sufficient, without supplies from abroad, to feed the people even for a few months, instead of being exhausted, as under the present system it would be, in as many weeks, then, from the point of view of national defence alone it would be a wise policy for the State to take any small money risk which may be involved in carrying out the measure.

The State has already, in the case of Ireland, undertaken a liability for an amount at least ten times as great as that named in the Bill. It has done this, not for the love of any one class, but in the public interest, with the object of securing, or attempting to secure, contentment and prosperity in Ireland. It would seem but fair that the English farmer should have at least some of the advantages and opportunities so liberally conferred on the Irish tenant. A Parliamentary Return states that the total estimated purchase-money of estates sold or offered for sale to the Irish Commissioners up to 18 March, 1905, was £19,115,830.¹ In order to quicken the sales of land to tenants Mr. Walter Long has made such liberal terms with the Treasury as will secure that at the end of 1906 the British Government will have advanced 23 millions sterling for the purposes of the Irish Act of 1903.² While this is being done for Ireland we are told that to advance the comparatively small sum named in the Land Purchase Bill for the benefit of English tenants "would involve too great a risk to the State."

Of course there are risks connected with every undertaking, and in this, as in the Irish case, whatever risks there are will rest with the State alone. But experience shows that these risks are infinitesimal. The many thousands of Irish tenants who have bought their farms under the purchase clauses of the various Irish Land Acts, have punctually paid their instalments. After many years' experience, the loss to the State up to now has been too trifling to be taken into account. It is not for a moment to be held that the

¹ "Report of the Estates Commissioners" (1905), Cd. 2471.

² See "Times." Letter to Sir John Colomb, 9 September, 1905.

British farmer is less able or less honest than the Irish.

But take the worst possibility. Suppose that adversity overtakes an occupying owner, and he is obliged to sell his farm, and that, times being bad, the price realized is low. The farm is bought by a purchaser, no matter how low the price, subject to payment of the instalments, and that is all the State is concerned with. So long as the instalments are paid, the State receives interest for capital advanced, and the sinking fund is operating with the effect that every year's payment diminishes the amount owing. The debt to the State is lessening, while the security remains the same; that is, a first charge on the holding till every farthing is paid off. It is not like advancing money on commercial undertakings which are liable to a failure involving total loss. The security here—with a yearly increasing margin—is on the land, and that ever remains.

Putting aside, therefore, the Irish precedent, it is difficult to see how the argument that the Bill "would involve too great a risk to the State" can be fairly maintained.

With regard to the farmer, seeing that the whole of the purchase-money is advanced, he risks none of his capital. Every year's instalment which he pays, instead of being mere rent, goes to increase the value (to him) of the holding, and all the improvements he may make are his own.

It is frequently urged that the State would be a "harsh landlord," and could not, like an ordinary landowner, postpone the payment of a year's rent on account of bad seasons or other valid cause.

First of all, the State, under the Bill, would neither

be a landlord, nor have the powers and rights of a landlord. The State would be simply the receiver, for a limited time, of well-secured charges. These charges may be called quit-rents, to which a large number of freeholds are permanently subject. But to meet the case referred to (which ought to be met), the Bill names no definite number of years at the end of which the repayment of the advance must be completed. To do so would be to make it imperative that each year's instalment should be promptly paid. The Board of Agriculture, therefore, could, and no doubt would, on good cause being shown—such as an exceptionally bad season or a special outlay on improvements—give the required relief, and would not incur the slightest risk in doing so.

The English farmer has so long been in the position of a mere tenant, that he has become more or less accustomed to the sort of feudatory subjection which that position necessarily involves. He has learnt too much to see eye to eye with the landlord, to be dependent on his will, and to put up with the "good understanding" on which, as a yearly tenant, he has mainly to rely.

Sir James Caird, in a sentence already quoted, declared some years ago that this "good understanding" could not remain for long a sufficient protection for the British farmer. This opinion he gave "with the responsibility of forty years and with a general knowledge, both personally and officially, of the agriculture of the United Kingdom, and of the relations between landlord and tenant."

It is evident that a mere "understanding" must be unsatisfactory as regards a business in which the interests of parties are so opposed and their powers so

unequal that real freedom of contract cannot exist. There are, no doubt, numerous instances of tenants-at-will of the same family having occupied farms for several generations; but that does not affect the argument. It is the possibilities of the position that have to be taken into account.

An understanding with a good landlord who has plenty of money might work ever so well; but it affords no security against change of ownership, needs of owners, revaluation of estates, and other circumstances, as many ruined and half-ruined farmers in the past have found to their cost. Of course, during years of continued depression the farmer, to a certain extent, can have his own way; but we are contemplating better times for agriculture, and with better times the uncertainties and drawbacks referred to would again become operative.

The Duke of Bedford makes some pertinent remarks on this point. He speaks of the owner who "had squandered or stunted his inheritance," and goes on to say: "Great estates may endure from generation to generation, provided always that the owner is capable and the management sound. But with the advent of a fool or a spendthrift comes bankruptcy and sale."¹

It has been pointed out as an objection to occupying ownership that repairs now done by the landlord would have to be done by the farmer when he became owner of the farm. No doubt a landlord in many cases thinks himself fortunate if, after paying for repairs and other farm outgoings, two-thirds of the nominal rent finds its way into his pocket. But these

¹ "The Story of a Great Agricultural Estate," by the Duke of Bedford. (Murray.)

farm works are on quite a different scale when carried out by a cultivating owner. Lord Harrowby¹ estimates that for estates, in a fairly good position to start with, at least 20 per cent must be deducted from the gross rental for general upkeep, including expenses of agent, fire insurance, and dilapidations. But of course the price which a purchaser would pay would be based on the net rental. This difference between the gross and net rentals would be for the benefit of the purchaser, and his yearly instalment being less than his previous rent, a margin would exist for the purpose of the upkeep of his holding. Substantial improvements must be considered separately, seeing that for the outlay on these the tenant is charged as a rule 5 per cent, and often more.

Small repairs the cultivating owner would get done by his own staff; larger repairs he would get done as cheaply as possible; structural alterations or new structures he would have carried out to his own plan, exactly to suit his wants, and at a minimum cost. Moreover, the product of his outlay, little or much, would remain his own.

The late Lord Wantage, who was an ardent advocate of the principle of men owning the land they cultivate, said, with regard to this point: "In my own case I am certain that the buildings I put up, which are practically little better, would cost me twice as much as the buildings that would be put up by a small proprietor on his own land. Then, in the event of the slightest repairs having to be made—if, for instance, a tile falls off or a gate gets out of order—the tenant sends for a carpenter at five shillings a day, whereas a

¹ If all the outgoings of large estates were reckoned it would probably be found that the average was much higher than Lord Harrowby's estimate.

man on his own land would do the repairs himself for nothing."¹

The Duke of Bedford, in the extremely instructive book referred to, gives for the year 1895 the difference between the nominal amount of his farm rents and the actual receipts:—

	Nominal Rents.			Actual Receipts.		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
The Beds and Bucks estates	29,065	0	9	16,131	3	8
The Thorney estates	26,196	0	0	17,567	17	6
	<u>£55,261 0 9</u>			<u>£33,699 1 2</u>		

The following statement is added, which presumably refers to the time of writing (1897): "So far as the Bedfordshire and Bucks estates are concerned, the reduced rental is not now sufficient to meet the necessary outgoings. . . . There is no net rent which can reach my pocket."

The details given show only this—that a man with other sources of income is enabled to carry out his ideas of liberality, benevolence, and charity in the management of his large estates. But only a few landlords, even if they had the will, can afford to act in a like manner. Such management, moreover, is not in accordance with business principles, and is not applicable, and ought not to be applicable, to the conduct of what is by far the largest industry in the kingdom.

The Duke rightly complains of the ever-increasing burdens imposed on the land, and especially of the

¹ Evidence before the Select Committee on Small Holdings, 1889.

The writer has, on occasions, noted a proprietor on the Continent doing things on his homestead which the tenant-farmer in England has no inducement to do and would never dream of doing. The latter has not that feeling of ownership which leads a man not only to improve, but often to embellish, his home and surroundings.

increased rating that immediately follows any enterprise which results in improved production.¹ He hardly speaks too strongly when he says that both local and imperial authorities "worry the land as though its very presence was a nuisance." But this is the natural outcome of the present system of land tenure. A large party in the House of Commons do not reflect on the connection which agriculture has with the general welfare of the country. With them the land interest is synonymous with what they call "landlordism," and their policy is fashioned accordingly. They oppose the Agricultural Ratings Act, not from any intention of injuring the farmer, but because they regard the measure as one for "landlord relief." Further, for this opposition many of them

¹ The general public do not realize how badly the farmer is treated in this respect. The commercial classes would resist a proposal that they should pay local rates on the capital invested in their undertakings. But this is practically the principle on which the farmer, to a large extent, is rated. If a manufacturer by skill and enterprise should increase the value of his business without enlarging his premises, his local rates remain the same. Should the farmer by the same qualities increase the value of his land, he is liable, as the Duke of Bedford points out, to an increase of rates. By the Agricultural Rates Act he is relieved from a part of the imposition, but the Act is only a recognition—not an abolition—of the injustice to which he is subject. The farmer, in common fairness, should be rated on precisely the same principle as that on which the manufacturer, shopkeeper, and merchant are rated. As an example, roughly stated, but which the general reader will understand, a tradesman carrying on business in premises rated at £50 per year pays rates on those premises only, though his stock may be worth £1000, and he enjoys all the benefits accruing from the expenditure of the rates. A farmer in the same parish whose premises may have a rental value of £50, and whose land apart from the premises is valued at £300 a year, pays in rates about four times as much as the tradesman. The injustice is keenly felt, now that the county rates have increased so much and are increasing so fast. The burdens on our agrarian industry—rates, taxes, tithes, land and income tax, duties, etc.—form a considerable percentage on the output of the land. They are far heavier, in most cases twice as heavy, as those on the same industry in any other country in Europe.

will claim, and receive, credit from their constituencies. Governments find that an agricultural question is a negligible quantity. A Butter Bill, of the utmost importance to the dairy farmer, has dawdled through several sessions, and it is still uncertain when it will become law. In the country the same apathy exists. Among those who elect our county councils there are so very few who have any direct and personal interest in the land that the fortunes of agriculture are regarded with indifference.

But if on the great estate referred to there were one hundred owners (yeomen) instead of one, if in addition there were several hundreds of peasant proprietors and a corresponding number of agricultural labourers, owning—not renting—bits of land, and if this change were introduced throughout the country—as it easily might be—a different state of things would be seen. There would then be a real agricultural party, with a force behind it; a party whose pockets would be directly touched by the action either of Parliament or of the local authority. They would all be in the same boat, and pulling in the same direction.

Those who have followed the discussions on agricultural subjects in the French or German Parliament know that the agrarian party there is powerful enough even to be aggressive. It is inconceivable that a Butter Bill introduced into the Rigsdag of Denmark, in the interests of the Danish dairy farmer, would be delayed a single day more than was absolutely necessary. There are too many owners of farms with too large a voting power, to allow any delay in a matter which affects their interests.

From an economic point of view, any business man

would conclude that a farm in possession of an owner, who knows every inch of his land, and whose eye is on every operation connected with it, could be managed at probably half the cost in proportion to the expense of management of a huge estate. In arguing this matter, it must be borne in mind that there is no question of competing for trade among British agriculturists. The demand for the productions of the soil is practically unlimited, and the sole question is how to meet it. The only competition is with the foreigner. A powerful agrarian party in England, while knowing that it would be impossible to get protection—in the old sense of the term—for their industry, would very properly ask for—and would probably secure—measures of *defence* against whatever is shown to be unfair and illegitimate in foreign competition.

Every attempt to protect the tenant farmer by legislation has more or less failed. In Ireland dual ownership was tried, with disastrous effects on the landlord, and with no ultimate good to the tenant. The legal fixing of rents was almost equally unsatisfactory. As far as Ireland is concerned, we have had statesmen who—discarding the policy of tinkering—were bold enough and wise enough, by the Irish Land Purchase Act, 1903, to adopt the only possible solution of the difficulty.

In England the various Agricultural Holdings Acts 1875–1900 have practically failed in their object. Even the last Act (1900) is regarded by nearly all of the best farmers as quite insufficient.¹ These Acts

¹ The late Mr. Clare Sewell Read, a most competent authority on this subject, wrote as follows: "I contend that the valuers of Norfolk, instead of having carried out the Act as they ought to have done, have avoided

have such conditions attached to them—claims, notices, counter-claims, valuations, arbitrations, reserve for the “inherent quality of the soil,” etc.—as to make a prudent man hesitate, on account of expense and uncertainty, before putting them into operation.

Nevertheless, this legislation is of great value, for the reason that, whereas in former times the landlord claimed practically everything placed on the land, the tenant has now a recognized legal right to certain things that belong to him, and he is thus enabled to make terms on leaving his farm. At a recent meeting of the Central Chamber of Agriculture the following resolution was moved: “That the Agricultural Holdings Act being the basis on which farming is conducted, should be so amended that the capital which the farmer invests in his holding is as safe as if the holding belonged to him, and that nothing should stand in the way of the tenant making the land produce all it can.” This resolution is well conceived, but it is absolutely impossible to carry it into law. The question is full of complications. A farmer may be a man of good judgment or bad, and to enact that he should receive compensation on leaving his farm for all that he has done, without the consent of his landlord, in the way of what he considers to be improvements would lead to difficulties and certainly to litigation. Some of the outlay he had made might be considered by an incoming tenant, as well as by the landlord, as useless or of small value. Other work, such as the planting of orchards, etc., would require

it as much as they could; and when it is applied, the result is, that instead of a tenant leaving his farm in the highest state of fertility, he is bound in his own interest to leave it passably foul and miserably poor.” (“Mark Lane Express,” 7 March, 1904.)

some years to show whether or not it was worth paying for at all. Such provisions as these are of the nature of dual control over the farm, which is bad for all concerned. It must be borne in mind also that there are unfair tenants as well as unfair landlords. In many districts there are men who do anything but justice to the land they occupy, and though they might be made liable for bad farming, yet it would be difficult for a landlord to get any compensation from such men at the end of the tenancy. After the most stringent law had been made in favour of a yearly occupier, the landlord would remain master of the position through his power to raise the rent of an inconvenient tenant or by giving him notice to quit. An examination of the subject in all its bearings must inevitably lead to the conclusion that it passes the wit of man to frame a measure, under the landlord and tenant system, that shall avoid injustice and loss either to landlord or tenant. The Land Purchase Bill would effectually dispose of all these difficulties. Indeed, under it, they would not arise.

These difficulties are dealt with at length in the recent Report of the Committee on the "Fruit Industry of Great Britain."¹ This Committee seems to have spared no pains in carrying out its work. The witnesses were carefully selected and gave

¹ Cd. 2589, 1905. The Committee was appointed by Lord Onslow in December, 1903. It was composed of Mr. Griffith-Boscawen, M.P. (Chairman); Mr. Radcliffe-Cook; Mr. J. M. Hodge; Colonel Long, M.P.; Mr. G. Monro; Mr. Pickering, M.A., F.R.S.; Dr. W. Somerville; Mr. E. Veriton; and the Rev. W. Wilkes, M.A. (Secretary of the Royal Horticultural Society).

The reference to the Committee was "To report upon the present condition of Fruit Culture in Great Britain, and to consider whether any further measures might with advantage be taken for its promotion and encouragement."

evidence of a most practical kind. The Committee was not satisfied with receiving evidence, but its members visited the principal fruit-growing centres and saw for themselves the condition of the industry.

The present land tenure and its effect on the fruit industry were subjects that received great attention during the inquiry. Under the Market Gardeners' Compensation Act a tenant of a holding, which he rents, by agreement, for the purpose of a market garden, may plant fruit and put up the necessary buildings without the consent of his landlord, and at the end of his tenancy is entitled to compensation. Many experienced fruit-growers, some of whom were tenants, insisted that these Acts, instead of encouraging the fruit trade, were a deterrent to it, because landlords refused to let land for fruit-growing, so as not to become liable for large sums in the form of compensation. "On the other hand," the Report points out, "in the case of a fruit plantation, the tenant increases immensely the value of the land by his skill, his enterprise, and the expenditure of large sums of money, all of which would become the property of the landlord unless there were a proper scheme of compensation, while, if his consent to each separate improvement had to be obtained the tenant would be seriously hampered in the extension of his business."

After carefully weighing the evidence, and fully considering the various methods for adjusting, in a satisfactory manner, the claims of both landlord and tenant, the Committee came to the conclusion that "The ideal solution of the difficulty would be that every fruit-grower should be the owner of the soil," a conclusion in which they were abundantly supported

by the evidence placed before them. Accordingly the Committee unanimously recommended "That a Bill should be passed for facilitating the purchase of small holdings by tenants with assistance from public funds, somewhat on the lines of the measure brought in by the Rt. Hon. Jesse Collings, M.P., in the session of 1904."

Now it may be presumed that the object of a Government in appointing a committee to consider and report upon a question, is to ascertain the kind of legislation it is necessary to adopt in order to remove admitted difficulties in connection with that question. This Report contains a positive recommendation stated in unqualified terms, and it remains to be seen if it will be adopted and carried into law.

Objections to the Land Purchase Bill were raised in the Central Chamber of Agriculture to the effect that tenants will not wish to buy their farms so long as they can rent them. But they would not be obliged to do so, as, like the Irish Act, there is nothing compulsory in the Bill. The man who farms from "hand to mouth," getting all he can out of the land and putting as little as possible into it, would most likely decline to buy. So also would the man who farms (if it can be called farming) as "a lodger," keeping on as long as he can, exhausting the land.¹ But it is difficult to believe that the real farmer,

¹ I was visiting a farmer of this class some time ago, and remarked on the foul condition of the land. The reply I got was, "We drop the seed into the ground and take what happens to come." This kind of farming is too frequently to be met with. I have watched for some years past a special case of this bad husbandry, and seen the process of deterioration of the land. A farm of about 160 acres in a midland county, which used to be in the hands of a good farmer, who had always from 50 to 60 acres under cultivation, was about five years ago taken by a man of the class referred to. Gradually the land was laid down into grass, and at the

whose love of the soil is inborn, would not jump at the opportunity of being able to feel that the farm he cultivates was his own.

The best way, however, to deal with statements of this kind is to bring forward typical cases wherewith to refute them.

In September, 1905, an estate in Worcestershire was sold by auction.¹

The following letter shows that the tenants of the lots sold were most anxious—as might be supposed—to be able to buy their farms:—

“ October 6, 1905.

“ I now have much pleasure in enclosing you a copy of the sale particulars, together with the prices realized for the respective farms.

“ The majority of the tenants had been in occupation of their holdings from twenty-five to fifty years, and the rent they were paying was an exceedingly moderate one, in consequence of which the prices realized do not show much return as an investment. Nearly every tenant on the Estate was anxious not to leave his farm or to have his rent unduly raised; and I am quite convinced, from conversation I had with nearly all of them, that if the same facilities were in existence in England as there are in Ireland, whereby they could borrow the purchase-money at a low rate of interest, that nine out of ten of them would have

present time the farmer keeps one man, three horses, and a number of cows. Last year a few acres badly cultivated and poorly manured were sown with wheat and oats, but the crops were so poor that some of them were ploughed in, being not worth gathering. The large rick-yard which used to be so well filled is now empty, and the staddles and other appliances stand useless. In about two years more the holding will be so far ruined that it will take some years to bring it into heart again. Then, no doubt, the man will leave and take another farm.

¹ I am indebted to the courtesy of the head of the firm to which the sale was entrusted—Messrs. Ludlow & Briscoe, Birmingham—for particulars of the lots that were sold.

become owners as well as occupiers. I have had dealings with a great many large estates in recent years, and it has always been a source of great regret to me to have to break up these large properties and yet to give the tenants no opportunity of buying their farms in consequence of their not being able to borrow the purchase-money and repay the same on easy terms.

“Where a farm is in the occupation of the owner, my experience is, generally speaking, that it is much better worked and the land is made to produce more than where the farm is simply rented and there is no fixity of tenure. “(Signed) WALTER LUDLOW.”

The following table contains the particulars referred to :—

Lot No.	Area.			Present Rental.			Price sold at,
	a.	r.	p.	£	s.	d.	including timber.
6 .	180	3	34	90	6	0	2576
„ „ 10 .	38	1	20	34	5	6	736
„ „ 9 .	51	1	34	60	11	0	1323
„ „ 12 .	115	3	35	67	10	0	2231
„ „ 14 .	28	2	31	32	0	0	1010
„ „ 15 .	138	3	8	90	11	0	2170
„ „ 17 .	119	0	8	85	19	6	1570
„ „ 18 .	94	0	12	62	18	6	1573
„ „ 30 .	7	1	8	11	10	0	320
„ „ 39 .	11	2	25	5	0	0	200
„ „ 31 .	20	1	9	10	0	0	359
„ „ 32 .	31	3	39	30	0	0	536
„ „ 38 .	5	2	30	3	0	0	115
„ „ 33 .	97	2	18	56	1	9	1200
„ „ 35 .	157	3	22	76	0	0	2000
„ „ 36 .	113	2	4	66	3	6	1950
„ „ 40 .	14	1	28	7	0	0	315
„ „ 41 .	10	2	28	5	0	0	251
„ „ 42 .	155	3	25	72	13	0	2200
	<u>1392</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>£866</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>£22,635</u>

As regards these farmers, had the Land Purchase Bill been law, or had they been tenants in Ireland, they would without difficulty have become owners of the farms they had occupied for so long, and which, presumably, they had well cultivated.

Another estate of a similar size was sold in Devonshire in 1903. Omitting the mansion, with land, parks, etc., and other parts of the property not suitable for occupying ownerships, the particulars of the holdings sold are as follows:—¹

Lot	No.	2	Area.			Present Rental.			Price sold at,		
			a.	r.	p.	£	s.	d.	including timber.		
								£.			
	2	.	565	2	8	...	449	10	0	...	8150
"	"	3	182	3	0	...	206	0	0	...	4052
"	"	5	18	0	10	...	26	15	0	...	510
"	"	6	6	0	6	...	7	5	0	...	189
"	"	7	24	3	22	...	58	5	0	...	1112
"	"	11	263	1	32	...	165	0	0	...	3386
"	"	12	242	3	14	...	271	10	0	...	5045
"	"	15	36	2	15	...	33	5	0	...	689
"	"	18	8	1	17	...	9	5	0	...	204
"	"	19	293	2	20	...	306	10	6	...	6000
"	"	24	185	0	15	...	172	10	0	...	3200
"	"	20	27	0	17	...	39	5	0	...	823
"	"	21	4	0	36	...	6	0	0	...	144
			<u>1858</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>12</u>		<u>£1751</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		<u>£33,504</u>

These details are given to bring home to the general reader the uncertainties to which the farmer

¹ An account of this sale appeared in the Press, but the figures given are from a copy of the "Sales Particulars," for which the writer is indebted to the courtesy of Messrs. J. and H. Drew, surveyors, Exeter. For the present writer there is a special interest attached to this sale. One of his parents was born on the estate, and all his very numerous relatives worked on it (or on the adjoining one), either as labourers on the land or in trades connected therewith. The wages of agricultural labourers in those days were, for men, 8s. per week, women 9d. per day, girls 6d. per day, with, in all cases, an allowance of cider.

is liable by changes of ownership such as are taking place almost every day throughout England; and to illustrate the manner in which—under the provisions of the Land Purchase Bill—land would gradually pass into the hands of cultivating owners.

What is most striking about these sales is the low price of the land. There is nothing like it in any other country in Europe. It is in itself a complete condemnation of our present land system. The land itself is good; on the farms sold there are suitable dwelling-houses, large and commodious byres, out-houses, and other farm buildings, on some of them orchards of apples and other fruit, and yet the price of the whole—above 3200 acres—works out at about £17 an acre. These reductions in prices are generally regarded by the public as losses affecting landlords only. A shop or a house standing idle is a loss to the private owner, but a derelict field or a half-cultivated farm is surely a reduction of the assets of the nation, affecting every man, woman, and child in the kingdom. To work out the problem accurately the idea must be kept in mind that land is different from all other property, and that in it the whole people have inalienable rights.¹

Some objections have been made to the Land Purchase Bill, on the grounds that it contains no compulsory provisions. These objections, however, come from politicians who look with small favour on legisla-

¹ "Last week an estate comprising 512 acres of arable and 87 acres of pasture land, and residence and farm buildings, situate near Louth, Lincolnshire, was offered by public auction, and the highest bid obtained for it publicly was £6750. In 1874 the late owner refused £36,000 for the same estate. . . . About a year ago an estate in the well-known Lincolnshire grazing district of Saltfleet came into the market. One lot which made £650 in 1872 went for £385; another, which made £1000

tion (such as Allotment and Small Holdings Acts) unless it contains compulsion in some form or another. This arises from the antagonistic feeling towards "landlordism" already referred to—a feeling which creates a desire to *compel* the landlord to do something. But there is no necessity for compulsion in transactions which are in the interests of all parties concerned in them. Those who read the advertisements in newspapers and follow the proceedings in Tokenhouse Yard will see that there is plenty of land in the market. The numerous offers of estates for sale—large and small—contain notices such as the following: "All the farms are let," "Homesteads in good condition," "To be sold at moderate price," "To pay a good interest," "Rents low," etc. etc., and now and then there is a significant suggestion that the "rentals might be improved."¹ In these advertisements "sport"

in the former year, went for £410; another for £380, which thirty-two years before had made £570; another for £500 which in 1872 made £880; while only £80 was bid for another which in the first-named year made £600. . . . Two other lots were sold for £195 and £200 respectively, which in 1861 and 1863 made £450 and £545. . . . A farm at Binbrook which in 1881 cost £6000 was sold twenty years later for £3000; a small holding at Moortown which in 1860 cost £1650 was sold last year for £500; another at Barlings, which cost £5500, made £2100," etc.—"Standard" newspaper, 2 November, 1905.

¹ Pages of these advertisements appear every week. To quote one or two examples: "Leicestershire. Three hundred acres first-rate grazing land with farmhouses and premises in excellent order and let to good tenants, to be sold to pay a fair rate of interest" ("The Field," 27 February, 1904). "Wiltshire. An attractive estate of about six hundred acres to be sold. It produces an income of nearly £1700 and would be sold to pay nearly five per cent. The land is at the present time considerably underlet and the purchaser could easily obtain a larger percentage on the purchase-money if wished" ("The County Gentleman," 27 February, 1904). "Three thousand acres in Norfolk. A grand sporting domain . . . considered to be one of the best shooting properties in the eastern counties. The estate is well let, and can be purchased to pay a good rate of interest" ("County Gentleman," 24 June, 1905).

gets an undue prominence. Facilities for sport are named, in numbers of cases, as the chief inducements offered to purchasers. The foremost place is given to such statements as the following: "Shooting good; hunting with several packs," "Good shooting, hunting, and fishing," "Choice sporting estate," "Shooting exceptional," etc. The yield of food and other agricultural produce in which the general community has such a large interest is quite a secondary matter. This is another point well worth the farmer's consideration. As a yeoman, owning his own land, he would be a free man as regards sport; as a tenant, whatever he may enjoy legally or by way of favour, his position is one of humiliation.

Many landlords, no doubt, object to the creation of independent ownership, lest they should not, in the matter of sport, have the same control over owners as they now have over tenants. But this objection is a groundless one so far as reasonable recreation goes. The love of sport is inborn in the English people. It is marked among farmers as a class, and exists among the rural population generally.

There is a further matter that deserves attention. Public lands are continually being sold by departments of State and turned into private property. This is a bad policy, and one opposed to the best interests of the community.

Every year there is a quantity of land sold under the Glebe Land Act, 1888. The number of sales completed under this Act during the year 1903 was 102, comprising 2179 acres, the purchase-money paid being £69,905. A considerable quantity of College and University land is also sold every year.¹ During

¹ Annual Report, Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Cd. 2005, 1904.

the ten years 1895 to 1904 the Charity Commissioners authorized the sale of real property to the value of nearly four millions sterling, much of which no doubt was agricultural land.¹ The Commissioners of Woods and Forests also sold by private contract a large number of small pieces of land during the same year.² All this land, so far as it is suitable, could be put within the reach of small cultivating owners by the purchase-money being provided by the State.

Farmers holding charity lands are liable to great hardships through having their farms sold over the heads. A farmer who is in this position, in a letter to the present writer, states (6 June, 1905): "If my farm were sold, it would be a very great loss to me, as I have been on it all my life, and have much improved it in many ways, and I should get little if any compensation if I had to leave it. This is one of the cases in which your Land Purchase Bill would be a great boon were it passed into law, but I am afraid it will be crowded out."

There is another class of farmers to whom the Land Purchase Bill would be a great boon. Sales of farms, and even estates, are frequently taking place by private contract. The tenants, however much they may wish to buy, have not the money to do so. Their farms are sold over their heads, and they have to accept all that comes from a change of ownership.

A letter which the present writer has received from a professional man, very well known in agricultural circles, illustrates the hardship of the position of these men. It states (10 March, 1904): "There is a farm

¹ Report of the Charity Commissioners, Cd. 2496, 1905.

² For particulars of these sales, see Report of the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, No. 221, 1905.

I know in —— which was a very poor property when taken in hand by its present tenant, who in six years has spent a considerable sum of money on it and transformed it to its present condition, although he is only a yearly tenant. He is most anxious to buy, and would buy under your Bill, for he would be enabled to do so. He keeps about sixty cows, and has done wonders for the property. There is another farm of 400 acres in ——, which has been thirty years in the hands of the present tenant, who is a good farmer. He pays 10s. per acre rent, which, when it was let originally, was quite as much as it was worth. He has brought it into good condition, and it is now clean and productive. The present landlord, who has inherited the farm, wishes to sell, as he wants the money, and would gladly take £12 an acre for it; but I valued it, having been employed to do so, at nearer £20 an acre. The tenant would have gladly bought it, because it would have paid him well to do so; but for want of such a medium as your Bill would provide, the two men are kept apart, and outsiders do not possess sufficient knowledge of the value of the farm to buy it, for it is still in the market. I daresay I can find twenty similar cases.”

Let us take the second of these two cases. Under the provisions of the Land Purchase Bill, the tenant referred to would be enabled to buy his farm at £12 per acre, the price asked by the landlord. He would immediately become the owner of his farm, subject to the payment, for a limited number of years, of an annual instalment of 7s. 10d. per acre, instead of 10s. per acre, which he now pays in rent. As it is, the farm will be sold. The tenant will have to leave or pay an increased rent for his own improvements. Had

he been a slovenly farmer and kept the land in the bad condition in which he found it, no increase of rent could be demanded. This is one proof, among so many, of the truth of the statement made by practical men, that the present system is "a premium on bad farming."

Any so-called compensation which this occupier might receive is not worth consideration, in view of the fact that the man is turned out of his home and out of a holding where for so many years he has been doing work profitable to himself and of great value to the community. Were he a tenant in Ireland, how different would be his position!

Further, there is reason to believe that, under the system we are discussing, many landlords would be willing to sell at least a portion of their land to tenants who wished to buy. A most competent witness, speaking on this point, says: "The landowners of England, under the bitter experience of past years, are as anxious as any men can be to part with a very large area of their land." And again: "Landlords were generally willing to sell their land, or even portions of it, and to forego the territorial advantages which attached to land in the past."¹

A friend of the present writer, who is a wealthy commercial man, and also a large landowner, in a letter (5 October, 1904) expressing approval of the Land Purchase Bill, states: "Things are going wrong in England, and going wrong rapidly. . . . If your Bill should become law, I will do what I can to help it forward. I have 2000 acres of good land in the county of ——, let to nine farmers, who are satisfac-

¹ Mr. Elias Squarey. Evidence before the Select Committee on Small Holdings, 1889.

tory men. The rent is, for the most of it, 15s. per acre, for some of it less. I should be willing to offer to sell the whole estate to the present tenants at £15 per acre." Now if these nine tenants were to accept this offer, they would, without having to find a farthing of capital, become owners of the farms, subject to a payment, for a limited time, of 9s. 9d. per acre, instead of the 15s. they are now paying in rent. It is difficult to know what reasons, consistent with common sense, can be advanced against legislation which would allow such arrangements as these to be carried out.

The first necessary step in dealing with the Bill is that the proposals made in it should be discussed and understood. Agricultural associations have had the measure before them and have come to different conclusions respecting it. The Central Chamber of Agriculture is a body said to be composed of the pick of English farmers. At a meeting of the Chamber held 2 February, 1904, the Land Purchase Bill was discussed. The resolution on which the discussion was to hang was—somewhat unfairly—drafted in terms hostile to the Bill. It ran: "This Council considers that there is no necessity for Mr. Collings' Land Purchase Bill for England and Wales."

The debate was instructive, and showed the necessity of reading and understanding proposals before discussing them. Some of the speakers evidently thought that these preliminary steps were unnecessary.

Mr. H. Williams (Monmouthshire Chamber) moved an amendment expressing approval of the Bill, and in a short speech directly to the point, said:—

"The Bill was a very desirable one, for reasons which would apply to those cases in which land was

up for sale absolutely and must be sold. If there was anything like compulsion in the Bill, he for one would not support it. If they looked at the newspapers, they could not fail to see that there was a great deal of agricultural land coming into the market every day. Seeing that the Bill in question was drawn on the lines of the Irish Land Bill, and that the State could borrow money more cheaply than the individual, he thought that they ought not to throw cold water upon an effort to make it easy for tenants to buy their holdings. He believed the Bill was desirable for many reasons, because anybody who happened to know the price of a farm which was sold, and the rent which was being paid by the tenant, would see that under the Bill the tenant would generally be able to buy for something like 25 per cent less as annuity than he was paying as rent. That was an element that ought not to be lost sight of. The objections which he had heard to the Bill were two. One was that those persons who had approved of the Bill had overlooked the cost of repairs. He thought that it could not fail to be known to every practical man in the room that when a man did his own repairs he could do them very much more to the occupier's personal liking and convenience. Another objection was that it was absurd to imagine that landowners got more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ or $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent on their capital. He thought that that objection was erroneous, for it was based on the estimated value of land twenty-five years ago. In almost every instance that he had seen of agricultural land coming into the market, the land was being sold to-day to pay 4 per cent, and if the tenant could borrow money at $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent he would be in a better position than before."

Professor Long (British Dairy Farmers' Association), in seconding the amendment, said:—

"What did the Bill propose? It gave the option to the tenant, which he could accept or refuse, of agree-

ing with his landlord to buy his holding with the aid of money from the public purse. . . . Many farmers occupied farms which they would be glad to buy if they could, but they were unable to buy through want of money. . . . In all parts of the country farms would be found for sale at low prices ; but still, a farm of five hundred acres costing £12 an acre would involve a large sum of purchase-money, which many men were unable to put down at once. A man who occupied a farm could afford to give a better price for it than could be obtained if it went to the Mart, and to give such a man facilities for purchase would be better both for the tenant and the landlord."

Mr. Christian (Fareham Farmers' Club) said that—

"He had been sent to the meeting to oppose the Bill, and the reason why that was the case was that his Chamber did not understand the matter. He was now going to support the Bill. . . . He had not heard a good argument against it."

Mr. Stanley (North Cotswold) and Mr. Gardner (Worcestershire) supported the Bill on behalf of their respective Chambers. Other members spoke in favour of it, and there were four speakers against it. The result was that the amendment was carried by a majority of nearly two to one.

The course and result of these discussions, so far as they have gone, are anything but disappointing. Farmers move slowly, but as a rule they move surely ; and the important question is, what will be their ultimate decision with regard to the Bill? If they as a body decide that it is framed in their best interests, and wish to have the benefits which it offers, they must bestir themselves ; for a mere passive support is not sufficient to secure that the measure shall become law.

Irish farmers get what they demand ; they accept it without thanks, and straightway ask for more, which as a rule they also get. English tenant farmers will not get what they want without some combined effort on their part. In the present state of agriculture they may fairly and properly make a Government understand that reasonable attention to their interests is a condition of their support.

So far, the economic side of the question has been considered ; but the social and political side is of still more importance. Every man placed in the position described would be an addition to that element of strength and conservation in our national life, of which we are getting so lamentably deficient. He would represent one step towards restoring the old landed classes, who, on occasions in our "rough island story," served their country so well.

CHAPTER XVII

OTHER SCHEMES OF LAND REFORM

THERE are several schemes advocated by land reformers to remedy the evils of the present system. The most practical among them, and the one receiving most support among ardent land reformers, is that known as "Free Trade in Land." Shortly stated, the object of this reform is to make the sale and transfer of land as easy and inexpensive as that of any other property; to abolish the laws and customs which invite, encourage, and perpetuate the accumulation of land in a few hands; to destroy the power of the "dead hand"; to control the disposal of estates; to alter the law which allows a man to tie up land during his lifetime, and for many years after his death; to abolish the law (primogeniture) which, if the landowner does not avail himself of his power to make a deed or will, gives all his land, in one undivided estate, to his heir; in short, as described by a well-known writer, to abolish the "old feudal system of primogeniture, entails, long settlements, and intricate devises of land, invented in order to keep great estates together, and to preserve the great power of the feudal aristocracy."¹

Now, whatever may be the merits of these reforms, it is difficult to see how they would facilitate the creation of yeoman holdings or of a peasant proprietary. At the best the process would be tedious

¹ "Free Trade in Land," by Joseph Kay, Q.C.

and slow. No doubt "Free Trade in Land" would result, eventually, in putting a large number of estates on the market, but the cultivators would certainly be in no better position than now, and probably in a far worse position.¹

Seeing that tenant farmers, as a rule, have no spare money to buy, and the peasants certainly have none, the buyers would be of two classes: the first class would consist of small capitalists, who would buy land as an investment and let it at the highest rent they could get. This would be a disadvantage, as small owners—either from necessity or from the commercial spirit—are generally the hardest of landlords. The second class of buyers would be wealthy men desirous of becoming "county" people, who would buy up any estates offered, as indeed to a considerable extent they are now doing.

There would be no gain in this; for of the two, a landed aristocracy is, as far as the tenants are concerned, perhaps preferable to a landed plutocracy. So that "free trade" in land, if realized to-morrow, unless accompanied by a Land Purchase Bill, would simply have the effect of locking up land in the hands of a new set of owners. It would retard, rather than advance, the one object in view, which is to get the soil

¹ The Irish "Encumbered Estates Act" of 1849 no doubt enabled land of the value of many millions sterling to be sold, but the tenants were not the purchasers. On the contrary, the land thus set "free" was too frequently bought by capitalists who dealt in a commercial manner with the property they had acquired. Many of them raised rents regardless of the tenants' position and rights, and the Irish farmers often found themselves worse off than they were under the old squireens. The present writer remembers the advertisements for the sale of these lands and seeing frequently at the bottom of them, "These rentals are capable of great improvement," etc.

of the country as far as possible permanently into the hands of occupying owners.

There is no doubt that in England in past times large numbers of peasants' and yeomen's holdings have been bought and consolidated into large estates by wealthy men, who have offered such prices for the holdings as the owners felt bound to accept. To this cause mainly is due the disappearance, to such a large extent, of that fine class of freeholders called "statesmen," for the loss of whom, from a national point of view, no money can compensate. The following is an extract from a very interesting account of these hardy husbandmen and of their exit from the soil:—

"These independent farmers, with their well-marked qualities of persistence, industry, and suspicion, due to their retired position, are worth careful study. . . . We are told that at the beginning of last century there were about seven thousand statesmen in Cumberland. . . . The lads and damsels saw no disgrace or degradation in farmwork, and followed it with a due sense of the social unity involved in it and with the native pride of an independent community. For the farm was a common duty and a common pleasure also."

The writer goes on to describe the falling prices of produce and the heavier charges on the land which caused these honest statesmen to drift slowly into difficulties, and adds:—

"While there was less and less hope of making a comfortable livelihood out of the land and the farmer's heart failed him, the value of his freehold still tended to rise, not to fall, as it should have done. So that as the difficulties of living increased, the temptation to throw the whole thing up and try some other way of living increased also. There were rich people, iron-

men and others, who wished to create an estate and were glad to tempt the poor farmer, often encumbered with debts and mortgages incurred in the bringing up of his family, to relieve himself of all present anxiety by selling his land for a good round sum of ready money."

The writer laments the disappearance of these men, "driven out by the baleful power of wealth," but adds that in the remaining statesmen much of the old quality remains. "The old stuff survives, and one wishes that this conservative element of our race might return to the land," etc.¹

The provisions of the Land Purchase Bill would prevent untoward transactions of this kind. The object of the Bill is not only to get the soil of the country as far as possible into the hands of occupying owners, large and small, but to make these ownerships permanent, and as they increase in number to become an important, and ultimately the most important, factor in our rural life.²

On this point—Free Trade in Land—it is impossible to admire too much the foresight and patriotism

¹ "The Statesmen of West Cumberland" (G. W. Kitchin, the present Dean of Durham), "Northern Counties Magazine," Vol. II, 1901.

The following extract from a letter received by the present writer some years ago from a firm of surveyors in Westmoreland, bears on this point: "Economic law has swept away the aboriginal 'statesmen,' whose acres have been absorbed by the wealthy. One Estate of £15,000 a year has been so aggregated by such purchases entirely within my own memory in the last fifty years; in many cases forty years' purchase, in some fifty, having been paid. In fact, land got to be a luxury which only the wealthy could afford to buy."

² On the Continent many legal and other means exist for benefiting occupying owners which would not apply to tenants. Land banks are established which offer protection to the proprietors from professional money-lenders. Country bankers help these men, whom they know, in ways that they would not think of doing with yearly tenants who may be here to-day and gone to-morrow.

of the Prussian statesmen at the beginning of last century.

Perhaps the best accounts in English of the land legislation begun by Stein and Hardenberg are to be found in the numerous parliamentary reports on land tenure in other countries.¹

The description of this German land legislation is a complete model of the manner in which the land question of England—of the same kind, but far less complicated than it was in Germany—might have been dealt with if there had been statesmen in this country of the same fibre and foresight as those in Germany. As soon as Stein took office he issued the celebrated Edict of 1807, which was the basis of all subsequent reforms. The edicts and laws which followed, extending over a period of fifty years, contained corrections and improvements of that Edict, and provided machinery for carrying it out.

The avowed objects of the legislation initiated in 1807 were—to free the peasantry from their servile tenure and to fix them on the soil, in order “to invigorate the State”; to provide a national agriculture; to abolish the powers of lords of the manor, giving them fair compensation, and thus to convert peasant lands into independent ownerships; to commute the real charges resting upon private rights which were attached to various kinds of landed property; to commute rights of common and inclosed common lands,

¹ “Reports respecting Land Tenure,” C. 426, 1871; C. 271, 1870; C. 66, 1869; C. 572, 1872; C. 75, 1869-70. See also “Land System of France,” T. E. Cliffe Leslie; “Agrarian Legislation of Prussia,” Sir Robert Morier; “English Land System,” C. Wren Hoskins; “Land System of Belgium and Holland,” M. Emile de Laveleye.

and to consolidate outlying and intersected lands so as to form compact holdings, etc.¹

The enactment, however, which abolished all restrictions on the alienation of lands, that is, gave absolute "Free Trade in Land," had to be altered, on account of the danger that the peasant lands might be absorbed into larger estates. Lords of the manor were forbidden to annex peasant lands. These lands were to be kept in the occupation of peasant cultivators. These arrangements were carried out by striking a balance between the obligations and rights of one party and the obligations and rights of the other party. This balance, which was usually against the peasant, was commuted by a rent charge or by the surrender of its equivalent in land. By a subsequent law these rent charges were extinguished on the basis of twenty-five years' purchase, the amount being advanced by rent-charge banks guaranteed by the State and repaid by the peasant by annual instalments composed of interest and sinking-fund. The amount of these instalments was based on $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent interest and sinking-fund for repayment in fifty-six years ; or 5 per cent for repayment in forty-one years.

Stein would give the lords no compensation, except in certain cases, for their alleged rights to the personal services of the peasantry, to inflict fines and to im-

¹ It must be noted that in German legislation and in official reports of that country the term "peasantry" is a very elastic one, and includes nearly all classes of farmers. "A middle-class estate, viz. $7\frac{1}{2}$ to 150 hectares, is called in Germany a peasant's (Bauern) estate" (Sir Edward Malet's Report, C. 6250, 1891). A hectare is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ (2'471) English acres, so that so-called peasant holdings may be as big as 375 acres each. As there are comparatively few tenant farmers in Germany, except on Crown lands, it may be taken, therefore, that the legislation referred to affected nearly all classes of cultivators.

pose other obligations upon them. He held that the inalienable right of a man to freedom was a sufficient and just ground for thus withholding compensation.

The spirit of the legislation throughout was, that in matters affecting the land, the State, on behalf of the community, can disregard, and, if necessary, override, the prejudice and opposition of the individual. This was done, but done on lines that were just to the landed aristocracy, and, as events showed, much to their advantage. Another notable principle in this legislation was that of helping those who were helping themselves. One illustration of this principle is that the State, through the Board of Agriculture, grants loans to cultivators for works of improvement. These loans are at a low rate, usually at 3 per cent interest and 2 per cent sinking fund, with a free period of three or five years. It is rightly held that public money, when spent for improvements of the land, is spent in the interests of the whole nation.

For those who have not time to study the lengthy and detailed reports referred to, the short and clear account given in Professor Seeley's excellent work is sufficient to give a general idea of the land legislation, of which, taken as a whole, and in connection with its results, it is no exaggeration to say was an epoch—a starting-point in the foundation by consolidation of the present great German Empire.¹

Seeley quotes the views of Stein as to the danger to the cultivating classes of removing all restrictions to the free sale of lands: "There is but one limitation of free disposition of landed property which must be allowed to remain. It is that which restrains the covetousness of the rich and educated classes, and

¹ Seeley's "Life and Times of Stein," University Press, Cambridge.

hinders the absorption of peasant land in manorial farms. This will be the more necessary, because the free trade in land allowed by Section 1 (of the Edict) will multiply alterations with the change of ownership, and the rise in the value of the land will more and more tempt the new proprietor to seek his advantage."

Provisions were therefore made to protect the peasantry from this serious danger of being driven off the land by the unequal competition to which they would be otherwise exposed. Professor Seeley's remarks on this point are well worth quoting (Vol. I, p. 433): "Now it might very plausibly be maintained that free trade in land would not create a happy peasant class, but would simply substitute for a peasantry, labouring under certain evils, that class of famished drudges which we know in England, and who, if they cannot be called serfs, can still less be called peasants; for a peasant properly so called must have a personal interest in the land. . . . The introduction of free trade in land created so manifest a danger of the absorption of peasant-holdings by the rich, that it was found in the end necessary to protect these holdings by a special limitation." Accordingly, he adds: "Sections 6 and 7" (of the Edict) "are introduced to prevent the system of free trade in land from bearing too hard on the peasant, and making the proprietorship of land a monopoly of the richer classes."

It may be noticed here for the benefit of our legislators that the initiation of these reforms did not lie with the rural population themselves. The German peasantry at the time held their lands for the most part under a servile tenure. After the defeat of their armed revolts in the sixteenth century they were com-

pelled to submit to the miseries of their seemingly hopeless position. The land reforms were begun by statesmen, and every obstacle in the way of their being carried out effectively was resolutely removed. These men did not act solely for the personal welfare of the cultivators. They took a wider view, and considered that the creation of a multitude of free cultivating owners was absolutely necessary for the future strength and welfare of the country as a whole. With them the social and political aspects of the question were the most grave, economic motives taking a second place.

They treated the pleas "no demand," "no land hunger," and other pretexts as simply irrelevant to the objects they had in view. The opposition of the landed aristocracy (short-sighted opposition as after-events proved) was difficult to deal with, but was overborne. Stein, referring afterwards to this difficulty, wrote: "But the King stood firm, and God maintained the right."¹

The social and political condition of Prussia at that time—the first decade of years of the nineteenth century—was at its lowest ebb. From this legislation gradually sprang a contented, loyal, and prosperous population, with strong personal interests in the welfare of the nation.

The political result need not be dwelt on here, but it might be safely said that later events, which led to the consolidation of the empire, were made possible mainly by the land reforms referred to.

¹ By this legislation "Not only were all ranks in the realm—landlords, citizens, and peasants—most materially benefited, but the peasant proprietors were raised to a much more important place in the economy of the State." Mr. Harris Gastrell, British Consul, Berlin (Parliamentary Paper, C. 66, 1870).

It is a distressing reflection that during the years these reforms were being carried out in Germany our own Parliament was actively legislating in quite an opposite direction. The territorial party in England were carrying out their policy—a policy which some of our statesmen gravely questioned, though they acquiesced in it—of depriving the rural population of all personal interest in the soil they cultivated.

The contrast between the results which followed these two opposite policies is sufficient of itself, without further argument, to convince any impartial mind. In the one country the cultivators steadily improved in independence, contentment, and material prosperity; in the other country the same classes as steadily sunk into a condition discreditable to its national life.

William Howitt, speaking from observation of these two conditions, states :—

“ In Germany the peasants are the great and ever-present objects of country life. They are the great population of the country, because they themselves are the possessors. . . . The peasants are not, as with us, for the most part totally cut off from property in the soil they cultivate, totally dependent on the labour afforded by others; they are themselves the proprietors. It is perhaps from this cause that they are probably the most industrious peasantry in the world. They labour busily, early and late, because they feel that they are labouring for themselves. . . . The German peasants work hard, but they have no actual want. Every man has his house, his orchard, his roadside, fruit-trees, etc. . . . The English peasant is so cut off from the idea of property that he comes habitually to look upon it as a thing from which he is warned by the laws of the

large proprietors, and becomes, in consequence, spiritless and purposeless. . . . The German Bauer, on the contrary, looks on the country as made for him and his fellow-men. He feels himself a man; he has a stake in his country, as good as that of the bulk of his neighbours. . . . He knows that when he dies he shall not be buried between the vile boards of a pauper's coffin."¹

A little book recently published contains valuable information and statistics which show, beyond doubt, that the prosperity of the German cultivators is fully maintained at the present time.² Professor Ashley shows that three-quarters of the agricultural surface of Germany is tilled and owned by "peasants" (Bauern), who are men farming from 2 to 100 hectares (5 to 250 acres). It is rightly stated that "such a class practically does not exist at all in England. They can neither be compared to our farmers nor our labourers."

Besides this class there is the large number of men whom we should call peasants, that is, men owning and cultivating holdings of less than five acres.

With regard to the agricultural labourers, the highest authorities are quoted to show that during the past twenty or thirty years wages have very largely increased, with a corresponding improvement in housing, clothing, food, etc.

Professor Ashley's figures are based on the last statistics available—to wit, those contained in the volume of the census of 1895, which deals with agriculture. If we analyse these figures and reduce

¹ "Rural and Domestic Life in Germany," William Howitt.

² "Progress of the German Working Classes in the Last Quarter of a Century." W. J. Ashley. Longmans, 1904.

the areas given to their English equivalents, reckoning two and a half acres to the hectare, the results are as shown in the following table :—

	Area occupied. Acres.	Average sizes of holdings. Acres.	Percentage owned by cultivators.
“Small” Peasants	. 8,214,960 ...	5 to 12½ ...	81·23 %
“Middling” Peasants	24,304,687 ...	12½ to 50 ...	90·55 %
“Big” Peasants	. 24,674,592 ...	50 to 250 ...	91·98 %

On this subject Dr. Meitzen, who was one of the greatest authorities on German agricultural economy, wrote: “The inclination of the German to establish his family on his own plot is a blessed trait of the greatest moral advantage. It has been sufficiently shown that the possibility of acquiring land fosters hope, encourages energy, and never lets useful activity flag.”

In reading these accounts there is one thought which comes uppermost—one which should hold the serious attention of all who are interested in the political future of this country. The militant section of the “Social Democratic Party,” represented by Karl Marx, are bent—as is shown by their writings—on capturing the rural population. In this—so far as Germany is concerned—they have utterly failed. Whatever may be their success in towns, in the country districts they have been met by the millions who have something to lose, and have been defeated. They have found that “collectivism” has no chance where “individualism” is in such overwhelming force.

It is found, in fact, that the very class which forms the strongest bulwark against communistic attacks is largely increasing in Germany. During the period 1882 to 1895 the census shows that while the larger

farms slightly decreased in number, the smaller ones, two to twenty hectares (five to fifty acres), greatly increased.

But in England the case is totally different. We have a proletariat such as does not exist in any other country in Europe, and consequently are without the only natural barrier to those socialistic doctrines which are rapidly spreading among the people.

Some of the territorial party who are bemused by the "splendid isolation" of the English land system among the systems of Europe may pooh-pooh this consideration. But they may find out, as time goes on, that should the wage-receivers of this country, who are the great mass of the people, become more organized and their political power be more directly exercised; should domestic discontent increase and should foreign troubles intervene, the offers for a settlement of the land question will be of a sibylline character.

There is another scheme of land reform which is received with a great deal of favour in certain quarters and which, there is reason to believe, is looked upon as practical by certain persons in authority. It is that the State should advance money to landlords for the purpose of dividing large farms into smaller ones and of cutting up other farms into small lots, and making these lots suitable for small holdings, and for providing homesteads and other buildings suitable for each class of holdings.

Before speaking of the objections to such a scheme as this, it is well to recall the policy adopted by landlords in the past, which had for its object the creation of the large farms which now exist in England. The practice of consolidation has already been referred to.

The rage for large farms began towards the end of the eighteenth century and continued to about the middle of last century.

Two or three, often as many as five or six, farms were thrown into one. Extensive buildings were put up for each large holding, and the old homesteads were allowed to fall into decay or were let for other purposes. The smaller farmers were thus driven from their occupations and had to become labourers, bailiffs, to go into towns, or to emigrate. The theory was that on these extensive holdings, high farming could be practised, scientific methods adopted, machinery more largely used, and the labourers to a great extent dispensed with. The high prices which ruled induced farmers with capital to pay large competitive rents for these farms. The application of this commercial spirit to agriculture answered the purpose of the landowners, whose rents thereby were enormously increased. Events, however, have shown that the policy, though highly profitable to the landlord for a time, was a mistake in every way. Through the fall in prices in the seventies of the last century and a succession of bad harvests, farmers were ruined and the large farm system collapsed.

The policy was pursued in spite of abundant warnings from men of experience, whose opinions should have had weight, but were of no avail in view of increased rents and high profits. Of the many warnings given at the time the following is an example :—

“The landed gentlemen, in general, run into the practice of laying out their estates in large farms, which is attended with two consequences equally pernicious to the public, a check to country population

and a less profit returned by the land. . . . That large farms make a less proportional return than small ones has been the opinion of all writers on the subject. . . . That the real strength of every country depends on the population is a well-known truth, and a little acquaintance with the principles of a sound policy will show that the only solid basis of a numerous population is agriculture. . . . The resources of the earth and the strength of the population can alone be looked upon as the foundation of a sure and positive power, and as the means by which a nation is enabled to suffice for itself."

The writer goes on to utter warnings of the danger of "depopulating the country and annihilating by degrees that essentially necessary class of men who cultivate the earth."¹

For some time past there has been a great desire to revert to the policy of smaller farms, but landowners as a class have not the money to spare to restore the old homesteads, to build new, and to incur other expenses necessary for an alteration in the system. Hence the proposals that aid should be given by the State. It is not necessary perhaps to discuss these proposals at any length, for the reason that it is not likely that any Government will adopt them. Any measure to carry them out would be regarded as one for the benefit of a class, and would be generally opposed. If State money is to be advanced for the creation of smaller farms and holdings, it should go directly to the cultivating owner, and through him to the improvement of the land. To advance money to landlords at a low rate of interest, without any check

¹ "Practical Husbandry," by John Mills, F.R.S., Member of the Agricultural Societies of Paris and Berne, 1767, Vol. V, p. 7.

on rents, would be to extend and perpetuate the evils of the present system.

Tenants would not be benefited; they would have to pay, not the small interest on outlay referred to, but just as much total rent as the landlord chose to ask. No advantage to either the large or small cultivator, or to agriculture itself, could accrue from such a plan.

There are further schemes of land reform of a socialistic character. The advocates of these schemes, however we may wish to ignore them, are, under different names, making considerable progress. The socialistic section of the labour societies are for making the State the "universal landlord," as well as sole proprietor of all means of production, distribution, etc. Resolutions passed at meetings in favour of these principles are more and more frequent. Candidates for Parliament are standing on this platform, and are gaining such an increasing amount of support as to make it more than probable that before long they will, as members, become a distinct force in the House of Commons.

There is also a separate organization, with members drawn largely from the middle classes, which advocates the "nationalization" of the land. Henry George — in his remarkable book — calls this a "more scientific" plan. He holds that it is not advisable for the State to become a "universal landlord," but advocates that an increasing tax should be placed on land. This, he argues, would, by a self-acting process, undo the evils of concentration, by gradually making it impossible for a man (except a user) to hold land at all. He would not "confiscate the land," but would tax the rents till they disappeared altogether.

The user of the land is to be compensated for any improvements made by him.

His scheme, which is supported by elaborate and attractive arguments, is outlined by the following quotation : " To take rent for the common benefit it is not necessary that the State should actually take possession of the land and rent it out from year to year, or from term to term. It can be done in a much more simple and easy manner by concentrating taxation upon the value of land. All it is necessary to do is to abolish all other forms of taxation until the weight of taxation rests on the value of land irrespective of improvements, and takes rent for the public benefit . . . ultimately the selling values of even the most valuable land would entirely disappear and taxation would become rental paid to the State. . . . Under this system no one could afford to hold land he was not using, and land not in use would be thrown open to those who wished to use it, at once relieving the labour market and giving an enormous stimulus to production, while land in use would be paid for according to its value, irrespective of the improvements the user might make. On these he would not be taxed." The part of the book most calculated to lay hold of the popular mind is that in which the social evils resulting from our present land system are vividly described.¹

The scheme of the veteran land reformer, Dr. Wallace, greatly modifies that of Henry George. Shortly stated, it is as follows : A complete valuation of all the landed property of the kingdom is to be made. The annual value or rental of each separate holding is to be estimated and divided into two parts.

¹ "Social Problems," p. 274. Henry George.

The first part is the value of the mere soil, the inherent worth of the land, apart from improvements and additions. The rental of this part is to be capitalized and bought by the State. The methods of payment are by a fixed sum, or by terminable annuities, extending over a number of years, or the duration of a certain number of lives. The State thus becomes permanent owner—the ground landlord—of the whole land of the kingdom. The second part of the valuation is that represented by improvements—building, draining, etc.—made by successive owners and occupiers. This is called tenant-right, and remains the property of the owner.

If these proposals became law the farmer would become a tenant of the State, paying an annual quit-rent for that part (the raw material) which belongs to the State. He would have to purchase the tenant-right, and so become absolute owner, subject to the quit-rent named. If he is not able to purchase, means are to be provided (not clearly defined) to enable him to do so.¹

These schemes, besides being of a confiscatory character, are not practical. To advocate them would be, in addition to the injustice involved, to delay a question indefinitely which is now pressing for settlement. Our land system, whatever its origin, must be dealt with as it is. Landlords have inherited land, have bought for value, and in the past have spent large sums on their estates. The financial ramifications in connection with the land—settlements, annuities, mortgages, through banks, workmen's associa-

¹ For details see "Land Nationalization," by A. R. Russel Wallace, LL.D., F.R.S., etc., President of the Land Nationalization Society. (Trübner & Co.)

tions, assurance societies, etc.—are so vast that to deal with the question in any way except by purchase would cause widespread disaster among almost every class of society.

There remains the scheme under consideration, that contained in the Purchase of Land Bill, and which is free from all the foregoing objections. There are strong reasons why landlords themselves (unless they are convinced that the present system can be maintained) should give favourable consideration to proposals based on *purchase* at a fair price. They are an extremely small number compared with the voting population of the kingdom. The owners of the great bulk of the land of Great Britain could be comfortably seated in the Albert Hall. In the case of any hostile agrarian movement arising from war, continued depression in trade, or some other calamity, they are, as an institution, too few to be safe. They were in this position during the Corn Law agitation, 1838 to 1846. By their policy they had succeeded in getting rid of their natural allies in the form of yeomen, peasant owners, and others with personal interests in the soil. They stood alone and were defeated.

In reading Cobden's speeches made to agriculturists, it will be noticed that the arguments which he specially used for showing the great benefits "free imports" would confer on agriculture, were nearly all of them based on predictions confidently, and no doubt sincerely, made, but which have never been realized. He spoke, however, so continually in favour of general land reforms in such directions as "entails," "primogeniture," "game-preserving," "granting leases," etc., that these reforms became associated in the minds of the farmers as part and parcel of the great Free Trade

policy which was to do them so much good. Men in distress are apt to listen readily to promises of relief, and the farmers who were suffering from excessive rents, which in so many cases they were paying out of capital, became converts to the doctrine of free trade.

The labourers had no political power, but their depressed condition, due to other causes, as will be shown later on, was held up as the effect of the "iniquitous Corn Laws." Altogether the state of things during the years 1843-6 was most favourable to the spread of free-trade doctrines. Agriculture was depressed, the great improvement in trade, which was to become so remarkable, was only just beginning, and the potato disease appeared in Ireland with its awful consequences of famine and death. These and other evils were shown up as the results of the Corn Laws, and "repeal" was declared to be the remedy for all of them.

But vigorous as was the Anti-Corn Law agitation, there was no evidence that it was near success until the Prime Minister of the day, who had been treating the question largely in the spirit of opportunism, decided to adopt the policy of the League.

Had Sir Robert Peel withheld his support for yet another two or three years, when trade became good, and employment abundant, the issue would probably have been different.

If the wise suggestion of Lord John Russell of a fixed duty had been adopted, it would have put an end largely to the fluctuations of the sliding scale which invited continual gambling in wheat, and was, after all, the cause of half the trouble. In that case it is questionable if total repeal would have been carried.

If we turn to France, we see that a different result from a similar agitation was secured, solely because the land tenure of that country differed from that of ours. During the period of the Corn Law agitation in England, a sliding scale of duties existed in France. The French Cobden of the time, Bastiat, and his school, preached the doctrine of free imports with an earnestness equal to that of Cobden and his colleagues, but their preaching was vain before above five millions of proprietors. From the same cause, the able speeches of the modern "Free Trader," M. Yves Guyot, are received with acclaim in England, while his arguments fall on deaf ears in France.

There is nothing whatever surprising in all this. The owner of ten acres of land is as keen on the rights of property, and as watchful of the interests of his industry, as the owner of ten thousand acres. We see a landed aristocracy, in continental countries, which is not exposed to the disfavour and hostile criticism to which that order in England is subjected. The reason is, that it is not a class apart, separated from other classes of cultivators by a gulf which, under our present system, is well-nigh impassable. In these countries the landed aristocracy is intermingled with a landed democracy, and the two interests are not antagonistic, but identical. Hence it is that the rural economy of these countries is in the hands of a body diverse in character, but united in interest. Even the comparatively few labourers who are simply wage-receivers are in the same boat, because they can get land if they like to save and strive in order to do so. These classes, as a body, came to the conclusion that it was necessary to defend agriculture from foreign attacks, and for that purpose they not only proposed,

but were strong enough to carry, legislation which imposed duties on imports of foreign corn.¹ It must be remembered, however, that these duties were not put on, as they were with us in 1815, in the interests of a small territorial class which was able to control legislation. They were put on by the voting power of the great mass of the people, urban and rural, a majority of whom regarded agricultural prosperity as synonymous with the prosperity of the nation.

For the foregoing reasons it would seem wise for landlords to support the proposed reform. Agriculture is in such a state of depression that capital is no longer attracted to the land, but is leaving it for foreign and other investments. The direct political power of landlords is mostly gone. The disposal of the tenant's vote is no longer a condition of letting a farm. Feudalism has passed away, though no doubt its influence lingers to a large extent among the rural population, with whom that influence is hereditary, and will take a generation or two to die out. The advent of the commercial classes into the ranks of large landowners still further destroys the special characteristics of the old system. These men, though they may acquire lands, can never in the eyes of the rural people acquire the same status as that of the old school. The peculiar relationship, so attractive in many ways, which existed between the owners of estates and the dwellers thereon, was the outcome of ages of habit and use, and cannot continue in the same spirit under a new class of owners and under modern conditions.

It would be well perhaps to conclude this chapter

¹ These remarks specially apply to the action of the agrarian party in Germany, with regard to the recent tariff legislation of that country.

by quoting the weighty words of one who was among the ablest members of the diplomatic service, whose exhaustive and masterly reports on the Land Tenure of Germany have been the source of the information used by many who have written on the subject: "The maintenance of agriculture," he writes, "must ever be the solicitude of the statesmen, even of an industrial country like England. Moreover, there are not wanting signs, looming it might be on the far horizon, that two great dangers are menacing England. The one is the disproportionate unlanded or unpropertied class. The statesman who shall pass measures for removing that disproportion will indeed deserve well of his country. The other is a possible decline of manufacturing industry. If the possibility should assume the portentous shape of a probability, the statesman who shall pass measures to facilitate and provide for the transfer to agriculture of any capital which may be liberated from manufactures will indeed deserve well of his country. The names of such statesmen, and of him, too, who shall content the discontented cultivators of Ireland, will be handed down to posterity as household words and will be passed from generation to generation with, if it be possible, a yet greater renown and yet greater national gratitude, than the renown and gratitude with which the names of Stein and Hardenberg are being passed from generation to generation, as household words of the great Prussian people."¹

¹ The late J. P. Harris-Gastrell, Secretary to the British Embassy Berlin.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOME MARKET AND THE INDUSTRIAL CLASSES

“THE Home Market is first in order and paramount in importance.” Thus said Henry Clay when in 1844 he stood as candidate for the Presidency of the United States and was beaten. At that time the Anti-Corn Law agitation in England was at its height. Cobden, always apt to enlist public occurrences into the service of his cause, spoke of Clay’s defeat as follows :—

“He stood as a candidate for that high honour at the hands of three millions of citizens on the ground of his being the author and father of the protective system in America. . . . The speeches of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster might have done credit to the Dukes of Buckingham and Richmond themselves. All the banners at their processions were inscribed with such mottoes as, ‘Protection to Native Industry,’ ‘Protection against the Pauper Labour of Europe,’ ‘Stand by the American System,’ ‘Henry Clay and Protection to Native Industry.’ Yes, all this was said to the American democracy. And what said three millions of the American people, voting in the ballot-box? Why, they rejected Henry Clay and sent him back to his retirement.”¹

Sixty years have passed away since then, and in the light of this long experience it may well be asked,

¹ “Cobden’s Speeches.” Edited by John Bright and J. Thorold Rogers (Speech, 11 December, 1844).

Which of the two policies has been found to be right, the policy of Cobden or that of Henry Clay? The great patriotic man who is now President of the United States, who presides over eighty millions of people, mostly of the English race, has answered the question. "Our present phenomenal prosperity," he says, "was won under a tariff made in accordance with certain fixed and definite principles, the most important of which is our avowed determination to protect the interests of the American producer, business man, wage-worker, and farmer alike."

The manner in which British agriculture has been treated during the past two generations may be aptly likened, so far as folly and short-sightedness go, to the action of the man in the fable who killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. Commercialism has for so long a time governed the policy of the country, the people have for so long a time been used to look to trade and manufactures for their livelihood, that agriculture has gradually taken an inferior place, if it has not dropped out of sight altogether.

It is simply astonishing to note the indifference shown by the manufacturing and trading classes to the condition of this the greatest of all industries. The importation of a few steam-engines, or some tons of iron girders, is noted with alarm by our Chambers of Commerce and by trade journals; but the importation, say, of cheese to the value of above seven millions sterling per annum excites little or no attention. We pay without a murmur this sum, which is about equal to the value of our exports to Norway and Sweden put together, for an article which this country is as fitted to produce as it is to manufacture steam-engines and girders.

The development of new markets abroad is carefully watched, while the increase or decrease of the purchasing power of our own counties, as determined by the state of agriculture, is treated as a matter of small moment.

If the land of this country were fully cultivated, and were yielding to its full capacity, the case would be different. But seeing that under a proper system it would yield twice, or more than twice, its present produce, this indifference of the manufacturing classes is difficult to explain. The old saying about "making two blades of grass grow where one grew before," is always accepted as a sound one, but is never seriously considered as applicable to our own fields. The poor agricultural labourer is but a small customer of the manufacturer, for he can afford to buy little beyond food and raiment. But the peasant proprietor, by the wealth created out of mother earth, buys tools, utensils, carts, furniture, and a variety of other things, including to a considerable extent even ornaments and luxuries. The theory is that a ton of butter from Denmark, for instance, is exchanged for British goods, and thus employment is found for our workmen. The theory is a doubtful one. But if the ton of butter were raised at home—as it could be, seeing the men and the land are available—the exchange between the home producer and consumer would be certain to take place. The illustration is a simple one, but it contains the principle contended for.

Owing to the vast development of trade and commerce throughout the world, which began just before the middle of last century, our manufacturers who were prepared for the event (being unrivalled as producers) had for many years a most prosperous

time. But this must have been the case, with or without the legislation of 1846. With agriculture, however, the position was reversed. By that legislation it was brought into open competition with other nations, who in their turn were unrivalled in the production of the staple articles of the agricultural industry.

The British farmer, having practically nothing to export, was soon undersold in the only market open to him—that is, the home market. Land speedily fell in value, and the capital invested in it began rapidly to disappear. Thus agriculture, the premier industry of the world, the root of a nation's welfare, while prosperous in every other country, became a fast-decaying business in our own.

Things went well with the manufacturing classes for years, during which vast fortunes were made. But other nations, ridiculing our policy, began to protect their manufactures as well as their agriculture. By the ever-increasing foreign tariffs, the manufacturing classes of this country, in their turn, are being brought face to face with a state of things quite different from that which existed sixty years ago.

From the latter part of the eighteenth century to the seventies of last century was the golden age of the landlords. From about 1844 to 1880 was the golden era of the manufacturer. It remains to be seen whether or not our commercial classes did not unnecessarily sacrifice a certain constant and—as it might have been made—an ever-increasing home market, for a foreign trade which they would have had without such sacrifice, and would have kept as long as they are likely to keep it now. It remains to be seen whether, as our fiscal policy caused the

cultivation of our fields to be abandoned, the foreign fiscal policy will have a like disastrous effect on our workshops and factories.

It is difficult to ascertain, exactly, the amount of loss which traders and manufacturers have sustained by the decline of agriculture, and the extent to which they are still dependent for prosperity on that half-ruined industry. Several practical men have given much time and attention to these two points, and the results of their calculations are such as should arrest the attention of every commercial man in the kingdom. Perhaps the most elaborate and complete of these calculations are those made by Mr. R. E. Turnbull.¹

The lines on which they are made, Mr. Turnbull claims, are such as to make it impossible for a practical man to make a mistake of any great importance. Passing over the details of this exhaustive paper, a few of the conclusions arrived at cannot fail to be interesting to the general public.

Mr. Turnbull takes all the land in the United Kingdom occupied for agricultural purposes, and treats it as one large farm. His calculations cover a period of twenty-five years, that is, from June, 1872, to June, 1897. He estimates the average gross annual revenue from this large farm during each of the five years between these dates. The figures as regards revenue refer solely to the value of the produce sold by farmers to persons who do not occupy land, and to the value of produce consumed in the houses of the farmers. Sales

¹ This valuable and carefully prepared contribution to the subject is contained in a paper (73 pages) entitled, "Farm Capital and Revenue," by R. E. Turnbull, Claremont, Shrewsbury. It is published in the Transactions (Vol. X, 1898) of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland. (Blackwood, Edinburgh.)

made by one farmer to another are left out of account, as they do not affect the gross revenue of the whole of what is described as the "nation's farm."

Mr. Turnbull puts the average gross annual revenue for the first five years (1872-7) at 255 millions sterling, and for the last five years of the twenty-five dealt with (1892-7) at 175 millions, thus showing an average falling off in the revenue of no less than 80 millions per annum.¹ As regards farmers' capital, he puts the average amount of capital employed in farming during the first five years (1872-7) at £450,210,000, and during the last five years (1892-7) at £348,845,000, being a loss of farmers' capital of £101,365,000, or about 22½ per cent.

But in a shorter paper² published by Mr. W. J. Harris, the subject is perhaps treated in a manner more suitable for the trading and other non-agricultural classes, and it is for them that the information is the most necessary. Mr. Harris is a man of long experience in agrarian affairs, and has for years given much attention to the economic side of the farming industry in the United Kingdom. He adopts the same periods for inquiry as those taken by Mr. Turnbull, and, for all practical purposes, shows the same results.

The details of his calculation are arranged in a simple and an orderly manner, and can be readily followed and easily understood by a business man. He gives a profit and loss account of the farming industry, which shows that in the first five years

¹ These great reductions, it must be borne in mind, represent an annual decline of our home trade.

² Addresses delivered to the Devon and Cornwall Chamber of Agriculture by the President of the Chamber, W. J. Harris, of Halwill Manor, Devon.

(1872-7) farmers, as a body, made an annual average profit of £43,286,000, equal to an average income per farmer of £165 per annum. In the second five years (1892-7) they, as a body, incurred an annual loss of £1,694,600, thus showing how fast their capital had been disappearing.

But the calculations which directly affect the industrial classes—manufacturers and workmen—are those which show the falling off of the gross output of farms—the decline in the purchasing power of the land. In the first five years (1872-7) Mr. Harris estimates the gross value of the produce sold from all the farms of the United Kingdom to average £249,148,000 per annum.¹ We may reckon that the bulk of this enormous sum was spent in our own country in labour or commodities.² Its relative importance may be gauged by the fact that for the same five years (1872-7) the total amount of our exports of British and Irish products averaged less than 224 millions per annum, including coal (the nation's capital) and raw material. This export trade, therefore, was considerably less than the home trade as represented by the purchasing power of our own soil.

¹ Mr. Turnbull puts the sum at 255 millions.

² Mr. Harris calculates that of this sum above 65 millions were spent in labour and 12 millions with tradesmen. On this important point Adam Smith remarks: "The capital employed in agriculture not only puts in motion a greater quantity of productive labour than any equal capital employed in manufactures, but in proportion, too, to the quantity of productive labour which it employs, it adds a much greater value to the annual produce, to the land and labour of the country, to the real wealth and revenue of the inhabitants." Adam Smith goes on to describe the cosmopolitan character of the capital employed in other industries. The capital of the merchant has no fixed residence, but "may wander about from place to place according as it can either buy cheap or sell dear." The capital of the manufacturer must reside where the manufacture is carried on, but that might be anywhere at home or abroad. But he adds,

But during the period of five years, twenty years later, that is 1892-7, Mr. Harris reckons the gross value of the produce sold from the same farms to average £175,308,400 (instead of £249,148,000) per annum, or a falling off of no less than £73,839,600 per annum.¹ The figures show, therefore, that during the five years named the total decline was about 369 millions sterling, which may be held mainly to be the loss to British trade during the five years.

What consternation there would be among the commercial classes, if our foreign exports should show a falling off during the next few years of an average of 74 millions sterling per annum, with every prospect of the decline continuing!

But it is difficult to understand why there is such virtue attached to the word "exports." Why are sales (call them exports) to East Anglia, Devonshire, Northumbria, etc., of less importance to the manufacturer than the sales to Germany, Belgium, or the United States? A steam-engine or a plough is not less profitable to the maker if sold to a farmer in England, who pays for it out of the produce of the land, than if sent to a farmer in Argentina. Yet the

the capital employed in the agriculture of any society "must always reside within that society." These statements directly support the arguments used in these pages. If the 12 millions sterling named in the Land Purchase Bill were spent by the State (society) in the improvement of agriculture, any gains from that outlay would reside at home, but under our present system would reside with a few persons, the landlords. Under a system of occupying ownerships these gains would be widely distributed among the inhabitants of the country, whose revenue would be "in proportion to the value of the annual produce of their land and labour." (See "Wealth of Nations," Vol. II book ii.) In these arguments of Adam Smith the functions of a true political economy are seen, which are to deal with the distribution of wealth instead of with its aggregation, to which that so-called science is so often confined.

¹ Mr. Turnbull estimates this falling off at 80 millions per annum.

decline of our home trade is looked upon with unconcern by manufacturers, while the working classes do not seem, as yet, to realize the vast amount of employment they are deprived of by the decay of agriculture.

Landlords' rents during the periods under consideration have been largely reduced, though, as we have shown, these reductions are reductions from the inflated scale of rents which ruled during the old prosperous times. But this affords small consolation to the present landlords. During the time of prosperity, settlements, mortgages, jointures were made, establishments provided, etc., all on the presumption that the good times would last. Now and again there appeared an owner of the class whom the Duke of Bedford describes as "the fool or the spendthrift," whose worthless career encumbered the estates more or less permanently. Many landlords spent large sums, in the form of improvements, buildings, homesteads, etc., on their farms—sums larger, in many cases, than the present value of the freehold of the holdings. The result is that landlords who have inherited their estates have, as a rule, no spare money to spend on them. There is, therefore, no hope in that direction for improvements in the cultivation of the land.

The remedy which Mr. Harris proposes is to put a duty on imports of manufactured goods, on barley, oats (not on wheat or maize), and on the smaller articles of food. With the proceeds of these duties he would give bounties for home-grown wheat, and reduce, or remit, duties on other necessary articles of living, including tea and tobacco. The weak point in the scheme is that the proposed bounties would fail to produce the desired effect so long as the farmer is a

tenant. Mr. Harris seems to recognize this, for he suggests that the bounty "should be withheld from any farm where the landlord attempts unduly to raise the rent."

He proposes that the tenant should be enabled to appeal to the County Council against any undue exaction. But these safeguards involve the principles of "fair rent" and the establishment of land-courts, and are never likely to be adopted. Landlords, therefore, in the case of bounties would act very much like other people. The wealthy among them might possibly allow the advantage to go to their tenants, but this could hardly be expected from those holding an estate for life, and others, who, when they have paid their liabilities, have often little or nothing left for themselves. Under a system of occupying ownership the case would be totally different. A bounty paid to the cultivating owner, of sufficient amount to enable him to grow wheat at a profit, would secure the object in view. To the extent the operation was carried out, to that extent the food supply would be increased and good employment found for labourers, while the social and political advantages to the community would be well worth the cost.

As an example, take a limited area, say 200,000 acres, which is about the acreage that went out of wheat cultivation during the single cereal year 1903-4. If wheat were grown in this comparatively small acreage under the conditions named, there would be employment (allowing for machinery) for at least 6000 labourers.¹ No doubt wages would be increased, but

¹ This is reckoning that three men are required for every 100 acres in wheat more than are required for the same area in grass. This is a point on which there is great difference of opinion. Many farmers put the number at four, some at five. The Duke of Bedford reckons five

the yeoman farmer—receiving a bounty and no longer subject to having rent raised—could afford to pay them.

If this were done, even on the small scale named, it would mean that (reckoning the families) at least 25,000 persons would be restored to the land. The yield from the acreage named—at 30 bushels an acre—would be 6,000,000 bushels. So that this small area, only the size of that which went out of wheat cultivation in a single season, would produce wheat enough to supply bread to 1,000,000 of our people for a whole year.

It might be interesting to extend these calculations. Roughly estimated, our total supply of wheat (including flour expressed as wheat) from all sources for the calendar year 1903 was as follows :—

	Quarters.
Home production	7,000,000
Foreign imports	20,000,000
Imports from India and the Colonies	7,000,000
Total	<u>34,000,000</u> ¹

To produce this total and enable us, so far as bread is concerned, to become a self-feeding nation, would

extra men for every 200 acres. Of course, the presumption is that the land would be tilled, not in the labour-starved manner in which so much of it is now, but in a thoroughly good manner, as undoubtedly would be the case by a farmer who owned the land.

¹ These estimates are based on figures given in "Statistical Abstracts" of the United Kingdom; "Agricultural Returns," Board of Agriculture; "The Journal of the Board of Agriculture"; "The Corn Trade Year Book," Bromhall; Vinton's "Agricultural Almanac." The returns somewhat vary on account of the difference between those given for the cereal year (August to August) and those given for the calendar year. The changes in the sources of supply of agricultural produce generally, and qualifications of the estimates of the home supply of wheat, are fully dealt with in an admirable report by Major Craigie: "Report on Agricultural Returns, 1903," Board of Agriculture. The same subjects are discussed in "The Journal of the Board of Agriculture," December, 1904.

require about 9 million acres to be cultivated in wheat. But it might be thought that 9 million acres in wheat would be too large a proportion of the cultivable land of the kingdom to be used for one article of food; besides which, no one wishes to stop imports from India and the colonies. The quantities of wheat received from the different sources of supply vary from year to year, and therefore any apportionment of them can be only approximate. But taking the supplies of 1903 as a basis for the calculation, it would require the yield (at 30 bushels the acre) of about 7 million acres, in addition to the imports from India and the colonies, to provide bread for all the population of the United Kingdom for a whole year, and if from any cause all over-sea supplies were stopped, this home produce would be enough for more than nine months' supply.

Seven million acres out of nearly 48 millions under crops of some kind in the United Kingdom is not an undue proportion, seeing that before 1860, without bounties or protection, we had more than 4 million acres so cultivated.¹ Of course, to have 7 million acres every year in wheat would require a much larger acreage set aside for the purpose, as it is not thought at present to be profitable or to be good farming to grow wheat year after year in succession on the same land. But this in itself would be a further advantage to the community, because the extra acreage, whatever it might be, would be under the plough, producing crops of some kind, instead of being kept in grass.²

¹ McCulloch estimated that the total quantity of wheat grown in the United Kingdom in 1846 (seed being allowed for) was 15,578,000 quarters.

² Good crops of wheat can be grown on the same land for several

The question is, how can this increased cultivation of wheat be secured? It could be effectually secured by a bounty of, say, thirty shillings per acre on the 7 million acres named, which would mean an annual outlay of $10\frac{1}{2}$ millions sterling of public money. On the question of bounties Adam Smith makes the following important remarks, which directly bear on the suggestion here made: "To encourage," he says, "the production of any commodity, a bounty upon production, one would imagine, would have a more direct operation than one upon exportation. It would, besides, impose only one tax upon the people, that which they must contribute in order to pay the bounty. Instead of raising, it would tend to lower the price of the commodity in the home market; and thereby instead of imposing a second tax upon the people, it might, at least in part, repay them for what they had contributed at first. Bounties upon production, however, have been rarely granted. The prejudices established by the commercial system have taught us to believe that national wealth arises more immediately from exportation than from production."¹ One important result of this system would be that the foreigner would no longer be able to rule our wheat markets. We should be free, as countries with fixed duties are free, from sudden and rapid fluctuations in price caused by speculation in grain. If the foreigner came in at all, he would have to pay the charge out of his own profits, because the prices here would be fixed for him and not as at present by him. Further, no

years in succession, and some farmers do it. Mr. W. A. Prout, Chairman of the Farmers' Club, has grown wheat on the same soil continuously for above forty years. For the methods adopted see "Journal of the Farmers Club," October, 1905.

¹ "Wealth of Nations," Vol. III, chap. v.

question could be raised of taxing bread, or of raising the price of the loaf to the consumer, for the reason that the bounties would always keep the price of wheat steady and as low as possible. The cultivating owner, by means of the bounty, would prosper, and the land be restored to a high state of cultivation.¹

If some political economist could work out the financial results of this operation it would be interesting. He would have to put on the one side the amount of the bounties, $10\frac{1}{2}$ millions sterling plus the loss of the crops (whatever they may have been) which the extra acreage bore before it was cultivated in wheat, and also the additional cost of cultivation. On the credit side there would be assets (reckoning the yield at 30 bushels an acre and 30s. a quarter) of about $39\frac{1}{2}$ millions sterling for the wheat, about 9 millions (a low estimate) for straw,² and a proportionate sum for offal. The loss on offal in connection with imported flour, is too often overlooked. At a meeting of the Central Chamber of Agriculture, a table of calculations was presented by Mr. T. G. Read,

¹ To make the calculation short and plain, the bounty is reckoned at so much per acre. But it might equally well be given in the form of so many shillings per quarter of wheat, so that it might be a premium on good farming and increased production.

² Landlords frequently forbid the sale of straw, as it is considered that the fertility of the farm is lessened thereby, which is no doubt the case if no substitutes are used. All depends on the situation of the farm. If it is within carting distance of a populous centre the farmer can sell his straw at a much higher price than its manurial value, indeed, at such a price as would enable him, even now, to grow wheat at a profit. In any case the farmer who cultivated his own land could act as he thought best in the matter.

Mr. Moreton Frewen states: "The French theory is that cheap food is the resultant of a cheaply fertilized soil, in other words of cows and straw stacks, . . . that with straw enough and cows enough you can have endless cheap beef, mutton, and pork, cheap dairy produce, and cheap poultry."—Letter to the "Times," March 4th, 1904.

of the Tendring Farmers' Club, Essex, which showed that during eighteen years (1885-1902) there had been an average loss of £1,677,139 per annum through importing flour instead of its equivalent in wheat.

Besides these items, there is the question of employment to be considered. These 7 millions of acres brought under wheat cultivation would provide employment for at least 175,000 men, who, with their wives and children, would number at the lowest half a million of persons, all fixed on the soil, and living by means of employment on it.¹ Besides this, if Mr. Chamberlain's proposal to levy the small duty of 2s. per quarter on foreign wheat and 5 per cent on other imported food were adopted, not as "protection," but as a toll levied on the foreigner for the use of our markets, the sum so realized, no matter how applied,

¹ This is adopting the Duke of Bedford's opinion that five men are required for every 200 acres in wheat more than are wanted for the same area in grass; but it is certain that this estimate is far too low. Mr. Alfred Mansell, than whom there is no better authority, stated in a paper read before the United Service Institution (1903), that to cultivate an extra 2,218,493 acres of wheat would give employment to 150,000 extra labourers. This is about fourteen men to each 200 acres instead of the five that I have given, or a total of about 490,000 labourers (instead of 175,000) required for the 7 million acres named. I wrote to Mr. Mansell to ask if he had not overstated the number, and the following is his reply: "I do not think, after giving the matter careful thought, that I have overstated my case. The actual growing of this acreage of wheat would not in itself give work to so many extra labourers, but to grow this extra acreage of wheat a great deal more land than is actually occupied annually by this cereal would have to come into cultivation, as in the ordinary economy of the farm wheat could not be grown without an increase in roots and other green crops. It would also necessitate that a much larger acreage should be devoted to temporary pastures. This would all mean a good deal of extra labour." According to Mr. Mansell's calculation the cultivation of 7 million acres in wheat would give employment to about 420,000 labourers. These and their wives and families would number about 1½ million persons all living on the soil.

would materially lessen the cost of the operation to the general public. And, above all, there would be a vast reduction in the cost of pauperism and of the unemployed, all of which, in some form or another, now falls on the community. If all these savings could be estimated and placed on the credit side of the suggested account, it would undoubtedly be found that even from an economic point of view the transaction referred to would be a paying one for the nation. From a social and political point of view the advantages could not be estimated, they are incalculable.

Unfortunately, poverty and distress have become so permanent in our midst that charitable agencies for the relief of them are now a profession, paid and unpaid. They form a prominent part of our social life, and often a fashionable pastime. If a foreigner were to visit the home of some public or wealthy man in England, and could see the great number of appeals for help which are received, coming in by almost every post, he might fairly conclude that we were a nation of paupers.

There are large numbers of the philanthropic public who give willingly of their time and money in charitable directions, and by so doing are gratified with the feeling that they are doing something, and sacrificing something, for their fellow-creatures. They experience the "luxury of doing good." But it is questionable if they would take the same personal interest in legislative action, the course of which is impersonal and void of sensation, but the certain effect of which would be to replace charity, with its demoralization, by self-help and independence.

In the calculations made, 30 bushels of wheat per acre are taken as the average yield. But on farms

tilled by owners, who, by means of bounties, could afford to employ sufficient well-paid labour, and be enabled to highly cultivate the land, there would doubtless be a far larger average yield, thus adding many millions sterling to the credit side of the suggested account. Indeed, it is difficult to name a limit to what the kindly soil will yield, when fairly and skilfully treated.

Arthur Young,¹ in describing the best-cultivated land he visited, gives an account, now and then, of the labour and manure bestowed on it. The land, he said, is ploughed three or four times for wheat, and receives twenty to thirty loads (of 36 bushels) of farm-yard dung per acre. One farm of 90 acres employed 4 men and 1 boy regularly, besides extra help during harvest. A farm of 200 acres (60 in grass) had 8 horses, 6 regular servants and labourers, besides occasional extra help. Another farm (in Surrey) of 300 acres (240 arable) employed 12 horses, 8 oxen, and 16 regular servants and labourers. In a number of financial accounts which he gives of different farms, an item of "5 qrs. of wheat per acre" is almost invariably entered on the credit side. This refers only to the best-cultivated land.

Young attaches far more importance to good cultivation than to the quality of the land. He goes on to say how remarkable it is that the average quantity of wheat, on rich land which he refers to, should not exceed $6\frac{1}{2}$ qrs. per acre; while he is able "to state as a fact, with good tillage and plentiful manuring $13\frac{1}{2}$ qrs. of wheat have been produced from a statute acre of land." He continues, "Very poor soils, and

¹ "Tour through the Southern Counties of England and Wales." Arthur Young, 1772.

even such as have been reputed barren, are made by these means (good cultivation, abundant labour, and manure) to exceed the naturally fertile ones in produce. . . . The richness of the land is not, therefore, of so much importance to the cultivator, and, of course, to the nation at large; as a lively, vigorous, and judicious cultivation of it."¹

Another experienced agriculturist speaks of 12 qrs. an acre on well-cultivated land, and adds, "I have known myself 8 qrs. to 10 qrs."² In a description of farming in Berkshire, the following appears: "From the averages of parishes in the different districts, it appears that the Vale of the White Horse yields about 4 qrs. an acre; the best soils 5 qrs. . . . Stamford, in the Vale of Kennet, produces about 5 qrs. to the acre."³

In short, it is difficult to find any writer on husbandry who reckoned less than 5 qrs. per acre as the average yield of best-cultivated land before the decay of agriculture set in. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect that under a system of occupying ownership, with a sufficient bounty on wheat-growing and the consequent good cultivation the average yield would be at least 40 bushels per acre.

The present writer has recently received a letter from one of the greatest authorities on the subject,

¹ The present writer was visiting a farmer in the south of England a few years ago at harvest time. He remarked on the poorness of the wheat crop, and pointed to a large field in the neighbourhood, the yield of which, in the opinion of competent judges, was at least 50 bushels an acre. The reply was, "That field is the property of a butcher in the village, who spares neither labour nor manure; he cultivates in a manner that I cannot afford to do." This farmer, about two years afterwards, having lost what capital he had, was obliged to leave the farm.

² "Practical Husbandry," John Mills, 1767.

³ "The Agriculture of Berkshire," by William Mavor, LL.D., 1809.

which points out an economic advantage of great importance connected with the proposal for giving bounties. It states :—

“ I consider that a bounty would have an enormous effect on the increase in the production of wheat, and that it would be an unmixed benefit to the poorer half of the community, because it would keep the price of wheat steady and low. The land that would be brought into cultivation would be mostly old worn-out pasture, not worth more than 15s. per acre now. The proposals mean a great revolution in farming which at the present time is to lay everything down into grass, and let it remain till it is almost valueless except for a small rental to the landowner. . . . The decrease in the number of sheep in the kingdom during the past forty years shows how little advantage the large acreage of poor grass has been to the tenant. It simply, in many cases, makes it easier for him to do without employing labour, and he practically depends for his living on spending as little as possible.”

General calculations are always open to criticism, and are often faulty in details ; but those here given are obviously sufficiently accurate to support the arguments advanced, and the conclusions drawn from them. These arguments and conclusions are addressed to those of the industrial classes who may not have thought much on the subject of agriculture and the extent to which their own prosperity is dependent on that great industry. They are addressed to the general public, with a view of giving some insight into the problem of rural depopulation with its attendant evils ; and they are further addressed to the philanthropist and social reformer, with the

object of showing that it is to the land they must look for the most hopeful remedy for the misery and destitution which exist.

In addition to a revival in ordinary farming, there is the question of "*la petite culture*"—small farming—which is a distinct branch of the agricultural industry. If it were restored on the lines suggested, there seems to be no reason why a yearly increasing part of the smaller articles of food now imported should not be produced at home. Taken as a whole, therefore, if the agrarian policy here advocated were vigorously carried out, and Mr. Chamberlain's proposals were adopted in connection with it, the whole condition of English rural life would soon be changed. Employment would be enormously increased, not only for those immediately connected with the soil, but also for those engaged in subsidiary trades, such as the blacksmith, carpenter, miller, implement-maker, saddler, wheelwright, etc. Our villages and market towns, now in decay, would again become peopled and prosperous.

This is pre-eminently a labour question. Thousands of men who are now competing with their fellows in an overstocked labour-market in towns would be drawn off to the land, there to produce wealth to be spent largely in the very localities they had left.

The vast sums now spent with the foreigner for food, and which go to enrich the workshops and retail shops abroad, would, by the increased production of our own mother earth, be largely devoted to the benefit of similar concerns at home, and, what is of great importance, the justifiable anxiety now felt as to our food supply in time of war would be removed.

Touching the labour part of the question—during the Corn Law agitation it was urged that Free Trade meant “exchanging our manufactures for the corn of other countries.”¹ The argument ever repeated during the contest was that “every bushel of corn imported would be paid for by British manufactures.” But this prediction, like almost every other made at the time, has never been realized. The exact contrary result has been seen.

Let us take the United States as an example. Unfortunately the references to imports so far as values are concerned cannot be carried further back than 1854. But, taking quantities, we find that during the first ten years (1847-56) after the repeal of the Corn Laws the average yearly imports of wheat, wheat meal, and flour from the United States were under five million cwts. During the last ten years (1894-1903) the average yearly imports of the same produce were nearly fifty-six millions cwts. So that, according to the Cobden theory—a theory which told so effectively during the Corn Law agitation—our exports to the United States should have increased in a like proportion.² But the values of these exports are available so far back as the years named, and therefore a comparison can be made. We find that during the first ten years (1847-56) our average yearly exports of British and Irish produce to that country were between 16 and 17 millions sterling, while during the second period (1894-1903), nearly fifty years later, the average yearly exports of the same kind of produce

¹ Cobden's speech, House of Commons, 25 August, 1841.

² In this comparison the imports of wheat and wheat flour only are taken. If the imports of other grain and meal are brought into account, the disparity is enormously increased.

were only about $20\frac{1}{2}$ millions, showing a comparatively small increase. The average yearly imports from the United States during the same ten years (1894-1903) were no less than 117 millions.

Leaving averages and taking the year in each of the decades of years named, in which our exports of British and Irish products to the United States were the highest, we find that in 1853 they were above $23\frac{1}{2}$ millions sterling, while in 1902 they were about $23\frac{3}{4}$ millions, or practically the same. So that instead of every bushel of the enormously increased imports of corn being "paid for by British manufactures," facts show that the exports of British products to the United States are about the same now as they were fifty years ago.¹

The full significance of this comparison can only be seen by looking at the increase of population in the two countries. The United States in 1853, with a population of less than 30 millions, bought about as much in value of British products as that country did fifty years later (in 1903), with a population of about 80 millions. In the same way our working classes got as much employment through working for the United States in 1853, when our population was about 28 millions, and the imports of grain were so small, as they got in 1903, when the population had increased to about 42 millions and the imports of grain were so vast. To put the case in another way, the exports to the United States in 1853 were 17s. per head of our population; in 1903 they were about 10s. 8d.

¹ The returns for last year (1904) have just been issued. They show that the value of our exports to the United States of British and Irish produce was still lower, being less than $20\frac{1}{2}$ millions sterling, while that of our imports from that country the same year were $119\frac{1}{4}$ millions.

The subject will be referred to in detail later on, but in the meantime it may be noted that the great increase in our exports to America in the middle of last century had nothing to do with free imports of corn. In fact, it began before the repeal of the Corn Laws came into operation, and was caused solely by the pressing and increasing need which America had for goods and capital which this country alone could supply. As Cobden himself pointed out in 1845, "manufactures and commerce are thriving, and the revenue is flourishing."¹ Indeed, looking at the history of the time, there are strong grounds for believing that if the legislation of 1846 had been delayed for a single year, the total repeal of the Corn Laws would not have taken place, so great was the increase of prosperity and the consequent increase in employment.

Mr. Morley, writing of the state of things in 1845, says: "In spite of the activity which was involved in those profuse supplies (subscriptions) the outlook of the cause (repeal of the Corn Laws) was, perhaps, never less hopeful and encouraging. The terrible depression which had given so poignant an impulse to the agitation had vanished, and trade and commerce were thriving. The revenue was flourishing, pauperism had declined." (Life of Cobden, chap. xiv.)

In spite of experience, another argument is still used on political platforms, to the effect that if we lessen imports by protecting our home production, our exports will fall off. It is strange that any one with experience of the foreign trade can really believe in such a fallacy. Our sales to a foreign country are

¹ Speech in London, 15 January, 1845.

not made in a lump quantity, in one large indent, but are made to a great number of individual buyers in that country, each one of whom will, in any circumstances, take our goods if it suits him to do so, and in no circumstances will he take them if it does not. France, Germany, and other nations have been effectually defending and protecting their agricultural interests, and at the same time their exports of manufactured goods have been increasing by leaps and bounds.

If we turn to the future, the outlook for agriculture, and consequently for the British home trade, is a gloomy one, if the present system is continued. Small as our home supply of cereals is at the present time, there is every prospect that it will become less and less. There is evidence that farmers will act more freely on what is termed the "wise advice to rely on cattle," and on the assurance that "live stock will prove to be the sheet-anchor of farming."

But even this branch of the industry is threatened. In former times, cattle from over-sea could be imported into this country and sold on arrival as fat or store animals. The Diseases of Animals Acts, passed some years ago, put an end to this practice by providing that cattle must be slaughtered at the ports within a few days after they have been landed.¹ But a powerful and wealthy organization has been formed with the object of securing the repeal of these Acts. This organization includes graziers, representatives of railway and shipping companies, co-operative societies,

¹ The efficacy of these Acts is shown by the following report:—
"With the close of the year 1904, I am again able to report that the live stock of Great Britain remains free from all the more serious contagious diseases legislated for in this country." (Report of the Chief Veterinary Officer, Board of Agriculture, Cd. 2454, 1905.)

chambers of commerce, harbour authorities, butchers' associations, etc. A strong deputation representing these bodies waited on the President of the Board of Agriculture (October, 1903), and in support of their views used the old hack argument of the free importer. Imports of store cattle should be unrestricted because "they were raw material"; they would "make food cheaper," and be in the "interests of the consumer," etc. The present law was generally denounced as "protection."

The safety of the herds of the British farmer, and the welfare of agriculture, were of secondary, if of any, consideration in the prospect of getting meat a farthing per pound cheaper, and extra traffic for railways and steamships.

The President of the Board, Lord Onslow, acting in the true interests of the country, declined, in no uncertain terms, to interfere with the Acts. But there is no guarantee that, with future governments, the commercial and urban influence will not, as usual, override the interests of agriculture. The spurious cry of "cheap food" will be used—as the equally spurious cry of the "cheap loaf" is being used now—as a political means to secure the end in view. Should the Acts be repealed the results will be that some time or another disease will be imported, and once imported will spread throughout the country; that the vast amount of public money that has been spent in successfully stamping out cattle disease will be thrown away, and that the long and difficult work will have to be done over again. But besides the question, so important to the community, of having healthy cattle, it is difficult to see, should the Acts be repealed, how the smaller and middle-class farmer will be able to breed

and rear stock at a profit. The large grazing farmer, no doubt, will find it profitable in preparing imported store cattle—the “raw material”—for the markets. Grass land is more profitable and less troublesome to manage than tillage, and fewer labourers are required on it.

Looked at from any point of view, it seems probable that the land of England, so far as the great bulk of it is concerned, will soon become practically a ranch, on which few will be employed besides the herdsman, and, as Bishop Latimer said, the “shepherd and his dogge.”

It is often asked, why should State assistance be given to agriculture any more than to the iron, cotton, or any other industry? The present writer will have failed in one of his main objects if he has not shown that agriculture is different from all other industries, that it is the basis of all others. The land is Nature’s great factory in which the work never ceases by night or day, producing everything we eat, use, wear, or handle. “In agriculture Nature labours along with man; and though her labour costs no expense, its produce has its value, as well as that of the most expensive workmen.”¹

Every one—man, woman, and child—in the country is affected by the prosperity or depression of agriculture. In the proposed land reform the yeoman farmer is regarded as the nation’s instrument to secure national gains, comforts, and safety; the fact that he shares the general advantages of that reform is but an incident in its operation.

The question is a too comprehensive one to be

¹ “Wealth of Nations,” Vol. II, p. 55 (11th edition, 1905).

looked at only from the point of view of the agriculturist. It is, in a sentence, whether—looking at the moral, social, and political, as well as the economical considerations involved—it is wise to make a vigorous attempt to develop the splendid capacity of our own fields, or to leave agriculture to its fate, and continue to rely on the produce of foreign countries for food.

If the former course is thought the wiser, then all experience proves that the system of cultivating ownership is the only one to attain the object. The system is the same in principle as that which so largely obtained in this country “ere England’s woes began,” and which forms the basis of land-tenure in almost every other civilized nation in the world.

CHAPTER XIX

OUR FOOD SUPPLY IN THE TIME OF WAR

THERE is another view of the case worthy of the serious attention of the commercial and wealthier classes of the country. Lord Selborne, when First Lord of the Admiralty, in the debate on Naval Administration, said: "No other Admiralty in the world has to consider, besides safeguarding the country from invasion, the fact that on the Navy depends the supply of food for the people."¹ He might have added—so far as the food supply is concerned—that this is an untried position for this country, and that in case of a great war the Navy would be charged with this vital duty for the first time in our nation's history. During the great wars of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, this country was so nearly a self-feeding one, that no anxiety existed as to supplies from without.

Lord Selborne was one of the ablest men that has ever filled that post. He would be the last man to indulge in mere alarmist rhetoric for the purpose of passing his enormous Navy estimates through Parliament. We have, therefore, seriously to consider our position in the event of a great struggle. It appears that almost everything may now be declared by a belligerent to be contraband of war, and it is

¹ "Times," 10 August, 1904.

possible that food might be so declared.¹ No doubt our Navy would effectively discharge the duty prescribed by the First Lord of "seeking the enemy's ships and destroying them wherever they could be found." But suppose the enemy had a dozen or so of swift, lightly armed cruisers of the "commerce-destroyer" class, whose duties would be not to fight, but to run away from our ships of war, and to scour the ocean in search of grain-laden ships. In such a case the security of our food supply would be greatly endangered.

It has been urged that neutral powers, who are so financially interested in supplying this country with grain, would not allow it to be declared contraband of war. But this argument disappears on an examination of our sources of supply. Russia might be one of the belligerents. Argentina is too weak to interfere. India and the Colonies are parts of the British Empire, and would be treated by our foes as such. There remains America. The United States would no doubt be at least a neutral, because the ties of friendship and race between the two countries have happily become so strong, that a war with our kinsmen across the Atlantic may be placed in the region of the impossible. But there are signs that we shall receive less and less grain from America. Her rapid increase in population and prosperity indicates that the time is not far distant when America will require all or most

¹ "In February, 1885, it was announced on the part of France that in the circumstance of her war with China she would treat rice as contraband of war by virtue of the right of a belligerent to issue occasional prohibitions of the trade in things which, though not contraband by nature like arms and ammunition of war, are of a particular utility to his enemy." (Memorandum by Professor J. Westlake, K.C., Appendix 29, Vol. III, Report of Royal Commission on Food Supply, etc. Cd. 2645.)

of her produce for consumption at home, and consequently will have small financial or commercial interest in the matter of grain being declared contraband of war.¹

War, as a rule, breaks out suddenly, and for the unprepared there is no time for preparation. In the matter of food we are absolutely unprepared, and the question would immediately become one affecting the daily existence of the people. Careful calculations have been made, which show the disquieting fact that "during the last ten years, at no period have we had in the United Kingdom sufficient stocks of wheat and flour for more than seven weeks' consumption, and at times the stocks have fallen as low as two weeks' consumption."²

¹ The returns for 1904 are now available. They show that from one cause and another our supplies of wheat and flour from the United States were less than one-half of what they were in 1903. On the other hand, the imports from Argentina, India, and Australia had largely increased. The returns show the great fluctuations in the over-sea sources of our wheat supply.

² "Our Food Supply in the Time of War," by T. V. S. Angier, F.R.S.S., 14 May, 1903.

According to the Report of the Royal Commission on "Food Supply in the Time of War," our stock of wheat in hand varies between a *maximum* of seventeen weeks' supply and a *minimum* of six-and-a-half weeks.

We have to go back to Roman history for a parallel to this dangerous state of things. Egypt was the granary on which Rome depended for wheat supplies. We are told that Vespasian, after the victory of his forces at Cremona, "committed to the still tempestuous sea some of the swiftest of his ships laden with corn, and well it was he did so, for the City was then tottering under a state of things so critical that the corn in the granaries was sufficient for no more than ten days' supply when the stores from Vespasian came in to their aid."—Tacitus, Vol. II, book 4, chap. LIII (Bohn's translation).

Again the same lesson is taught by the story of the buccaneers:—"They held complete possession of the Italian waters. Rome, depending on Sicily, Sardinia, and Africa for her supplies of corn, was starving for want of food."—Froude's "Cæsar" (Longmans).

Modern warfare is so different from warfare of former times that few sound conclusions can be drawn from the past. Ships have increased in size and might, but, as we have seen by the war in the East, the means of destruction have increased with equal rapidity. No one can forecast what would happen, even to our Navy, however strong, in the event of a war with a European power or combination of powers. In any case, our enemies would be bad generals indeed if they did not concentrate their efforts on the one vulnerable point in our defence which has never before existed.

In 1903 a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the question of the supply of food and raw material in the time of war. The evidence given before the Commission by competent witnesses contains the most valuable information, and fully reveals the dangers connected with our present position as a nation. But the report of the Commission, so far as remedies go, is vague and unsatisfactory. Perhaps there never was a commission which received more valuable evidence and information than that of Lord Balfour's, and also never one whose report was more disappointing.¹

A large part of the evidence refers to the commercial side of the question, to the manner in which the corn trade, shipping trade, and other industries would be affected by war. But several witnesses closely touch what, after all, is the main part of the problem, namely, to what extent and in what manner the great mass of the people would be affected by the contin-

¹ Report of the Royal Commission on "Supply of Food and Raw Material in Time of War," 1905. Lord Balfour of Burleigh chairman.

gency under notice. One witness, who speaks with authority for the working classes, when asked what would be the general results of a war to the working classes in the present condition of our food supply, replied :—

“When you are giving the matter serious thought, it is almost too terrible to think of what would be the result. If our food supply, for which we have to depend upon other countries so very largely, were prevented coming into this country, that must increase prices to a terrible extent, and I am quite sure of this, that a very large number of workers would see starvation at once. . . .”

As to the dangers arising from conditions of war (Q. 1817), he stated: “When you get men into a destitute condition, and starvation is facing them, men will not be too particular. . . . Men will not starve quietly so long as there is food to be obtained, honestly or dishonestly. That follows as a matter of course.”

To the further question as to whether the people would put pressure on the Government to end the war, the witness replied: “I am sure they would. Men who are starving would not have any compunctions about putting the utmost pressure upon the Government to stop the war under any conditions when they are starving.”¹

One witness touches the root of the matter by saying: “I think the best and cheapest way to provide our food supplies in time of war would be to provide for them in times of peace”; and when questioned as to the best methods of doing this, he replied :—

¹ George D. Kelly, secretary of the Manchester and Salford Trades and Labour Council. See evidence, Vol. II, p. 312.

“I think the most economical thing for the country to do would be to make the small farmer, the small holder, as numerous as possible, and to do it as soon as possible. . . . I think we ought, as far as we can, to increase in every way the small holdings in the country and get the agriculturist to be his own master . . . same as they do in France and Germany, and then we should have a certain supply at home more than we have now.”¹

As if to complete these answers and to point out their practical character, another witness, an experienced agriculturist, stated :—

“Thousands of acres now practically producing nothing, which with wheat at a paying price would come again under the plough. . . . A great deal of land has never been laid down, it has simply tumbled down, and has been left to assume its own pasture. I have walked over hundreds of farms I may say in the last twenty years, and I cannot call it anything but moss and poor herbage . . . and notwithstanding this, the aggregate number of sheep, cattle, and pigs is about two and a half million less than it was about thirty years ago. This shows what we have lost in grain has not been made up in animal food.”²

It is to be regretted that the Commissioners did not consider the question from the standpoint of such evidence as this and give us their conclusions respecting it. To do so, no doubt, would be to face the fiscal question, but that question should have been considered quite apart from the opinions of individual members on the merits of free imports. It would be satisfactory to the public if they had been told by the

¹ Evidence of Sir Alfred Jones. Vol. II, p. 206.

² Evidence of Alfred Mansell. Vol. II, p. 308.

Commissioners whether or not in their opinion a modification—and what modification—of our present fiscal system would give a key to the solution of the problem of feeding the people in times of war.

As it is, a report is presented covering sixty-three pages of a Blue Book, signed by all the members of the Commission, and followed by about a dozen minority statements, containing reservations, qualifications, and supplementary reports—making altogether a very inconclusive and confusing document. The corn trade, shipping trade, and commercialism generally, appear to have governed the inquiry, and the question as to whether or not a sufficient stock of wheat in war time could be secured by the improvement of agriculture seems to have received no consideration. To ordinary men it seems incredible that during such a long inquiry, conducted by able and painstaking men, not one glance should have been cast in the direction in which it is most likely a remedy could be found for the evils they were considering—a remedy natural, commonplace, and effective: that of increasing the yield of our own fields.

The largest section of the Commission reports in favour of some system of national indemnity which would provide that the State should indemnify ship-owners and merchants for the capture or destruction of their ships and freights. The necessity for a scheme of this kind is fully dealt with in a letter written by Mr. Leverton Harris. Mr. Harris states:—

“It is sufficient to point out that every British vessel will be liable to be sunk, burnt, or captured by any enemy’s cruiser. . . . No one doubts that all our opponent’s energies will be directed against our over-sea trade; it will not be by invasion but by starvation

that our enemy will seek to reduce us. . . For this purpose no money will be spared and no opportunity neglected."

Mr. Harris shows that the United States, before the Civil War, had a just pre-eminence among maritime nations, second only to England in the amount of their tonnage, and that at the end of the war their fleet, through being sold, transferred to neutral flags, or captured, had ceased to exist, and that "this destruction of their mercantile marine was brought about by a mere handful of Confederate cruisers."

It is argued in the letter that shipowners, if insured under a scheme of national indemnity, would run risks that it would be ruin for them to run without, and so a continual supply of grain would reach our shores, while the nation would be paying only the actual net losses that might happen. The cost of the scheme, Mr. Harris says, it is impossible to estimate; it might, he states, be "five millions; it might be twenty millions or more"; but he adds, "it is far better to pay for the loss of a few vessels and a few cargoes, than that this country should lose her shipping supremacy and inflict grave sufferings on her working classes."¹

With regard to Lord Selborne's statement that "on the Navy depends the supply of food for the people," in 1903 a very able paper was read on the subject.² The discussion which followed showed the opinions of men who are qualified above all others to speak on the question of the navy in connection with the food supply in the time of war. Those opinions

¹ "Times," 12 September, 1905.

² See "Journal of the Royal United Service Institution," December, 1903: a paper read by Mr. Alfred Mansell on "Food Stuffs in the Time of War."

are decided and unqualified, and ought to carry the greatest weight with the outside public. Sir Nowell Salmon, admiral of the fleet, said on that occasion: "We may hope to a certain extent, but not at the beginning of a war, the trade routes may be kept free; at the commencement of a war I have no doubt they would be very much interfered with." He goes on to quote the opinion of the secretary of Lloyd's to the following effect: "No form of insurance was practical except keeping up a strong navy and army, and also, as a second line of defence, a reserve of wheat."

Admiral Harding Close said on the same subject:—

"We spend 31 millions a year on the Navy. You might as well chuck that money into the sea for all the good it will do, for what is the use of our going to sea and winning battles of Trafalgar if we leave a starving population behind? . . . It is no use your boasting that we have a powerful navy, and that therefore, having command of the sea, our food supply is safe. You cannot get a naval officer to say so. We never had command of the sea, so far as the protection of our merchant ships is concerned. If there was a period in the history of this country when we might say we had command of the sea, surely it was after the battle of Trafalgar, when there was not an enemy left on the sea. Yet after that battle, hundreds of our merchant ships were captured; and it will be so again. We cannot protect our merchant ships; the thing is impossible. But I believe this also, that a blockade of our ports is impossible. The true blockade will be the impossibility of our ten thousand slow merchant ships obtaining any insurance and being laid up as useless, as the United States merchant ships were laid up when the 'Alabama' was about. This will prevent the weekly arrival of the four hundred merchant ships which bring us our food, and cause

panic on the corn-market, the enemy having made food contraband of war."

In the face of these strong opinions, and having regard to the evidence given before the Royal Commission, it would be a bold course for any First Lord to tell the country that he is satisfied that a strong navy is sufficient to secure a supply of food for the people in the time of war.

In warfare, it has often happened that towns and strongholds have been starved into surrender, but probably no case in history can be found in which a whole nation has been subjected to that fate. But, though difficult to realize, it is useless to deny that that is the danger to which this country would be exposed in the event of war.

Such a crisis might never arise, but it is possible, and the possibility is actually advanced by the Government as a prime reason for spending the vast sum of above 36 millions sterling on our Navy in a single year. Should it arise, it must end in national disaster and humiliation. Unlike other nations, the great bulk of our population has been reduced to a proletariat, on whom, with their wives and children, the suffering would fall. Food, if it could be got at all, would be at famine prices. Our foreign trade, through dearness and scarcity of raw material, with freights and insurance at war rates, would speedily pass into other hands, and—having so largely destroyed our home trade—there would be no employment for the people. Enforced idleness and starvation, together, form a dangerous situation. It might be taken for granted that the great mass of the people would not for long quietly endure their sufferings. Why should they?

They would demand—and perhaps enforce the demand by methods that would have to be heeded—a peace and settlement on any terms, and at any price, however costly and humiliating.

Mr. J. Macdonald (Secretary of the London Trades Council), who spoke at the meeting referred to, said :—

“Mills and factories would either be shut up or be running on short time, and wages not obtainable by the working-man. . . . You will see hundreds, nay, thousands of men, able and willing to work, parading your streets, and not being able to work cannot get food.”

He goes on to say that these men will ask the Government why no provisions were made to meet these conditions, and will resolve that “if there is food in the country we mean to have it, or our share of it.” Mr. Macdonald adds :—

“That is what you have to face ; and frankly I say that, did such a condition arise, I should be one of the very first to advise the working-men, who have produced the food, to go and take it if they are hungry, and not allow it to be stored up.”

One other thing would be certain to happen. Men's eyes would be turned on the millions of acres of idle land which, had they been properly cultivated, would have been the means of averting the disaster. All classes would then see the extent to which a nation is dependent on agriculture for its safety and very existence.

Another proposal which, so far as can be gathered from the various reports, is supported by a majority of the Commissioners, is to provide huge granaries,

public and private, and in them to store wheat sufficient for so many months' consumption.

The practice of storing wheat to provide against famine years is as old as the time of the Pharaohs. Rome had her public granaries, but the wheat stored in them was the hard, dry kinds grown in hot climates, mainly in Egypt.¹ Wheat is stored for many months in our fortresses in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. But that is a small undertaking compared with an attempt to store enough grain for forty-two millions of people. Besides, in our climate wheat, however dry it might seem, contains moisture that makes it liable to turn sour and mouldy if kept for any length of time. The question of storing grain has been the subject of volumes of agricultural literature in this country for generations past, but it never received much favour.

One of the very best authorities on the subject, who was in favour of storing wheat, if it could be done, in order to equalize prices and provide against scarcity, concludes that it can only be stored in private hands. He writes :—

“Neither can that care be taken to preserve corn from corruption, decay, or being diminished or destroyed by vermin, in such public magazines, as in private hands, and consequently the goodness of the quality cannot be so well preserved; for they will seldom be emptied more than once a year; and all who know the corn-trade know how difficult it is, in this climate, to preserve corn sweet, after it is out of the straw, for the whole year round.”²

¹ Pliny, in his “Natural History,” describes various methods which the Romans adopted for storing grain. Book XVIII (Bohn's translation).

² “Tracts on the Corn Trade,” by Charles Smith, 1804.

Jethro Tull—a noted pioneer in the improvement of agriculture—

Besides, it is not bread stuffs only, but other articles of food would have to be stored, for we are as a nation in the same unhappy position with regard to them as we are with regard to wheat. The cost of doing this would be enormous. The building or renting of granaries, the deterioration of the food, the cost of administration, the vast amount of capital employed, of which perhaps neither principal nor interest might be ultimately realized, or only partly realized: these and other considerations might fairly make any Government hesitate before adopting a scheme of storage as a permanent and settled policy, whatever it might do as a temporary expedient, while a better, cheaper, and a more effective system is growing to completion.

These various proposals and recommendations serve to illustrate in a striking way our unique position among nations of having to import five-sixths of our food stuffs, while at the same time millions of acres of our own land are uncultivated. We turn from them with the strengthened conviction that the stackyard of the farmer is the only natural and proper place to store wheat for a nation, but under our present system the stackyard must remain empty.¹

speaks of a farmer who made it a practice to buy wheat when it was cheap; to dry it and keep it till the price was high. His method was to dry it upon a hair cloth in a malt kiln with no other fuel than clean white straw, never suffering it to have a stronger heat than that of the sun. After this process the wheat would keep sweet for many years. This man had occasionally in his granaries as much as five thousand quarters of dried wheat. "He was a most sincere and honest yeoman, who from a small substance he began with, left behind him about forty thousand pounds, the greatest part whereof was acquired by this drying method." (The "Horse Hoeing Husbandry," by Jethro Tull, 1822.)

¹ Up towards the end of the eighteenth century England was a wheat-exporting country. Ancient writers speak of the "fertile soil of Britain bearing heavy crops of corn," of the large exports of wheat, "of 800

Another suggestion, known as "private storage," is of a more reasonable kind, and is looked upon with favour by a large number of persons. The scheme is to make grants of public money to farmers to enable them to keep wheat in the stack for a considerable time, so that any contingency that might arise would find us with a good stock on hand.

Perhaps the most practical plan for private storage is that proposed by Sir R. P. Cooper.¹

Sir Richard Cooper, besides being one of the largest manufacturers in the kingdom, is a large owner of land both at home and abroad, and has close connections with all the corn-growing countries in the world. The question of food supply in time of war, he says, "is one of vital importance to every Briton, and cannot be over-rated, for our very existence as a Nation, and our continuance as an Empire, may depend upon it."

The scheme he proposes, shortly stated, is to put a small duty on all imported grain, 2s. per quarter on colonial, 4s. on foreign, and to place a duty of 4s. on colonial flour and 8s. on foreign.

The proceeds of these duties are to be given to the British farmer who grows wheat, and keeps it in stacks for certain periods. The following scale is suggested: if kept in stack till Christmas, 4s. per quarter; if till Lady Day, 6s.; and if till Midsummer, 8s. Sir Richard argues, with great force, that these sums would come out of the pockets of those who supply us

vessels, more than mere boats; employed in going backwards and forwards bringing over British corn (to the Rhine), thus proving the extent of British agriculture." "The English Village Community," Seeböhm.

¹ "Paper read before the Staffordshire Chamber of Agriculture," by R. P. Cooper, Shenstone Court, Lichfield, 30 January, 1904.

from abroad, and would affect the consumer at home to a very slight degree, if at all.

This would be a workable scheme, and would secure its object under a system of occupying ownership, because the farmer would then be quite sure that if he grew wheat and kept it till Midsummer, the 8s. per quarter premium would go into his own pocket. As a tenant, however, the chances are that it would not, but would go to pay an increased rent. Consequently the inducement to grow wheat, much less to store it, would not exist. Sir Richard Cooper contends that this would not be the case. It would probably not be with him, and with many other landlords; but, speaking generally, there can be but little doubt that it would be so,

Mr. Mansell, a farmer and land-agent, in his evidence before the Royal Commission, when asked (Q. 8656) if landlords would be likely to take an unfair advantage in case a bonus were given, replied: "I do not think so; that is a bogey which is largely put forward. There may be some landlords who would, but I think the majority of the landlords are certainly too patriotic to do that. I think the better class of landlords would not, but there may be some men who would."

It is frequently stated that even the relief given by the Agricultural Rating Act will find its way ultimately into the pocket of the landlord, but there is no evidence whatever that this is likely to be the case; the relief is too small and indirect to warrant any rise in rents. But Sir Richard Cooper's proposals are of quite a different kind. They involve the continual payment of very large sums to the tenant farmer, sums large enough to enable him to grow corn, and to store it, at a profit to himself. This would inevitably lead to a

readjustment of rents. There is no need to attach blame to landlords, or to call them "bad landlords," for doing what most business men would do in their place ; but, in judging the merits of any scheme for the avoidance of the great national danger under consideration, it would be folly to ignore the invariable experience of past times, and the guidance of common sense.

Under our present system of land-tenure, therefore, the scheme referred to would, in all probability, fail in its purpose. But with cultivating ownership these difficulties would not exist. Public money given, whether for wheat-growing or wheat-storing, would go direct to its object without being liable to have a toll levied on it during transit, and would make every yeoman-owner eager to grow as much wheat as he possibly could.

But why resort to these costly, doubtful schemes when a cheaper, simpler, and an absolutely effective method is available? In a previous chapter it is shown that by an expenditure in the form of bounties to cultivating owners of a comparatively small sum—less than a few weeks' general expenditure in time of war—wheat could be grown at home in such quantities as, when added to the imports from India and the colonies, would be sufficient to supply all the bread we need. Supposing, even, that in the time of war the whole of the supplies from over-sea were cut off, the home produce—which nothing could cut off—would be sufficient to provide bread for the whole population for a period of at least nine months.¹

¹ This is reckoned on the present rate of consumption, that is, about six bushels per annum per head. By the exercise of economy the supply would last much longer, as there is no doubt that, in the majority of households, the waste of bread, on account of its cheapness, is enormous.

Gambling in wheat, which would surely take place in the case of uncertain supplies from abroad, would be largely checked, and what is important, the knowledge that this store of food was safe within our shores would stave off panic among the people with all its serious effects.¹

Now this is of the greatest importance, as it is considered by all naval authorities that the danger connected with our food supply would be greatest during the first few months of a war. Admiral Close, speaking at the meeting referred to, said :—

“The struggle and danger will be in the first month or six weeks of war. If we can tide over that, you may then talk about convoys ; but during that period the whole strength of the Admiralty will be strained to dispatch our ships to sea ; for to engage and defeat the enemy must be the first consideration, and the protection of our merchant ships the second consideration.”

Our Navy and Army estimates for the financial year (1904-5) amount to the vast sum of £65,789,500. It would seem but a common act of prudence on the part of a government to take the few millions required from that sum, or to provide them by a separate vote—the issue is so vital it is immaterial which—for the purpose of mere insurance against famine and panic during the first few months of a war.

In any case, those classes now so indifferent to agriculture—from the man in the slum to the greatest capitalist—should see how closely their interests are connected with the state of that industry.

Adam Smith, in his advocacy of free trade, makes

¹ Leiter's gamble in wheat, though it failed, caused a rise in price in this country which we could not prevent.

an exception "when some particular sort of industry is necessary for the defence of the country." He strongly held that "defence is of much more importance than opulence." Looked at in this light, governments should seriously consider whether or not they are fatally neglecting the industry of agriculture, which, in a country so singularly situated as ours, might be truly described as the "first line of defence."

Lord Selborne, in the speech already referred to, remarks: "I would say that the navy and our national credit are the two pillars on which, in every material sense, the safety of the Empire depends." This is the old story of absolute reliance on wealth, but in times of stress it will surely be found that a third pillar is necessary—that of a thriving agriculture—without which no country is permanently safe, and our country is in actual danger.¹

¹ A writer who was perhaps the highest authority of his day on the subject of the Corn Laws, made the following remarks on the question of war in connection with wealth: "There may be politicians indeed who, considering money as the chief end of all policy, may think that forcing the cottagers into towns and the villagers into cities is a good to be desired rather than an evil to be deplored. Yes, we have had statesmen who laid it down as a maxim that modern war is merely a matter of expense. The wealthiest nation, it was naturally presumed, would ultimately be the most triumphant, and final victory was supposed to be appended to the weightiest purse. We have lived, however, to see a nation arise (France) who could make conquests without money; as indeed history had already recorded the conquest of poverty over riches. Europe has already seen that our wealth could not obtain warriors. . . . Where is that illustrious regiment which overthrew the invincible phalanx to find recruits if sheep be driven into our northern glens as a more valuable animal than the human race? Where shall our armies obtain levies if villagers be forced into cities? We may now perceive that money cannot buy men; that men are of more value than money: the policy then which regards riches as the chief good must end in the ruin of the state: and that statesman who should consider the exchequer as the only object of his care, would soon be without an exchequer to care for." ("Tracts on the Corn Trade and Corn Laws," Charles Smith, edition 1804.)

CHAPTER XX

FISCAL POLICY AND AGRICULTURE

It is not the intention in these pages to discuss the general policy of so-called "free trade," except as far as it affects the agricultural interests, and through them the interests of the whole country.

In order to discuss the question fully, with any gain, it is necessary to begin by referring to the opinions and arguments of those who were practically the founders of the doctrine of free trade, namely, the great French economists of the eighteenth century, of whom Quesnay was the head, Turgot and other great thinkers were the disciples, and Adam Smith was, in the main, a follower. It is necessary to know and keep in mind exactly what this school meant by free trade. Mr. John Morley, speaking of Quesnay, says: "It was no small proof of originality and enlightenment to precede Adam Smith ten years in the doctrine of free trade, of free industry, of loans on interest, of the effects of the division of labour, of the processes of formation of capital, etc. etc."¹

But no one knows better than Mr. Morley that the doctrine advocated by the school to which he refers, and generally adopted by Adam Smith, was that of universal free trade. All their arguments were of a cosmopolitan, and not of a national kind, and were based on the supposal of a freedom of exchange among nations. They claimed, not to have set up a theorem,

¹ See "Critical Miscellanies," first and second series.

but to have discovered a natural law for the regulation of the trade and commerce of the world. Following the same line, Adam Smith's inquiry was into the causes of the wealth of nations, not of a single nation. In his great work¹ he refers at some length (book iv.) to the system of the above school (Physiocrats)—a system which represents the produce of the land as the sole source of revenue and wealth of every country, and the work of all classes other than agricultural to be altogether unproductive. With this extreme view Adam Smith does not agree. He puts labour in the first place, and holds it to be, together with the produce of the land, the source of wealth—the source whence all the necessaries and conveniences of life are universally supplied (Vol. I, "Introduction"). "Both productive and unproductive labourers, and those who do not labour at all," he says, "are equally maintained by the annual produce of the land and labour of the country" (Vol. II, book II.). Adam Smith speaks highly of the French economists, as "men of great learning and ingenuity," and of Quesnay himself as the "very ingenious and profound author" of their system. "This system," he adds, "with all its imperfections, is perhaps the nearest approximation to the truth that has yet been published upon the subject of political economy, and is upon that account worth the consideration of every man who wishes to examine with attention that very important science." He goes on to speak of the good these economists had done by bringing under discussion many subjects that had never been examined before, and by influ-

¹ "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations." First published in 1776. The doctrines of the French school of economists were published more than ten years before this date.

encing the public administration in favour of agriculture. Through setting aside or being ignorant of the historical side of the question, modern speakers and writers in their arguments in favour of what they call "free trade" are confusing and contradictory. They first vitally alter the premises of the old masters of the subject, and then try in a narrow-witted way to come to the same conclusions as they did. Let any unbiassed student keep the idea of universal free exchange amongst nations in his mind and go through the writings of the French economists and of Adam Smith, he will find their arguments on the subject of free trade intelligible, attractive, and such as command deep attention and general assent. But let him go through the same course keeping in mind the fact that one nation alone has adopted the policy of free imports and that the other nations have set up strong artificial barriers against free exchange, and he will find the same arguments, for the most part, inapplicable, and the very names and terms used false or misleading. "Free trade," "reciprocity," "free exchange," "leaving trade to take its natural course," "natural rights of peoples to exchange products freely with one another," "freedom of competition," "international equality," etc., are the conditions which form the base and cornerstone of the free-trade structure set up by the economists of the eighteenth century, but they are conditions that at present do not exist. If the student happens to belong to the one solitary nation referred to, he would probably conclude that though the present arrangements are good for other countries, yet from a national and patriotic point of view they are too openly altruistic for him to adopt. Cobden's arguments in favour of the repeal of the Corn Laws were

from the point of view of the Manchester school, the objects of which school were to get cheap food, with consequent cheap labour, and increased trade for Lancashire.

Those who read Cobden's speeches will find, when he leaves the comparatively narrow issue involved in the question of the Corn Laws and deals with the subject of general free trade, that his arguments are stunted and superficial. He evidently feels the weakness of his reasoning in favour of free imports for one nation alone, and in order to be somewhat logical and consistent he feels bound to state confidently that we were within a very few years of the advent of universal free trade.

We can of course only guess as to the part the old writers referred to, if alive, would take in the present fiscal controversy; but one thing is sure: they would fail to recognize in the present state of things any semblance to free trade as they understood it, and it is likely that, while holding firmly to their principles, they would conclude that tariff reform was an urgent matter in England, seeing that all other countries had denied free trade and, further, that it was the only means by which they were likely to get their ends. In the same way there are men who, rightly holding that peace is the highest of all national interests, advocate a policy of general disarmament; but these men, without giving up their opinions, would shrink from placing their country in a defenceless state so long as the nations around are armed to the teeth. But it is not necessary for the present purpose to pursue the general subject of free trade. Supposing the policy of each country to remain as it is, or that universal free trade were established, in either case the

arguments in favour of securing prosperity to agriculture, by some effective means, would remain untouched, because that industry, unlike any other, is a vital element in the economy of a nation, the one on which a country must depend for defence, health, strength, and permanence.

But the fiscal question has a close relationship to that of cultivating ownership, both large and small, and no scheme of tariff reform would have, or ought to have, any chance of success which left our largest industry—that of agriculture—out of account. Unfortunately, under our system of party politics, most of the proposals, good or bad, of any Government, are used by the Opposition to discredit and, if possible, to defeat that Government. Accordingly Mr. Chamberlain's scheme for a review of our whole fiscal system, which should have been treated as a great national concern, has degenerated into a fierce party question.

The stock arguments, and the most popular ones, used by those who are opposed to any form of protection for agriculture, are, that the policy of 1846 made the food of the people cheaper, and that any interference with that policy would bring back the dearth and scarcity which it is falsely alleged then existed. These so-called "free-traders" offer no explanation of the fact, which they admit to the full, that notwithstanding the "beneficent legislation" adopted more than half a century ago, misery and want, to an appalling extent, exist in our midst at the present day. For party purposes cries are adopted, such as "the big loaf and the little loaf," "free food," etc., which, looking at the impression they are certain to convey to

the minds of the poorer classes, are as artful as they are truthless, serving only to obscure the issue, and reflecting but small credit on the educated men who use them.

But in political contests statements, however untrue, if backed by a taking "cry," are apt, by continual repetition, to gain widespread credence until the facts are known.

Now we purpose to show—First, that, whatever benefits may have resulted from the policy of free imports, cheaper food was not one of them; secondly, that the distress which existed sixty years and more ago, was not caused by dearness of food; and lastly, that the relief of that distress was brought about by causes other than free imports.

Statistics show what many of the labouring class and others, who are old enough, can by personal experience confirm, that during the early forties of last century, when distress was so acute, most of the necessary articles of living were cheaper throughout the rural districts than they were after the repeal of the Corn Laws or than they are at the present time. Tea, sugar, rice, and certain other groceries were certainly dearer; but meat, cheese, fruits, vegetables of all kinds, and other necessaries, including rent and fuel, were much lower in price. Butter was from 6d. to 9d. per lb., and fowls 1s. to 1s. 3d. each. Eggs were twenty, often thirty, for a shilling, and were regularly eaten as a cheap food by the rural labouring class.

Most important of all, milk, the best of food, was very cheap, and easily obtained by the labouring classes. In most poor families where, through want

of employment, solid food was scanty, milk was generally found for the children.¹

Looking at the value of this article for the proper nurture of children and at the milkless diet of the present day, this fact should weigh heavily in any consideration of the price of food. In a recent return it is estimated that among the agricultural labourers in England the average consumption per week is only $4\frac{1}{2}$ pints of new milk, or $8\frac{3}{4}$ pints of skim per family of six persons.² This shows that milk has practically ceased to be an article of food for the labourer's family.³

¹ The present writer remembers as a lad—in accordance with a common custom—going in the early morning to a neighbouring farm with a large pitcher which, for a penny, in the summer for a halfpenny, was filled to the brim with good skim (not separated) milk. New milk was correspondingly cheap. This, with home-made bread, home-fed bacon, eggs, cheese, an occasional fowl or rabbit, with plenty of vegetables, formed a wholesome diet. The cost was small, the labour connected with the produce being done by the family. When this diet is compared with that of the poorer classes of the present day, which is largely composed of tea, white bread, salt fish, tinned meats, etc., with few, if any, vegetables, physical deterioration is largely accounted for.

² "Statistical Tables," 1903, Cd. 1761. This refers to milk thoroughly separated by machinery. By the old method of hand-skimming a good portion of butter-fat was left in the milk. Prof. Long, referring to the fact that milk is not regarded by the public as a food because it is a fluid, states that it contains all the materials necessary for the nourishment of the body. In comparing milk with meat he states that a sample of lean beef without bone contains 72 parts of water, $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of fat, $19\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of albuminoids, or muscle-forming matter, and 5 lb. of salts per 100 lb. A sample of rich milk contains 4 lb. of fat (superior to that of beef), 5 lb. of sugar, 4 lb. of albuminoids, and $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. of salts. The beef would cost at least five times as much as the milk, while on the basis of "unit" value it would be worth just double.

³ Speaking of milk recalls an incident which illustrates the difference between the old and the new. Twenty years ago the present writer was in a cottage in Wiltshire where a little child, one of a large family, was ailing. The mother, with loving hands, was vainly trying to tempt the child's appetite with sweet, milkless tea and bread with a scrape of butter on it. In the olden times referred to, milk and eggs would have been given to the little one, not as luxuries, but as the cheapest food the mother could get.

With regard to butcher's meat, the average price paid at St. Thomas's Hospital during the years 1840 to 1849—the so-called “hungry forties”—was for beef, 3s. 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. ; for mutton, 3s. 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per stone of 8 lb. In 1843, the year when the greatest distress existed, the prices were, beef, 2s. 8d. ; mutton, 3s. per stone of 8 lb.¹ In 1902 beef in London was 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ d. per lb. (foreign 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ d.) ; mutton, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ d. per lb. (foreign 4 $\frac{9}{16}$ d. ; and pork 8 $\frac{5}{8}$ d. per lb.² At Stamford, in 1851, beef was 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb. ; mutton, 5d. In 1863, after fourteen years of free imports, beef in the same locality was 8d. to 9d., mutton 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 10d. per lb.³

Mr. Villiers in 1843 moved a resolution that “The House resolve itself into a Committee to consider the import duties on foreign corn, with a view to their immediate abolition.”

One of the main arguments—an argument not disputed—of Mr. Gladstone, in opposing the motion, was “the existing cheapness of provisions.” He quoted the prices of the principal articles of food, and showed how exceedingly low they were. He compared favourably “the prices of the present year (1843) with those of 1835, the cheapest of the generation.”⁴

If we turn to the prices of bread, the facts are still more striking. There is a sentiment about the “staff

¹ These averages are based on the detailed prices given in Tooke's “History of Prices,” Vol. VI. It must be borne in mind, however, that the market prices for meat and other produce were always higher in large towns, for some articles much higher, than the prices which ruled in country places. The present writer well remembers that the labourers always expected to get—and did get when they had the money to buy—at least a pound of beef, a pound of mutton, and a pound of pork, for a shilling.

² Board of Trade Statistics, 1903, Cd. 1761.

³ Noble's “Fiscal Legislation,” 1867.

⁴ “Annual Register,” 1843, p. 112.

of life" which is attached to no other kind of food. "Earning one's bread" is a figurative expression, including in it other necessities of human existence. In the popular mind, therefore, the cry of dear bread is connected intuitively with the idea of dear living.

During the Corn Law agitation the question of bread was ever to the front. A general impression was given that, by the repeal of the Corn Laws, bread was to be more plentiful and much cheaper; but it is a noticeable fact that the actual *price* of bread which ruled during the contest, was rarely, if ever, alluded to. The cry of "Cheap bread!" was used for political purposes then, just as the cry of the "big and little loaf" is being used now, and was equally false.

The prices of bread varied then, as they vary now, at different times and in different parts of the country, and the variations seemed to be then, as they have been since, largely independent of the price of corn.

As far as the rural districts are concerned, there is no continuous record of prices of bread extending over a number of years before and after the repeal of the Corn Laws. But there are isolated quotations and references to price to be found in different years and in different localities, which abundantly prove the point for which we are contending.

At a Free Trade meeting held at Aylesbury in 1843, Mr. Cobden was asked by one of the audience: "Did the members of the League think the existing price of the quartern loaf, which was then 5d., too high for either producer or consumer?" Cobden answered with his usual dexterity," etc. (Morley's "Life of Cobden.")¹

¹ The present writer was in daily association with the poorer classes during the "hungry forties." He witnessed one or two of the bread

Twelve years later, and after seven years' experience of free imports, Cobden describes the miserable condition of the labourers at Midhurst "with bread at $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb.," that is, 10d. per quartern, or just double the price quoted at Aylesbury in the time of protection. (Letter to Mr. H. Ashworth, 19 December, 1855.)

Fortunately, however, there exists a continuous yearly record of the price of bread in the city of Edinburgh from 1824 to the present time. No doubt the prices given in this record are considerably higher than those which ruled in the country districts. But the special value of the Edinburgh tables is that the fluctuations of prices, for the same quality of bread (the best quality), can be readily traced continuously through a long series of years. If we analyse these Edinburgh prices of bread and the official prices of wheat during corresponding years and periods, the actual fluctuations in prices of both articles will be seen at a glance. The following table shows the relative average prices of wheat and bread for a period of years immediately preceding and directly following the beginning of free imports:—

	Wheat per quarter.	Best quality Bread per loaf.
Average price for 7 years, 1842-48 ...	$54/10\frac{3}{4}$... $7\frac{3}{8}$ d.
" " " 1850-56 ...	$55/6\frac{3}{4}$... $7\frac{1}{8}$ d.

This comparison shows a very slight increase in prices during the second period named. But during the year when distress was the greatest (1843), the prices of wheat and bread were actually lower than

riots and raids on bakers' shops; but he cannot remember a single occasion when the *price* of bread was the subject of complaint. The cause of the distress was not the price of the loaf, but the want of money wherewith to buy it.

the average, being 6½d. per loaf, and 50/1 per quarter of corn.

Taking decades of years the average prices for the same articles work out as follows :—

The "Hungry Forties."		1840-49	1850-59	1860-69	1870-79	1880-89	1890-99
Wheat per quarter	}	54/1	53/3	51/8	51/4	36/11	28/9
Bread per quatern loaf		7¾d.	7¾d.	8d.	8½d.	7d.	5½d.

This table shows that for thirty years after the beginning of free imports the average price of bread was higher than it was during the "hungry forties"; and for fifty years after free imports (including the years when wheat was specially low) the average price was only about one farthing a loaf lower. Moreover, in the earlier years the weight of the loaf was 4 lb. 5½ oz. It was afterwards gradually lowered to 4 lb., and in comparing prices this difference in weight should be reckoned.

The period 1890-99 was the worst time for the farmer. The following table shows the average prices of bread and corn for each of these years :—

	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	
Wheat per quarter	}	31/11	37/10	30/3	26/4	22/10	23/1	26/2	30/2	34/10	25/8
Bread per quatern loaf		6¼d.	6½d.	6d.	5¾d.	4¾d.	4¾d.	5½d.	6d.	6¼d.	5½d.

One other thing is revealed by a study of prices, namely, the irregular and limited influence which the price of wheat has on the cost of bread. This may be caused partly through the baker's fixed charges being the same in the making of a loaf, whatever the selling price of it might be, and partly through competition among the foreign countries which send us

corn—in other words, the supply and demand. But whatever the cause, the fact remains that the changes in the price of bread have never tallied with the fluctuations in the price of wheat.

During the three years, 1877, 1878, 1879, the price of wheat averaged 49s. per quarter, and the price of household bread in London averaged about $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. the 4-lb. loaf. In the three years, 1893, 1894, 1895, the average price of wheat fell to 24s. 1d., or to less than one half, but the price of bread in London fell, not one half, but only to $5\frac{1}{2}$ d.

Even in September of the present year (1905), with wheat about 30s. per quarter, the mean price of bread throughout Great Britain was 5'43d. (say $5\frac{1}{2}$ d.) for the 4-lb. loaf, while in 1867 and 1868, when wheat averaged 64s. 7d. per quarter, or just double, the price was only $7\frac{3}{4}$ d. in London, and no doubt less throughout the country. In Edinburgh, in March of the present year, the price was $6\frac{1}{2}$ d. per quarter loaf, as against $6\frac{5}{8}$ d. (or about the same) in the bad year of 1843, when wheat was 50s. per quarter.¹

When the Corn Laws were abolished a duty of one shilling per quarter on imported grain was retained. There was no objection raised to this provision; it was regarded simply as a small fee to pay the expenses of registration. In 1869 the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Lowe, afterwards Lord Sherbrooke) took off this duty. Its abolition was not asked for and was not wanted by anybody; it was simply a sacrifice of what was called the "last rag of protection" to the

¹ The calculations here made and the averages stated are based on figures given in Tooke's "History of Prices," Vols. IV. and V.; "Wholesale and Retail Prices," 321, 1903; "Statistical Tables," Cd. 2337, 1904; "Board of Trade Labour Gazette," 1905.

idol of free trade. It had no effect whatever on the price of corn or bread. The yield of the tax was a pure gift, a bounty, to the over-sea producer of grain. The amount of the gift at the time was about one million sterling a year. In 1902 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, reimposed the duty.

When Mr. Ritchie, in March, 1903, took the ill-advised step of abolishing the shilling duty on the imports of wheat, he deliberately sacrificed a revenue of about £2,500,000 sterling, without lowering, in the least, the price of bread. Indeed, within a few months (in August) after the duty was taken off, the price of bread went up. The only real effect of the abolition of this small tax was to transfer any advantage which might belong to it from the British farmer to his over-sea competitor, and thus to increase the profits of the latter by a quarter of a million sterling a year, which had to be made good by the taxpayer at home.

But supposing that the price of bread were influenced by Mr. Chamberlain's proposed duty of 2s. per quarter on foreign corn, and that the consumer had to pay the whole of the extra price, that extra price would be so small that there is no coin of the realm small enough to represent it. The "man in the street" can make the calculation for himself. Six and a half bushels of wheat, on which the proposed import duty would be 1s. 7½d., produces one sack (280 lb.) of flour. A sack of flour produces on an average about ninety-four quartern loaves, so that the 1s. 7½d. duty, divided by ninety-four, gives the additional cost of the 4-lb. loaf.¹

¹ The exact number of loaves depends on the quality of wheat used and the weight of the bushel, which varies in different parts of the country.

The following table gives the weekly budget of 133 labourers, so far as the items of wages, bread, tea, and tobacco are concerned :—

	Average Wages.	Average number of family.	Average number of 4 lb. loaves.	Average price per loaf.	Average quantity of tea.	Average quantity of tobacco.
133 labourers .	16/10	5	8½	5½	10 oz.	—
76 of these } were smokers }	16/6	5½	8½	5¼	9¾ oz.	2¾ oz.

From the above it will be seen that if a reduction were made on the duty of tobacco say of 1d. per oz., and on tea of 4d. per lb., there would be a considerable weekly saving on the items named taken as a whole.¹

It would be a waste of time to pursue this subject were it not for the fact that large placards have been widely distributed in the rural districts and throughout the country generally, illustrated with two loaves, one of them about half the size of the other. The inference to be drawn from these pictures is that if a 2s. duty on foreign wheat were imposed, the present price of the loaf would be raised enormously. It is stated that this placard has had more effect than any other electioneering device, especially on rural voters, who, being deceived by the imposture, naturally shrank from the prospect of having the price of bread nearly doubled. The proceeding is a low one, for whatever might be its motive, its certain effect is to deceive the poorer and less instructed classes of our fellow-men, whose condition ought to command

¹ The above returns I have obtained direct from labourers themselves who live in different districts throughout England and Wales—districts selected with a view to get a fair average return. Mr. Wilson Fox, in his interesting report, gives the average rate of wages for England and Wales at 17s. 6d. (instead of 16s. 10d). "Earnings of Agricultural Labourers," Wilson Fox. Cd. 2376. 1905. In both cases the value of allowances in kind is included.

greater respect and more honest treatment at the hands of those in a happier position in life.

The object in dealing with the incident here is a political one—to protect the labourers from fraud. Misstatements repeated and repeated, unless disproved, are apt to become current among the people, and in time, if unchecked, to be believed even by those who are the authors of them. The questions touched by these misstatements do not affect Mr. Chamberlain's great scheme of tariff reform. Without discussing that scheme, it might be described as one that has for its basis *employment*—enough well-paid employment, and for its acme increased powers of money-getting and money-spending on the part of the people. The interests of the working-class producer are put before those of the general consumer. The success of the scheme would reduce to a secondary place any slight rise in the price of commodities; for, after all, "cheapness" is a minor matter to the person who has money with which to buy, and is no benefit at all to the penniless man.

The statements about the dearth and dearness of the necessaries of life before the repeal of the Corn Laws could not be made, and were not made, a generation ago. There were then too many persons living who remembered the facts. The "cry" that food was "dear" in those times is of recent date—a modern invention for political ends.

Free-trade writers of thirty and forty years ago fully admit the increase in the price of food which followed free imports. An economist, referring to this increase, states: "Notwithstanding the extraordinary increase in the importation of butter, cheese, and eggs, consequent on their admission free of duty, these

articles form no exception to the general rule." Among other examples of this general increase of prices he names cheese, which, with a duty of 10s. 6d., was sold in 1845 at £2. 10s. per cwt. In 1865, with no duty, the price was £2. 17s. 8d. Eggs, the price of which in 1845, with a duty of 10d., was 4s. 10d. the great hundred, had risen in 1865, when duty free, to 6s. 1d.

The same writer goes on to refer to the great increase which had taken place in the price of meat and other articles. "Milk," he says, "had doubled in price, and bread, which in 1851 was 5d. for the quarter loaf, had risen in price to 8d. in 1867."¹

As regards fuel, the prices paid by the Bethlehem Hospital for coals was, in 1845, 18s.; 1846, 16s. 8d.; 1850, 16s. 5d. The price steadily rose till in 1874, the last year quoted, it reached 30s. 1d. per ton.²

A distinguished political economist, writing nearly thirty years after the repeal of the Corn Laws, states :—

"In some branches of industry there has been no doubt a very considerable rise in wages ; many classes of workmen, however, have only been able to obtain so slight an increase in their wages as barely to compensate them for the greater cost of living consequent on the rise in price of so many articles of general consumption. . . . As there has been a not less marked rise in the price of coal, meat, milk, butter, cheese, and many other commodities which compose the items of a labourer's ordinary expenditure, it would seem that, even in the trades where the advance of wages has been the greatest, a large portion of the additional wages has been absorbed by the increased dearness of commodities."

¹ "Fiscal Legislation, 1842 to 1865," John Noble (Longmans, 1867).

² "National Finance," John Noble, 1875.

He goes on to refer to the position of a class which includes the agricultural labourers, and says :—

“In other trades where wages have remained almost stationary, the condition must have deteriorated in proportion to the increase in the cost of living consequent on the greater dearness of commodities.”¹

Many other writers might be quoted to the same effect. Professor Thorold Rogers, writing after nearly thirty years' experience of free imports, while admitting the increased prosperity of the towns and other centres of industry, declares that “the mass of agricultural labourers, and many among the unskilled and underpaid occupations,” had not benefited by the changes in our fiscal system.

“I am persuaded,” he says, “that with the solitary exception of house-rent—though that has also risen—the cost of living in country districts has doubled within the last thirty years, and that some articles of food, once within the reach of all, are now practically unattainable by country people.”²

Clothes, after free imports, were lower in price, but on account of their shoddy character were not so cheap in the long run. The old smock frock, so generally worn up to the middle of last century, was a handsome and durable garment. The present writer had many labourer friends who wore their Sunday suits of clothes for twenty to thirty years. The village-made, well-nailed boots merited the name of “everlastings,” by which they were called.

The price of shoes supplied to the inmates of

¹ “Wealth and Increase of Wages,” Prof. Fawcett (“Fortnightly Review,” January, 1874).

² “Cobden and Modern Political Opinion,” Thorold Rogers, 1873.

Greenwich Hospital during the years 1830 to 1837 varied from 3s. 3½d. to 3s. 6d. per pair. The price of those supplied to the officers of Chelsea Hospital during the same period was from 4s. 6½d. to 5s. per pair. (Porter's "Progress of the Nation.")

"Free Importers" may claim that the increase in prices was caused by increased consumption on the part of the people, and was therefore a proof of the soundness of their policy. So far as the manufacturing and other classes of skilled workmen were concerned, there is no doubt that better employment and higher wages added to their purchasing power, and consequently the average consumption of the principal articles of food by the population, taken as a whole, was largely increased. But the increased demand for foodstuffs in the large towns and the improved facilities for transit and distribution, while they increased the profits of the dealer, placed the rural labourers—and it is their case we are mainly considering—in a far worse position. They found, not only that all kinds of necessaries were dearer, but that important articles of food—abundant in former times—were no longer within their reach. The increase of wages which took place was but a small and totally inadequate compensation for these adverse changes. All things considered, there is no doubt that Professor Rogers' description of their reduced circumstances, after the fiscal changes referred to, comes very near the truth.

These views are abundantly confirmed by the reports of the various Royal Commissions which deal with the state of the rural population. These reports are more fully dealt with in other chapters. They show that during the forty years or more which

immediately followed free trade the condition of the agricultural labourers was deplorable in the extreme. The manner in which they fared during these years became a national scandal in the eyes of those who contrasted it with the vast and unprecedented increase in wealth, luxury, and expenditure of the well-to-do classes. Relief from their hopeless position was only found in a continuous and ever-increasing "exodus" from the land. Whatever advantages, therefore, may be claimed as the result of the change in our fiscal policy, such advantages were undoubtedly accompanied by the greatest calamity that can befall a nation—namely, the destruction of its peasant classes.

But as we have stated, it is not the intention here to discuss fully the general question of so-called free trade, but mainly to disprove the ever-repeated statement that the price of food and the general cost of the labourer's living were less after the free-trade era than before, and to show that the exact contrary was the case.

Facts prove beyond dispute that the want and distress which existed in the so-called "hungry forties," and specially in the years 1840 to 1843, were not caused by dearness or scarcity of food, but by the want of money wherewith to buy it. Trade was bad, employment scarce, and wages universally low. This distress and want were immensely aggravated by the practice of inclosures already described. So long as the labourer had a bit of land, he could generally get from it something to eat for himself and family. Deprived of that, he became totally dependent on wages. If he could not work he had to starve, or go on the parish. As the purely wage-earning class increased, so the competition for work

became more keen, and wages, both in town and country, were kept low. Employment, in short, was then, as it is now, and must ever be, the governing factor in the welfare of the working classes.

For several years, up to the beginning of 1843, every branch of trade and manufacture was in a most depressed condition, but towards the end of that year a general improvement set in—an improvement which continued, and steadily increased, for a great number of years.

The Queen's Speech, at the opening of the Session of 1844, referred to the revival of trade. Her Majesty's words were: "I congratulate you on the improved condition of several important branches of the trade and manufacture of the country."

The improvement was so marked and rapid that in 1845, to repeat the words already quoted: "The terrible depression which had at first given so poignant an impulse to the agitation (Anti-Corn law) had vanished. . . . Trade and commerce were thriving. The revenue was flourishing. Pauperism had declined." (Morley's "Life of Cobden.")

The Queen's Speech, at the opening of the Session of that year, stated: "I rejoice that I am enabled to congratulate you on the improved condition of the country. Increased activity pervades almost every branch of manufacture; trade and commerce have been extended at home and abroad; and among all classes of my people there is generally prevalent a spirit of loyalty and cheerful obedience to the law."

Again, Her Majesty's Speech at the opening of the following Session (1846) referred with satisfaction to "the prosperous state of the revenue, the increased demand for labour, and the general improvement

which has taken place in the internal condition of the country."

The most eminent economists of the time—strong free-traders—were emphatic in attributing to want of employment the suffering and destitution which had previously prevailed. They were equally clear in showing that the improvement in the condition of the people was secured by the general increase of trade which began long before the policy of free imports was adopted, and was the result of causes quite independent of that policy.

Mr. Tooke, writing of the state of things which existed during the years 1839 to 1847, refers to the "transition from distress and despondency pervading all branches of industry in the years 1841, 1842, and part of 1843 to a state of extraordinary prosperity and activity which prevailed through the three following years."¹

It is directly contrary to the facts, and therefore simply absurd, to ascribe this improvement to the repeal of the Corn Laws, which did not come into operation till six years later.

Steam-vessels, built and registered in the United Kingdom and the colonies, "doubled in tonnage between 1839 and 1849." With regard to railways, "the sums authorized by Parliament to be raised for the construction of railways averaged £21,966,860 per annum for the four years 1842-5, and £47,567,355 per annum for the four years 1846-9." (Porter's "Progress of the Nation.")

Mr. Tooke also refers at length to this rapid development of our railway system, and says: "The direct consequences of railway expenditure of the

¹ Tooke's "History of Prices," Vol. IV.

years 1848, 1849, 1850 were that the working classes were provided with fair employment during a period of uninterrupted trade, . . . they were able to command, by means of wages, a larger amount of comfort and sustenance than probably in any previous part of the century. . . . It appears that in 1848 the number of men actually employed as navvies, and in other capacities, on the sites of the various lines of railways in course of construction, was 188,000. Besides this army of persons directly employed on the works, there were the further large number of artisans engaged in different workshops of the country in preparing iron rails, building locomotives, carriages, and other processes indispensable to the work. . . . During the years 1847-8 the railway expenditure may be safely assumed to have given employment to at least 300,000 workmen, and that as a general result hardly less than a million of persons (men, women, and children) were dependent during these two years on employment flowing from railway works in progress."¹

In addition to the rapid development of the undertakings named, both at home and abroad, there was the discovery of gold in California in 1848. The effect of that discovery was almost immediately felt in this country by an increased general demand for goods, and specially by a rapid increase in our export trade with the United States. The discovery of gold in Australia in 1851 had the same striking results. Our exports to that colony of all kinds of commodities increased in a remarkable manner. The demand for

¹ Tooke's "History of Prices," Vol. V. The population of England and Wales at this time may be estimated at about 16½ millions.

shipping was enormous. Employment became abundant, and the scale of wages rose.

All economic writers are agreed as to the gigantic impulse which these discoveries gave to trade and manufactures, and to the development of the coal, iron, and other industries in this country. Indeed, Mr. Tooke seems to place them in the first rank among the causes of the increased demand for labour, and of the commercial and manufacturing prosperity that existed. Referring to the state of things in 1848 to 1856, he writes: "But the production year by year of large and increasing quantities of new gold, not only in California, but since 1851 in Australia, has so changed the aspect of nearly every question relating to the supply of, and the demand for, commodities—and relating to the demand for, and the wages obtained by, labourers, skilled and unskilled—that to have attempted any systematic investigation of prices during the past nine years without assigning a prominent place to an examination of the facts connected with the New Gold—and without attempting to trace the more important consequence arising from the Influx—would have been to misconceive wholly the nature of the task which had been undertaken." ("History of Prices," Vol. V.)

Again, in the sixth volume of his work on the same subject, he states: "The wages of labour, particularly of unskilled labour, have risen in proportion of 15 to 20 per cent, and since 1850 the social and commercial phenomena which have been most conspicuous in this country have been the effects produced by the gold discoveries in doubling the export trade, and in directing to useful purposes pauper and surplus labour."

Those who hold the doctrine of free imports as an

article of faith, not to be criticized or inquired into, invariably ascribe this prosperity to the policy adopted in 1846. But the legislation of that year did not come into operation till 1849, when the trade and manufactures of the country, as well as the demand for labour, were, and had been for several years, increasing by "leaps and bounds."

England was practically the "workshop of the world." Foreign nations in all their industrial undertakings had, regardless of corn laws or any other conditions, to send to this country for materials and other requirements, for the sufficient reason that nowhere else could they get them so quickly and cheaply. During this long period of industrial prosperity a vast amount of British capital was invested in various undertakings in foreign countries, all adding to the volume of trade and manufactures. "It was not money," as Mr. Porter observes, "in the usual acceptation of the word that thus found its way abroad for investment, but products and manufactures, the results of British industry."¹

The unique position which in those days England held among the nations of the world must be continually borne in mind in discussing the state of things at the present time. The writer just quoted describes that position as follows: "Placed beyond all comparison at the head of civilization as regards manufacturing skill, with capital far more ample than that possessed by any other people, with cheap and inexhaustible supplies of iron and fuel, and with

¹ It is to be feared that we are now receiving the interest on these investments ("dead men's profits" as they have been called) in the form of foreign imports, a kind of payment which affords no employment to the British workman, but rather deprives him of it.

institutions in every way favourable to the utmost development of the industry and ingenuity of her citizens, she must be able at least to maintain her superiority of position where (an important proviso) circumstances are in other respects equal."

It is not the intention here to discuss the conditions under which England had risen to the manufacturing supremacy described. "Down to 1820, manufacturers probably enjoyed as ample a share of legislative protection as the growers of corn."¹ But protection was continued for years after that; for though much store is placed by free importers on the reduction of the excessive duties on foreign imports by Huskisson's legislation (1823 to 1825), yet after these reductions were made the English industries remained sufficiently protected, and the Navigation Laws remained in full force till 1849.

Protection may be right or wrong, but it cannot be denied that the old trading supremacy of England grew up under it: nor can it be disputed that the manufacturing prosperity of Germany, the United States, and other countries, has been since secured by the same means.

The free-traders of the day, arguing from the state of things which then existed, had grounds for believing that our manufacturing position was an impregnable one, and that foreign countries would continue to take our goods in exchange for their "corn, cattle, timber," and other productions. It was pardonable for them to believe that England had had too great a start in manufacturing to be caught up by the puny efforts of other nations. They are, perhaps, hardly to be blamed for not foreseeing what has since taken place,

¹ Morley's "Life of Cobden," p. 105.

and which would have seemed to them incredible, because it would be a total denial of their doctrines.

So with Cobden. He could not foresee the later commercial policy of other nations; he believed that if we adopted free trade "there will not be a tariff in Europe that will not be changed in less than five years to follow your example." (Speech 15 Jan., 1846.)

Free-trade writers, adopting Cobden's opinion, adhered to the faith that other nations, following our example, would become free-traders. In face of all evidence to the contrary, they persevered in this belief up to the point of infatuation. They regretted the fact that France, though receiving the benefits resulting from the repeal of our Navigation Laws, was still adhering to her policy of protection. They could, however, "afford to smile at such a policy," being assured that the time would come when "our neighbours would open their eyes to their own good."

The French commercial treaty was hailed by these men with triumph, as the beginning of a realization of their views. One well-known economist, referring to the treaty, writes: "Such a day has at last come. The Emperor, alive to the best interests of France, has emancipated himself from the thralldom of the producers and manufacturers and has entered boldly into a career of reform."¹

Later on, however, Sir Louis Mallet, who was one of the greatest authorities on fiscal questions, and was also the colleague of Cobden in negotiating the French treaty, seemed to be less satisfied with the condition of the people generally under the one-sided system which was called "Free Trade." In a preface to the "Political Opinions of Richard Cobden," he writes:

¹ Leone Levi, "On Taxation," 1860.

“We have obtained enough Free Trade to enable our upper and middle classes to acquire more wealth than, with their present education, they can either employ wisely or spend innocently, and to stimulate unproductive consumption in vulgar luxury and wasteful charity; but we have not obtained enough Free Trade to feed, and clothe, and house our people, or to inspire confidence in other countries, and to establish those international relations without which all hope of internal progress is a foolish and idle dream.”¹

With regard to agriculture, Cobden calculated on the continuance of the “natural protection” to the British farmer in the form of freight and other expenses connected with foreign imports. This protection he reckoned at from eight to ten shillings per quarter of grain. His confidence in the later pros-

¹ Free importers forget that the French treaty itself was a refutation of their policy. Cobden was enabled to make the treaty simply because he had something to give, some duties to surrender. No treaty is possible now, because we have made the foreigner free of our market by abolishing all duties except the few which we are obliged to keep for the purpose of revenue. At the expiration of the treaty France—with good reason from her point of view—refused to renew it on the same terms. Instead of doing so, she steadily increased her tariffs against British goods. In essence we are a highly protectionist nation, but our protection is for the foreign workman and producer against the British workman and producer. The farmer in this country has to pay probably ten per cent on the value of his output in the form of rates, taxes, and other charges, which must all be added to the cost of production. It is true that the foreigner has to pay similar charges in his own country, but that only affects the question in a small degree. Those charges, besides being much lighter, are for his home trade, in which he is well protected by tariffs and often by bounties and drawbacks. England is for him an extra free market for his regular and his surplus productions. He has practically two markets at the cost of one, seeing that to the expenses of the English Government, whether national or local, he contributes not a farthing. The British farmer, while not seeking for protection in any form, might fairly ask to be put on the same level as his foreign competitor by means of an import duty equal in amount to that of the burdens levied on his own produce.

perity of the agricultural industry was unbounded. Read by the light of experience, the following short-sighted assertions and predictions appear amazing: "We do not contemplate deriving one quarter less corn from the soil of this country." "Not an acre of land would go out of cultivation." "So far from throwing land out of use, and injuring the cultivation of the poorer soils, free trade in corn is the very way to increase the production at home." These, and other sayings of a like kind, led up to the following rhetorical climax: "I believe that when the future historian writes the history of agriculture he will say, 'In such a year there was a stringent Corn Law passed for the protection of agriculture. From that time agriculture slumbered in England, and it was not until, by the aid of the Anti-Corn Law League, the Corn Law was abolished, that agriculture sprang up to the full vigour of existence in England, to become what it is now, like her manufactures, unrivalled in the world.'"

Political economists of the time shared Cobden's views. The great authority referred to, speaking of agriculture, says: "It would be absurd to suppose that in a state of things such as has been here contemplated, with a constantly increasing number of customers, our agriculture must not share in the general prosperity, and that they should, under any circumstances, fail to obtain a return for their capital equal to that realized by all other classes in the community; beyond this they can have no right to claim any advantage."¹

For a number of years after the Corn Laws were abolished there seemed to be some ground for these views. A distinguished writer, so late as 1878,

¹ "Progress of the Nation," 3rd edition, 1851.

states: "During the thirty years the Corn Laws were in operation five Parliamentary committees were appointed to inquire into the causes of agricultural depression. During the thirty years since 1845, agriculture has had no protection, and though they have had bad seasons, causing losses to the farmer, yet on no single occasion has the condition of agriculture been such as to call for a Parliamentary inquiry. . . . The value of land has been maintained, and rents have not fallen. It appears, therefore, that the owners of land, the only class that can be benefited by protection, need not necessarily be injured by its abolition."¹

But Mr. Fawcett wrote just at the end of the period of prosperity to which he referred. In the very next year (1879) a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the causes of the bad condition of agriculture. The fact is, the natural effect on the industry, of the repeal of the Corn Laws had, from various causes, been delayed for some years.

A succession of wars and other foreign disturbances combined had kept up the prices of grain.² After these ceased, prices fell, and this, coupled with some years of bad harvests, culminating in the harvest of 1879, the "most disastrous on record," caused the full and normal effect of free imports of corn to be felt.

In addition to this, freights were falling to almost nominal rates, and the "natural protection" to the farming industry had disappeared. In the late seventies of last century, therefore, from these causes, the severe

¹ "Free Trade and Protection," Henry Fawcett. Macmillan, 1879.

² The Crimean War, 1854-6; the Indian Mutiny, 1857; Civil War in the United States, 1861-65; Franco-German War, 1870; Russo-Turkish War, 1877.

agricultural distress set in which has lasted to the present time.¹

Even the advantages to the trading and manufacturing classes, which were the set-off against the sacrifice of agriculture, have of late been fast disappearing. Foreign Governments, by their fiscal policy, have been the nursing mothers of manufacturing concerns in their respective countries. By high tariffs, which more and more exclude British goods, their infant industries were nursed up and protected till they have become strong enough, not only to supplant the "workshop of the world" in the supply of their own home needs, but even to dump vast quantities of goods into our own market, which by our policy was made as free to them as their own.

Cobden, unfortunately, did not live long enough to see this development. To the last he believed that,

¹ In considering the causes that led to the repeal of the Corn Laws, this "natural protection" argument must not be left out of account, as it was largely used by Cobden and other repealers. One of the most influential writers of the day gave the cost, based on the sums actually paid, of the transit of a quarter of wheat from Dantzic to England, Dantzic being then the chief continental market and source of supply. The total cost in the form of freight, dues, insurance, handling, warehousing, brokerage, etc., is put at 18s. 3d. per quarter. "Influence of the Corn Laws," James Wilson. Longmans, 1840.

In 1868 the cost of transit of wheat from Chicago to Liverpool was 11s. 6½d. per quarter. In 1902 it had fallen to 2s. 10½d. "British and Foreign Trade," Cd. 1761. 1903.

McCulloch assured the agriculturists that "they had little reason to fear from the downfall of the protective system," that "there were no grounds for thinking that the average price of corn in this country will sink under the free system about to be established to less than from 42s. to 48s. a quarter." But he adds, "At the same time we should have preferred seeing this question settled by imposing a low fixed duty of 5s., 6s., or 7s. a quarter. . . . In scarce times (when importation is necessary) a duty of this description would fall wholly on the foreigner without affecting prices or narrowing importation." ("Principles of Political Economy," 4th edition, 1849.)

ultimately, other countries would adopt our policy, and that the advent of free trade among nations was only a question of time. He himself was a sincere and an earnest man. With no selfish aims, and under personal trials and difficulties that command our sympathy and respect, he pursued a course which he firmly held was for the good of the country. What he said about agriculture he believed. But had he survived to see the result of his policy, and especially its effect on our greatest and most important industry, the probability is that he would have reversed his position. Indeed, there is evidence to show that, had he lived to see the policy of other countries towards us, and the utter failure of all his predictions and hopes, he would have been among the most ardent of tariff reformers. The very character of the man sustains this contention. With the Manchester school of the day the case was different. The spring of their action—as a body—in the free-trade agitation was their own commercial interests. Agriculture with them was a minor consideration, and its subsequent decay, so long as their own trade kept up, excited no concern.

In the later years of his life, Cobden himself seems to have recognized this position. In a letter to John Bright, 24 September, 1857, he says: "To confess my honest belief, I regard the Manchester constituency, now that their gross pocket question is settled, as a very unsound and, to us, a very unsafe body."

In the same year he writes, somewhat bitterly, in the same strain (Letter to J. Parkes, 9 August, 1857): "The great capitalist class formed an excellent basis for the anti-Corn Law movement, for they had inexhaustible purses, which they opened freely in a

contest where not only their pecuniary interests, but their pride as an order was at stake.”¹

But the Cobden school of the present day seems to have inherited that quality so freely attributed to the old Tory party when it existed—namely, an inability to learn anything from experience. They stand on the platform of 1846, and do not see, or will not admit, the changes which sixty years have wrought. They use the same arguments as their predecessors, who “identified political economy with free trade, and thought that all difficulties would be solved by the free use of the sacred words ‘supply and demand.’”²

The members of this school, so long as they can see our exports not lessening in value, and especially so long as they see our imports increasing, will continue the worship of their fetish. The fact that agriculture has been half ruined by what they falsely call “free trade” is nothing to them. Its condition as a separate industry is no more important to them than it was to most of the founders of their school. Even those among them who look with some degree of favour on “retaliation” as being likely to benefit the manufacturer stop short at the idea of “preferential tariffs,” which propose to confer some small benefit on the agriculturist.

Outside this party, however, there are signs that a rapidly increasing number among the manufacturing classes generally are “waking up” to the position. They are no longer so certain of the hackneyed doctrine: “Take care of your imports and your exports will take care of themselves.” The idol of “Free Trade” is being examined, a process usually fatal to

¹ Morley's “Life of Cobden.”

² “English Utilitarians,” Vol. III, Leslie Stephen.

idols. It is being found out that, even where trade is not actually lessening, the profits are reduced almost to a vanishing point, and that unconditional free imports are having the same ruinous effect on trade as they have had on agriculture. The great "pocket" interest, so potent during the Corn Law agitation, is again becoming a moving force, but in an opposite direction.

It cannot be denied that there is ample cause for this unrest among those of the manufacturing classes who are looking into the subject. The home market is a steady one, but the foreign market, from its nature, must be subject to great fluctuations. Now and again there is a great wave of prosperity, and new factories are built and new plant put down to meet the increased demand; but the ebb-tide surely comes, and the result is that the capitalists have added largely to their wealth during the "boom," but the industrial workers are left stranded. The only scientific way of getting at the facts of the situation is to trace the course of trade and commerce through a number of years. The statistics given in the different censuses are a safe guide, and an analysis of these statistics shows clearly the way our national affairs are tending.

The commercial classes have largely increased during the last three decades of years. Bankers, merchants, agents, insurance companies, clerks, brokers, and other handlers of products, and dealers in wealth, have been largely and steadily growing in numbers. In house-building and all the trades connected with it a similar extension is shown. The numbers of those employed in providing for the wants of the well-to-do also show a great increase. The workers in precious metals, jewels, and other articles of luxury, have enor-

mously gained in numbers. Gamekeepers have increased above 20 per cent during the last ten years, and there are now nearly 17,000 men engaged in that non-productive calling

If, however, we turn to the industrial—manufacturing and producing—classes, we find that the returns tell a different tale. Up to 1891 these producing classes were increasing in numbers, or at least holding their own. But the census of 1901 shows that they have since been losing ground considerably. The numbers employed in the several branches of the great textile industry show a falling-off during the ten years from 3 per cent to 45 per cent.¹

The number of persons employed in the cotton manufacture, which is more than half of the whole number engaged in the textile industries, had lessened by 3·1 per cent during the same period. On this reduction the Registrar-General in his Report remarks: "The decline here shown of 3·1 per cent in the number employed in an industry of such magnitude is unquestionably a matter of serious concern."

The number of persons engaged in the carpet and felt manufacture in 1901 was 12·1 per cent less than in 1891; in the wool and worsted, 13·5 per cent; in the hosiery 1·5 per cent; in the silk manufacture, 28·6 per cent; in the fustian manufacture, 31·4 per cent; in the flax and linen, 45 per cent. In all the branches of the textile industry there are but two that show an increase in the number of persons employed. One is the lace manufacture, which shows an increase of 4·9 per cent; the other is the coarse textile group

¹ All these statistics must be read in connection with the great increase of population during the same period.

(jute, hemp, cocoa-fibre, etc.), which had increased 11 per cent.

These large reductions in the number of workers, when given in percentages, are apt to be insufficiently realized by the working classes and the public generally. It will be well, therefore, to give the actual number of persons affected. Following the classification adopted in the Census report, and putting the figures referring to the different branches together, the following results are shown :—

	Number employed in 1891.	Number employed in 1901.	Decrease.	Increase.
Cotton Manufacture. . .	546,015 ...	529,131 ...	16,884	
Fustian Manufacture . .	8,182 ...	5,612 ...	2,570	
Flax (Linen Manufacture). .	8,166 ...	4,493 ...	3,673	
Wool and Worsted Manu- facture	242,334 ...	209,740 ...	32,594	
Silk Manufacture. . . .	48,797 ...	34,847 ...	13,950	
Hosiery Manufacture . . .	49,087 ...	48,374 ...	713	
Lace Manufacture	34,746 ...	36,439 ...	—	1,693
Hemp, Jute, Cocoa-fibre, Rope, Mat, etc.	21,923 ...	24,336 ...	—	2,413
Carpet, Rug, Felt Manu- facture	16,843 ...	14,802 ...	2,041	
	<u>976,093</u> ...	<u>907,774</u> ...	<u>72,425</u> ...	<u>4,106</u>

It appears, therefore, that the net decrease in the number of persons engaged in the textile industry during the ten years ending in 1901, was 68,319.¹ These reductions in the industrial ranks must be taken in connection with the fact that, during the

¹ For particulars and details on which these calculations are based see "General Report," Census 1901, Cd. 2174. In reading these statistics it must be borne in mind that persons returned as "occupied" or "employed" in an industry are not necessarily at work. A carpet-weaver, for example, who is out of work, or on short time, is returned as "occupied" or "employed" in the carpet trade.

same decade of years, the general population of England and Wales had increased by 3,525,318, or 12·17 per cent.

A Government Report on the changes in the rates of wages has just been issued. It shows that the decline in prosperity of the chief industries still continues. The Report deals with the United Kingdom, and refers to above 800,000 workpeople belonging to the principal groups of trades from which definite returns are regularly received. Agricultural labourers, seamen, and railway servants are excluded. The total net decrease in rates of wages in last year (1904) was £39,200 per week. This followed a net decrease of £38,300 per week in 1903, which followed a net decrease of £72,595 per week in 1902, which in its turn followed a net weekly decrease of £76,587 in 1901. The cumulative character of the falling-off must be considered in order to realize the enormous decrease in the rates of wages since the last Census (1901).

Two only of the groups of occupations show an increase in the rates of wages in the year 1904, namely, in respect of those engaged in the clothing trade and those employed by public authorities. The Report gives only the *rates* of wages which workers would receive for the time they were in work. The actual earnings, of course, depend on the amount of employment available.¹

Another Government Report, just issued, deals with the actual state of employment. It shows that, in all the trade unions making returns, the yearly mean percentage out of employment for the year 1901 (date

¹ "Report on Changes in Rates of Wages, etc.," Labour Department, Board of Trade, Cd. 2674, 1905.

of the Census) was 3·8 per cent; in 1902, 4·4 per cent; in 1903, 5·1 per cent; and last year, 1904, it had risen to 6.5 per cent. This does not show the worst of the case, as a man though he might be working short time is returned as "employed."¹

In previous chapters² it has been pointed out that the decline in our home market is due to the decay of agriculture—to the yearly diminishing purchasing power derived from the productiveness of our own fields. This fact, and the consequent rural depopulation, have the closest connection with the unfavourable industrial statistics quoted. Together they are in the position of cause and effect. Our over-sea trade—to which agriculture was sacrificed—however valuable, must of necessity, under present conditions, be an uncertain quantity, liable to attack from all quarters. But our home trade, if wisely and properly safeguarded, would be under our own control.³

Had the industrial and manufacturing classes of this country in the past been more far-sighted with regard to agriculture, they would now be in the possession of an increased home trade, to be reckoned by millions per annum, and would still retain the over-sea trade, or so much of it as hostile tariffs allow them to keep.

¹ "Abstract of Labour Statistics," Board of Trade (Labour Department), 1905, Cd. 2491.

² "The Home Market and the Industrial Classes," chapter xviii.

³ In Germany the home trade is well protected, but the increase in the exports from that country of many kinds of manufactures is very remarkable. During the past decade of years the total value of machinery of all descriptions exported from Germany has increased very nearly threefold; for whilst in the year 1894 the total exports of these goods amounted to £3,970,000, their value in 1903 rose to £11,600,000. ("Diplomatic and Consular Reports," Germany, 1904, No. 622.)

CHAPTER XXI

FISCAL POLICY AND AGRICULTURE (*continued*)

THE results of our fiscal and agrarian policy on the rural population are still more marked. It is to be regretted that in the controversy on tariff reform attempts are made to use the agricultural labourers for party purposes. The advocates of free imports, in addressing county audiences, make statements which too often secure the end in view, but the truth of which will not bear examination. Labourers are told how much their position has been improved in every way, and are assured that the improvement is the result of so-called free trade. They are warned against going back to the "bad old days of protection," though of course the intelligent among these speakers know well that nobody has made the faintest suggestion of going back to what was then known as protection.

The advantages obtained through the progress of science, through better sanitation, through labour and other social legislation, through the facilities for transit, through discoveries of various kinds, are all held up as the direct results of free trade.¹

The policy of unrestricted free imports of foreign grain having, through the ruin of agriculture, driven

¹ As instances, the present writer remembers that candles were an important item in the weekly budget of the labourer. He remembers spending many an hour by the gloomy light of a slender dip, which had to serve for all in the room. Now, through the discovery of petroleum, a splendid light is secured at less cost. The manufacture of margarine, equal as an article of food to butter itself, was a saving to the poor. Free education is a further saving of from threepence to a shilling a week. These and a variety of other things—results of general progress—make the people to a certain extent better off, but are not due to free trade.

the bulk of a class from their employment, it seems ludicrous to hold up any slight improvement in the condition of the remnant which still remains on the land as a proof of the success of that policy. But setting aside the argument of the party politician, there is a vital view of the question which all thoughtful and patriotic men might be fairly asked to consider. Admit, for the sake of argument, all the advantages claimed for the policy of 1846, add to them, multiply them manyfold, and then consider whether or not these advantages are a sufficient set-off against the great national calamity involved in the destruction of a class of the community which is generally admitted to be the stay and strength of a nation.

The only sound way of dealing with the question is to trace the condition of the men during the years which followed the legislation of 1846 up to, say, 1897—the date of the final report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture. A period of fifty years is surely long enough to show the effect of a policy on a class of men whose position—for good or evil—was necessarily affected by that policy

Following this course, comparing like with like—comparing the condition of labourers who had employment before the day of free imports with the condition of those with employment during fifty years afterwards, it will be found that the former were much better off, or, to put it more aptly, many degrees less miserable than the latter.

Cobden himself, writing to Mr. Ashworth nine years after the repeal of the Corn Laws, says “It is sad to see the bewilderment of the poor people about the price of bread” (bread had gone up instead of down), “but we ought to be tolerant with them, seeing how

much ignorance we meet with among their betters. . . . I assure you I never saw more distress among this class. They are generally employed, but their wages here never exceed twelve shillings a week, and are often ten. The labourer's wife and three or four children live upon this sum, with bread at $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. per pound; dry bread is all they can get. The pigs have disappeared from the sties. They and their children are looking haggard and pale and ragged; and this is agricultural prosperity." (Morley's "Life of Cobden.")

If we take the state of things ten years later than when Cobden wrote—twenty years after free imports—we find the condition of the labourers, if anything, still more deplorable. The reader must study the numerous volumes which contain the reports and evidence of the several Royal Commissions, to know the almost incredible hardships which the rural labourers were suffering. They seem to have reached the depths of misery. "Children must work because the poor people could not get along without it. . . . It was the children that kept the wolf from the door. . . . Gangers supplied children (often as young as six or seven) to farmers at 14s. per score, paying them 4d. to 7d. per day," etc.

Mr. Fraser (afterwards Bishop of Manchester), one of the sub-commissioners, describing the social condition, dwellings, etc., of the labourers, says: "It is a hideous picture, and the picture is drawn from real life. It is impossible," he adds, "to exaggerate the ill effects of the state of things in every respect, physical, social, and moral."¹

¹ "Royal Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, 1867" (First Report, 1868). See also "Children's Employment Commission, 1862" (Sixth Report, 1867).

It is natural to suppose that the rapid lessening of the number of men employed on the soil would tend to increase the wages and improve the position of those who remained. In the preceding pages it is argued from facts that, from causes altogether apart from free imports, the condition of those who migrated to the towns was greatly improved. But that improvement did not reach the labourers who remained on the soil to any extent worth considering, and certainly not to be compared with the progress made by operatives in other industries. The statements, in fact, with regard to the increase of wages of the agricultural labourers are grossly exaggerated. Mr. Caird (afterwards Sir James Caird), referring to the time when free imports came into operation, states that after a careful inquiry into the question of wages in thirty-three out of the forty counties in England, "he finds that 9s. 6d. per week will be found the correct average."¹ About ten years afterwards a return, moved for by Mr. Villiers, was presented to the House of Commons. By that return it was shown that labourers' wages ranged from 8s. to 15s. per week generally: in Sussex, 11s. to 12s.; Berkshire, 9s. to 15s., and in winter 9s. to 11s.; Herts, 9s. 6d. to 10s. 6d.; Cambridgeshire, 10s. to 12s.; Norfolk, 10s. to 11s.; Wilts and Dorset, 9s. to 10s.; Devonshire, 8s. to 12s.; Somersetshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, and Warwickshire, 9s. to 11s.; Yorkshire, 8s. to 16s., etc.²

A few years later (1866) the Earl of Leicester uttered some pregnant words on the subject. After

¹ Caird's "English Agriculture," 1850-1.

² For full details see "Average Rate of Weekly Wages of Agricultural Labourers" (Villiers' Return, 20 August, 1860).

referring at some length to the wages and housing of the labourers, he urged the necessity for improving their condition in order, as he said, to "retain for us that greatest source of our wealth, the muscle and sinew of the agricultural labourer."

The Final Report of the Royal Commission so late as 1897 deals fully with the question of wages in all parts of the country, and shows how small the advance had been.

"In Norfolk," the Report states, "the general rate of wages in 1894 was 10s. per week, while the average earnings throughout the year were 13s. to 14s. . . . In Suffolk the weekly wages of ordinary labourers were 12s., in many cases 10s., and in a few exceptional cases 8s." Mr. Wilson Fox, in his Report just issued, gives the average earnings (including the value of all allowances in kind) of the ordinary farm labourers at 17s. 5d. for England and 17s. 7d. for Wales, being an increase of 4'0 and 6'6 per cent. respectively since 1898.¹

As to the purchasing power of wages, about which so many misstatements are made, it has been shown in a previous chapter, from facts that can hardly be disputed even by political partisans, that most of the necessaries of life, victuals, covering, and shelter (and the labourer had nothing to spare for anything else), were cheaper before the time of free imports than they were afterwards, so that a miserable increase of a shilling or two in wages did not cover the increase in cost of living. The labourer's earnings at the best of times were always within the starvation circle.

¹ "Earnings of Agricultural Labourers." Wilson Fox, Board of Trade. Cd. 2376. 1905.

A personal experiment in this matter would be instructive, and show what the improved condition of the labourer meant. Let the head of a household of six or eight persons have the highest rate of wages (say about 14s.) that ruled for fifty years after free imports placed in her hands to supply all the wants of the family. She would have to provide food, clothes, boots, sundries, and to pay rent; to provide for the incidents of sickness, loss of work, child-birth and death. And further, with one pair of hands she would have to do all the cleaning, washing, cooking, nursing, mending, etc. After this experience of domestic economy—not carried on throughout a lifetime, but only for a few weeks—there would be no more talk of “the improved condition of the labourer” as the result of free imports.

The present writer was among those who signed the petition to Parliament in favour of the repeal of the Corn Laws. He remembers the extravagant statements and promises made to the country folk by those in charge of the petition. Wages were to go up, victuals were to be cheaper and more abundant, and the condition of the labourer and his family was to be improved in every way. These statements were believed, and the petition was eagerly signed by the village people. Mr. W. J. Fox, one of the ablest, certainly one of the most eloquent and persuasive of Cobden’s colleagues, gave assurances which reached the ears of the rural population, and were believed by them. He declared that the abolition of protection would exterminate pauperism, and that in a few years the ruins of the workhouses would mark the extinction of protection in the same way as the

ruins of the baronial castles mark the destruction of feudalism.¹

The following extracts from a paper, written by the present writer just forty years afterwards, show how these alluring foretellings had been falsified and the sad condition to which a class of men whom we love to call the backbone of the nation had been reduced :—

“When the working classes are spoken of, the rural labourer is, as a matter of course, excluded from the term. In Blue Books, agricultural newspapers, and at farmers’ meetings, the position and standing of the labourer are described and descanted on by his masters. The description of his flourishing condition evokes astonishment in the minds of those who know his actual status. Any attempt to reveal to the general public the real condition of the labourer is resented with indignation by the agricultural interest.

“It is true he is often treated with condescending kindness, and as a deserving object of charity so long—and only so long—as he is docile and subservient, but any attempt at self-assertion or independence is punished and put down by many forms of social persecution which are in the hands of his superiors. Propertyless, and with no security for house or home, he has no means of helping himself, and any attempt of others to help him—except by social or benevolent means—is felt to be, and is frequently described as, a criminal attempt to unsettle the minds of happy and contented men, and to set class against class. For his wrong-doings he is judged by a rural magistracy who feel themselves set in authority over him, and who now and then award punishments so severe and un-

¹ Speech in Covent Garden Theatre, quoted in “Pauperism.” Henry Fawcett. Macmillan, 1876. Mr. Fox, by pen and speech, was one of the most prominent and best known among the workers in the cause of repeal. He wrote the Anti-Corn Law League’s “Address to the Nation.”

reasonable as to attract the attention of the Press, and the passing condemnation of the public." (Illustrative cases are here quoted.) "In the Report of the Royal Commission issued in 1882, the general conclusions arrived at are that 'the labourers were never in a better position,' that 'they have better cottages, higher wages, and less work,' that 'during the recent depression the labourer has been best off,' that there has been 'considerable deterioration in the quality of labour,' that 'there is not the same sympathy and not the same inclination to do anything he is not obliged to do for his employer,' and that 'labourers' unions have not only succeeded in disturbing, but have destroyed the good feeling which once existed.'

"These favourable conclusions, however, are hardly warranted by the facts given in the evidence on which they are founded. Though the sources of information are landowners, tenant farmers, factors, land surveyors, and employers of labour generally, yet a close examination of the mass of evidence given reveals a state of things of a painful character, and which, if studied by the general public, could not fail to awaken feelings of pity and sympathy. It is shown that the labourers are badly housed, their wages insufficient to keep a family or provide for bodily wants, to say nothing of sickness and loss of work. The hard lot of our peasantry is, as a rule, accepted by them patiently and in silence, and their sufferings are but little known outside their circle. The life of a labourer may be said to be one long grind of human toil, even when he escapes sickness and loss of work. With no pleasure in the present, and the horizon of his future bounded only by the workhouse and the grave, he works on to the end, to escape the 'parish' which he dreads. Strength, however, fails at last, and then he has to rely on a scanty outdoor relief, or he goes into the 'House.' In due time he is reported dead, and so ends a life of toil, in which he has added (who shall

say how much?) to that stock of national wealth so small a portion of which has fallen to his share."

In many parts of rural England this description still holds good so far as the regular labourers who cannot leave the land are concerned. The following letter received this year (1905) from the wife of a clergyman in a country parish states: "The wages here are 12s. and 13s. a week, or 15s. to shepherds (who never get a Sunday free at all), rent 1s. a week; but when a man and wife and seven or eight children have to live on that, they are literally so underfed that they have neither strength nor thought for anything but how to be fed or covered. What they need is not kindness merely, or charity, but a living wage; and that they have not got in these parts. The agricultural labourers are such splendid fellows when they have any chance, but all who can are going away; and if protection of some sort does not come soon to rural England, there will be nothing and no one left to protect. It is scandalous that home interests which affect the very root of the well-being of the nation should be so persistently ignored."¹

At the same time we are assured by a certain class of economists, generally well-to-do men, that all is well. Exports and imports are growing greater: the aggregate wealth has been increasing by leaps and bounds, till, according to the best authority, the nation's capital has reached the almost incredible sum of

¹ In the many visits made to rural districts for political and other purposes I have been continually struck with the good work done by the wives and daughters of parish clergymen. They give their womanly sympathy, and often material aid out of their scanty means, to poor parishioners in times of family troubles, while the games, entertainments, etc., which they promote form the only relief to the monotony and the uneventful character of village life.

15,000 millions sterling, and its income 1,750 millions a year. But there are thoughtful persons, happily growing in number, who have serious misgivings as to the economy of the national household. They think they hear "a noise downstairs," and, with the Scottish national poet, they find it difficult "to keep at times frae being sour, to see how things are shar'd." They are beginning to see that nostrums and palliatives cannot cope with the deep and widespread destitution that exists, and that some scientific methods are necessary to hasten the time when those who are the main producers shall have a larger share in the products, the time

"When wealth no more shall rust in mounded heaps,
But, smit with freer hand, shall slowly melt
In many streams to fatten lower lands."

CHAPTER XXII

DEPOPULATION OF RURAL ENGLAND

THE cry of "Rural Depopulation" is on every one's lips, but few know the extent to which it has been going on, fewer still realize fully what it means. The admirable manner in which the Census Reports are compiled is worthy of all praise, but of necessity the work is so full, elaborate, and complicated, that much study is required in order to draw from it such condensed information as will be of use to the general public—especially to busy persons. The headings and areas vary almost in every Census, and it is therefore very difficult to secure strict accuracy in comparing particulars under separate headings in the Report of 1901 with the particulars under similar headings in previous Censuses. But no pains have been spared to make the analysis of the returns, as it appears in the following pages, as correct as possible.

The term "Urban population" means the inhabitants of London, County boroughs, Municipal boroughs, and Urban districts. The term "Rural population" comprises the inhabitants of the remaining parts of the country except a very small population which is neither Rural nor Urban.

The total area of England and Wales is 37,327,479 statute acres, and the population in 1901 was 32,527,843. Of these totals the Urban districts have an area of 3,848,987 acres, containing a population in 1901 of 25,058,355, while the Rural districts, with an

area of 33,478,492 acres, had a population in the same year of less than 7,500,000.

The last Census, like the previous ones, reveals a startling state of things. While the population of England and Wales has increased in the ten years by 12·17 per cent, no less than 77 per cent of the whole are resident in Urban districts which comprise little more than one-tenth of the total area. Taking the Urban areas, it will be found that practically all the smaller boroughs, market towns, and other Urban districts which are in the midst of Rural surroundings, and rely more or less on agriculture for their trade and support, are either stationary, or have fallen off in population during the ten years (1891-1901), many of them to a serious extent.

As examples of the kind of places that show an actual decrease in population may be quoted :—

Ashburton, Abingdon, Bicester, Bishop's Castle, Bewdley, Buckingham, Blandford, Bridport, Bury St. Edmunds, Chipping Norton, Crediton, Daventry, Diss, Downham Market, Eye, Great Torrington, Glastonbury, Horncastle, Huntingdon, Hay, Ivy-bridge, Louth, Lyme Regis, Lymington, Market Rasen, Malmesbury, Marlborough, Ottery St. Mary, Ross, Shaftesbury, Saffron Walden, Sowerby, Southmolton, Stowmarket, Tavistock, Tetbury, Tiverton, Totnes, Wareham, Wallingford, Warminster, Warwick, etc.¹

The "Rural districts," of which the towns named below are the centres, show a still more alarming decay during the same decade of years. Out of 674

¹ There are above 200 places of this class that show a decrease, and many others that are either stationary or have slightly increased in numbers. For details see Summary Tables, Census 1901, Cd. 1523, Table XI, pp. 45-78.

Rural districts in England and Wales, no less than 408 have declined in population. In many of them the decrease is very considerable. Many of the rest are about stationary, or show a very slight increase.

As examples of those which show a decrease may be named :—

Andover, Aylesbury, Abingdon, Axminster, Barnstaple, Basingstoke, Battle, Berkhamstead, Beverley, Braintree, Blandford, Banbury, Bideford, Bridgnorth, Bicester, Brackley, Chipping Norton, Chard, Crediton, Daventry, Devizes, Hungerford, Holsworthy, Honiton, Huntingdon, Hertford, Hitchin, Dulverton, Dursley, Frome, Hereford, Leominster, Louth, Midhurst, Nuneaton, Newbury, Northleach, Oundle, Okehampton, Pershore, Romsey, Malmesbury, Pewsey, Sturminster, Wantage, Warminster, Swaffham, Spalding, Southmolton, Stow-on-the-Wold, Shepton Mallet, Sherbourne, Sleaford, Towcester, Yeovil, Tiverton, Torrington, Tewkesbury, Horncastle, Saffron Walden, Wincanton, Woodstock, etc.¹

These are the places and districts, many of them historical, where, in former times, the robust English race increased and multiplied, where country life was vigorous, where village sports abounded, and the recruiting-sergeant was continually seen. All are now more or less in a state of decay, in some cases with grass growing in the streets.

Taking the Administrative counties, which are wholly or mainly agricultural, no less than fourteen show an actual decrease in population, while some others are practically at a standstill or show only a small increase. But the decline in the number of those engaged in agriculture is seen in every county in

¹ See Table XII in the same Census Paper, pp. 79-99.

England and Wales except one. The following table shows the counties in which the decrease is most marked.

NUMBER OF MALE PERSONS ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE.

County.	1891.	1901.	Decrease per cent.
Westmoreland . . .	6,295	5,847	7·1
Lancashire . . .	43,228	40,124	7·2
Cornwall . . .	23,793	22,008	7·5
Merionethshire . . .	6,445	5,962	7·5
Derbyshire . . .	13,640	12,590	7·7
Lincolnshire . . .	56,185	51,625	8·1
Denbighshire. . .	8,680	7,861	9·4
Nottingham . . .	17,933	16,174	9·8
Devonshire . . .	39,234	35,408	9·8
Dorsetshire . . .	17,218	15,427	10·4
Somersetshire . . .	32,810	29,230	10·9
Durham . . .	11,712	10,373	11·4
Worcestershire . . .	15,870	14,039	11·5
Kent . . .	44,107	38,997	11·6
Norfolk . . .	48,872	43,151	11·7
Cambridgeshire . . .	26,506	23,248	12·3
Suffolk . . .	41,137	35,977	12·5
Middlesex . . .	6,508	5,644	13·3
Warwickshire . . .	19,664	17,003	13·5
Leicestershire . . .	15,660	13,479	13·9
Gloucestershire . . .	21,238	18,239	14·1
Hampshire . . .	28,797	24,530	14·8
Rutlandshire . . .	2,789	2,374	14·9
Huntingdonshire . . .	8,085	6,862	15·1
Surrey . . .	15,035	12,740	15·3
Wiltshire . . .	24,921	20,982	15·8
Sussex . . .	32,674	27,437	16·0
Essex . . .	40,352	33,591	16·8
Hertfordshire . . .	18,611	15,326	17·7
Northamptonshire. . .	21,015	17,279	17·8
Oxfordshire . . .	18,353	14,925	18·7
Berkshire . . .	19,735	15,886	19·5
Buckinghamshire . . .	15,337	12,244	20·2
Bedfordshire . . .	15,510	11,815	23·8

With regard to agricultural labourers, the classification of their different kinds of work adopted in the Census of 1901 differs from that of previous Reports. For this reason, the Report states, "it is obviously futile to compare the numbers under separate headings with those under similar headings at previous Censuses. The total numbers of workers may, however, be fairly compared after excluding farmers' sons under fifteen years of age and female relations of farmers, for reasons stated on a previous page. With this necessary modification, the aggregate of such workers at the last six Censuses were as shown in the following table"—

NUMBER OF WORKERS ON FARMS.

Census year.	Male persons.	Female persons.	Total.
1851	1,232,576	143,475	1,376,051
1861	1,206,280	90,525	1,296,805
1871	1,014,428	58,656	1,073,084
1881	924,871	40,346	965,217
1891	841,884	24,150	866,034
1901	715,138	12,002	727,130 ¹

If we take these figures in connection with the fact that in 1851 the population was about 18 millions, and in 1901 about $32\frac{1}{2}$ millions, or nearly double, the extent and rapidity of the decline in the number of

¹ For minute particulars of the manner in which agricultural work is divided under different headings, see General Report, Census 1901, Table XXXIV, p. 259, and Table XXXV, p. 274. These particulars are somewhat complicated, but very interesting. They relate to farmers, graziers, bailiffs, woodmen, gardeners, nurserymen, and all others connected with agriculture. These tables put the number of farm servants, men and women (including shepherds, stockmen, horsemen, and ordinary labourers), at 621,068, instead of the number 727,130 given in the above table. The former seems the more correct. For the changes in classification see Table XXXIII, pp. 245-55. Page 247 refers to agriculture.

farm workers will be seen. In 1851, of every 100 male persons over ten years of age 19 were workers on farms, while in 1901 the proportion was only 6 in 100. Between 1881 and 1891 the decline was 9 per cent, and between 1891 and 1901 it was 15 per cent. In no other important industry in this or any other country at any time has such a falling off been seen. It is a just gauge of the effect which our fiscal and agrarian policy has had on the rural population. Whether or not a compensation has been found in the direction of trade and manufacture let the state of our towns bear witness.

In contrast to the decay of the agricultural population is the enormous rapidity with which the inhabitants of Urban districts have increased during the ten years. Those Administrative counties which contain residential, mining, or manufacturing centres show a large growth of population, varying up to as much as 40 per cent. In the large towns the increase has been very striking, and the larger the town the more rapid the increase in proportion.

Among the 1122 Urban districts are 75, each of which had in 1901 a population of above 50,000. These 75 towns had grown in numbers during the ten years at the rate of 14 per cent. In some of them the rate of increase is almost incredible. West Ham increased by over 30 per cent; Willesden, 87 per cent; East Ham, 193 per cent; Walthamstow, 105 per cent; King's Norton and Northfield, 101 per cent; Handsworth, 61 per cent; Cardiff, 27 per cent; Gateshead, 28 per cent; Plymouth, 21 per cent; Southampton, 27 per cent; Smethwick, 51 per cent; Middlesbrough, 20 per cent; West Hartlepool, 46 per cent; and Walsall, 20 per cent, etc.

“Greater London,” which is ever attracting to it people of all sorts and conditions, has now a population of $6\frac{1}{2}$ millions. It increased by nearly one million in the ten years, that is by a number about equal to that of the inhabitants of Birmingham and Manchester put together.

These Census returns, as far as they relate to agriculture, become more and more doleful the more they are dissected and examined. In 1901, exclusive of gardeners, there were in all England and Wales only 195,141 persons (men-kind and women-kind) under twenty years of age who were engaged in agriculture. It is still more alarming to note that there were only about 50,000 boys and girls under fifteen who were so engaged. This shows that rural children on leaving school drift into other occupations, and that very few of them stay on the land. We are therefore brought face to face with the fact that few besides the middle-aged and the old remain on the soil; and as these die out, the grand old craft of the working agriculturist will die out with them.¹

¹ It is a common error to place an efficient rural labourer in the class of “unskilled” workers. In no other industry than that of agriculture does the workman require more skill, and in few other industries is such a variety of knowledge needed. The straight furrow, the well-laid hedge, the thatched roof, the well-built, comely rick, etc., require training and skill on the part of the workman. A labourer of the old type knew the ways and wants of horses and cattle, and could talk to them so as to be understood. His powers of observation were wonderful. With no knowledge of chemistry he knew the nature of soils. With no knowledge of meteorology, by looking at the way of the wind, its action on trees and animals, and by other signs, he could forecast the weather with a fair amount of accuracy. In these days, when almost everything is done by machinery, the agriculturist, if schooled in the scientific reasons—the “why and the wherefore”—of the things he sees and does, would be the grandest craftsman of all manual workmen, engaged, as he would be, in one of the few crafts left that require thought on the part of the worker and give him a personal interest and a pleasure in his work.

The present writer has recently received a letter from a farmer friend—a good cultivator and a liberal employer—which dwells on the serious difficulty farmers generally are in for want of these skilled men. The letter states: "We cannot get labour enough, and it is not efficient what we do get." He sends a newspaper ("Stanford Mercury") which contains eighty-three advertisements for waggoners, cowmen, shepherds, labourers with good knowledge of farm work, etc. Increased wages are offered, with cottages, gardens, and other perquisites.¹

The fact is, this class no longer exists in the country districts in sufficient numbers, though they are to be found in thousands in our towns and other industrial centres. No mere wages, that the farmer can at present afford to pay, will bring them back. These country-bred men, on account of their special qualities, generally get employment in towns if there is any to be had, and begin to earn wages which they regard as good when compared with what they had been previously earning on the land. In spite of their reputed dullness, they show a great aptitude in adapting themselves to new conditions. They are tractable, towardly, strong, and industrious—and, generally, they demean themselves well. They almost invariably "get on," and many of them become thriving men and important citizens.²

¹ In a Suffolk paper—"The Lowestoft Journal"—23 September, 1905, there were advertisements for 112 farm labourers—horsemen, shepherds, milkmen, ploughmen, stockmen, all-round men, thatchers, etc. Good wages were offered with continuous employment, and in many cases cottages and gardens free.

² I was speaking a short time ago to a man of this type who was at work on the roads in Birmingham. I told him of the great demand which existed in the neighbouring counties for such men as he. His reply was to the effect that he did not like the work he was at, but that

Successive governments are indifferent to the state of things as regards agriculture revealed by the Census Reports, and they are equally careless of the findings of Commissions specially appointed by themselves to inquire into the subject. The Report of the last of the Commissions so appointed may be said to contain the latest official utterance on the effect of our fiscal and agrarian policies on the rural population. At the date of that Report (1897) the exodus from the land of the old type of labourers was, as a class, well-nigh completed, leaving few but middle-aged or old men and casual labourers behind them. The Commissioners express alarm at the exodus, which, as they state, has been going on for many years simultaneously with a rapid increase in population. They add: "The total population of Great Britain rose from 26,072,284 in 1871 to 33,028,172 in 1891, and, as we have shown, the number of the agricultural labourers in Great Britain fell during those years from 1,161,738 to 919,685. In other words, while in twenty years the British population increased by 6,955,888, the agricultural labourers of Great Britain decreased by 242,053. It is unnecessary for us to enlarge on the significance of these figures from the point of view either of the national physique or of the interests of the working classes engaged in other than agricultural industries."¹

he was getting continuous employment under the Corporation at 23s. per week, and was "able to save a shilling or two for a rainy day." "But," I said, "suppose you had five or six acres of land of your own, could you manage it?" He replied that he should like to try, but "there was no chance of that"; if there were he "could chuck this to-morrow." Here was a skilled man who could plough, sow, reap, lay and mend hedges—a skilled labourer, for whose services the land of this country is "crying out," engaged in cleaning streets which any one of the numerous unemployed could do as well as he could.

¹ "Final Report of the Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression" (C. 8540), issued in 1897.

The reference to the "national physique" contains an anxious portent in connection with this process of migration. These masses of rural folk, starved out of their natural dwelling-place—the country-sides—become, as it were, invaders of the towns and centres of industry. No doubt they better themselves, not by filling places that could not be filled by others on the spot, but by supplanting other, older, and perhaps less capable workers. These supplanted ones sink into lower grades of employment, or become casuals, doing anything they can get to do, and at last many of them, after a bitter struggle, sink into the ranks of the submerged or fall on the rates. It is thoughtless and unjust to reproach this human wreckage with being "undeserving," "unemployable," etc., because few besides themselves know the odds they had to contend with in their downward course before they finally gave in. The offspring of the invading class deteriorate in their turn under the bad conditions of an overcrowded town life, but fresh relays continually arrive to take their places. Every thousand acres of land that goes out of cultivation of necessity swells the number of the human migrants.

Some writers on the subject console themselves with the statements that there is a "natural tendency"—as it is termed—towards migration, and that it is characteristic of every other nation as well as our own. "Migration is humorously described as the tendency of the rural population towards large towns, being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery."¹ The tattle about "natural tendency" becomes futile and evasive when the real condition of the labourer is considered. "The rest-

¹ "Tess," Thomas Hardy.

lessness generated by pressure against the conditions of existence perpetually prompt the desire to try a new position.”¹

For the unmarried labourer there is no inducement whatever to remain on the land, while there is every motive for a change. Transit is easy; he has only to throw his little fardel on his back, and in an hour, for a few pence, he is in a large town with all its novelties and attractions. But there is no comparison whatever between the migration in England and that in other countries. First of all, the migration in other countries is comparatively small—in some cases insignificant—and is satisfactorily accounted for. In Germany, for instance, the enormous increase in manufacturing industries has caused a natural demand for workers from the—if anything—over-populated rural districts. There is all the difference in the world between migration in countries whose rural population is from 40 to 60 per cent of the whole, and whose commercial prosperity is increasing, and migration in a country whose rural population is already depleted, and whose town industries are practically at a standstill. But in other countries this migration, however small, is regarded as a misfortune to be actively counteracted as much as possible. In England, on the contrary, we do little but talk about it.

In the new German Tariff Bill the interests of agriculture are intentionally safeguarded on the grounds that “agriculture is the sheet-anchor of the ship of state.” In his speech on that Bill the German Home Secretary said: “Police measures would be of no avail to keep the rural population attached to the

¹ Introduction to “A Plea for Liberty,” Herbert Spencer.

land. If it were to be kept there, it could only be done by encouraging agriculture, and by adopting measures which secured conditions favourable to agriculture. Side by side with agrarian policy, however, the Government would continue to promote legislation for the benefit of the working classes." At a recent agricultural meeting held in Paris the "24 million agriculturists" were spoken of as "the ballast of the vessel that carries the fortunes of France."¹

Another great cause of the depopulation of our rural districts is emigration. The general public are consoled with the theory that emigration is a means of relieving our congested population, and that by sending labourers and others abroad they are disposing of surplus people not wanted at home. It is presumed that emigrants, by tilling their own land in a new country, would benefit themselves, and at the same time raise food and create fresh trade for the Motherland.

Rural England, however, is not a congested country, but the very opposite, large areas being almost a desert, or fast becoming one. But for the evidence contained in the Census Papers, no one would believe the extent to which many of the country districts have been stripped of their population. If we take the rural districts in all the counties of England and Wales, we find that in no less than forty-two of them the population (men, women, and children) is less than 200 to the square mile; in twelve of them less than 100 to the square mile; and in three less than 50. The details are given in the following table:—

¹ Speech of M. Gomot, President de la Société Nationale d'Encouragement à l'Agriculture ("La Semaine Agricole," 2 July, 1905). At that meeting the French Minister of Agriculture, in proposing the toast of the Society, coupled with it that of "The Peasantry of France."

LAND REFORM

AVERAGE POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE.

	For the Administrative County as a whole.	For Rural Districts only.
Bedfordshire	363	171
Berkshire	350	180
Buckinghamshire	263	184
Cambridgeshire	214	103
Cheshire	808	197
Cornwall	238	151
Cumberland	176	71
Derbyshire	599	292
Devonshire	254	93
Dorsetshire	207	107
Durham	1171	379
Essex	708	178
Gloucestershire	563	195
Hampshire	486	147
Herefordshire	136	94
Hertfordshire	409	185
Huntingdonshire	148	112
Kent	630	226
Lancashire	2346	204
Leicestershire	526	181
Lincolnshire	189	97
Middlesex	3410	540
Monmouthshire	546	113
Norfolk	232	131
Northamptonshire	336	141
Northumberland	299	65
Nottinghamshire	610	165
Oxfordshire	248	135
Rutlandshire	130	130
Shropshire	178	107
Somersetshire	268	158
Staffordshire	1063	234
Suffolk	252	141
Surrey	906	330
Sussex	413	149
Warwickshire	1037	182

AVERAGE POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE.

	For the Administrative County as a whole.	For Rural Districts only.
Westmoreland . . .	82	52
Wiltshire . . .	201	121
Worcestershire . . .	605	247
Yorkshire . . .	591	110
Anglesey . . .	183	131
Brecknockshire . . .	74	52
Cardiganshire . . .	88	67
Carmarthenshire . . .	147	103
Carnarvonshire . . .	220	129
Denbighshire . . .	198	144
Flintshire . . .	320	218
Glamorganshire . . .	1061	302
Merionethshire . . .	74	46
Montgomeryshire . . .	69	47
Pembrokeshire . . .	143	89
Radnorshire . . .	49	39 ¹

The conclusion to be drawn from these facts—a conclusion that can hardly be disputed—is that there is room and profitable employment on the agricultural land of England and Wales, and in industries connected with it, for at least a million families.

Emigration became a regular system during the first half of the last century. It was an outlet for the peasantry who had been driven from the soil by the land legislation and the proceedings already described. The mere loss in the form of money and goods which these emigrants carry with them is considerable. On this point an economist writes: "Taking the esti-

¹ In the Census Reports the rural and urban population are given separately, but the areas are given in statute acres. The particulars in the above table have been ascertained by turning the acreage of each county as a whole into square miles and doing the same in respect of the acreage of the rural districts in that county, and then reckoning the population per square mile in each of the two areas.

mate of Mr. Buchanan, Agent of the British Government in Canada, the amount of capital taken with them by emigrants during the twenty-five years named (1820 to 1849) must be equal to 40 millions sterling."¹ In a paper published by the Labourer's Friends Society, an influential association formed for the purpose of restoring labourers to the land by voluntary agencies, appears the following:—"We shall continue, from time to time, to bring forward facts to show that an effectual remedy for all this mass of misery is not only in our power, but at our very doors, and that it would be a deplorable waste of public money to transport the labourer to foreign climes when by proper arrangement he might be made happy and comfortable at home."² Coming down to recent times, an American statesman, the late Mr. Blaine, stated some years ago that in the form of emigrants—"able-bodied humanity"—we more than paid for all the products which they (the Americans) sent to us.³

In the face of these facts there are serious proposals made for a wholesale assisted emigration of the working classes of this country—proposals for sending to the colonies from 10,000 to 20,000 families "carefully selected," and who "belong chiefly to agriculture."

Great cost is involved in carrying out the scheme—cost in the form of supervision, organization, and the necessary capital to be given to start the settlers in their new careers, a part of which cost it is hoped will eventually be recouped. These proposals do not affect

¹ Porter's "Progress of the Nation."

² "The Labourer's Friend." This society, which had the King and Queen as patrons, is described on page 71.

³ Various writers put the value of adult emigrants at £200 each and upwards. Mr. Blaine reckoned the value of an English able-bodied emigrant at £300.

the undesirables, the "riff-raff," the weak and incompetent. If any of these are sent they will be promptly rejected and sent back.¹ The number of emigrants sent back by the United States in 1904 was: British and Irish, 366; foreigners, 1198; total, 1566. The number rejected by the Colonial authorities in the same year was: British and Irish, 39; foreigners, 197; total, 236. Nearly all these emigrants were rejected for reasons stated under two headings—"Disease" and "Paupers or likely to become a public charge."¹ It is only the strong, the physically sound, the "fit and carefully selected"—in other words, those who constitute the real strength of the nation—who are eligible.

The regulations which have been gazetted in New South Wales with regard to immigration assisted by the Government of that colony are that immigrants must be in sound mental and bodily health and of good moral character, and must not be over fifty years of age. They must be selected mainly from the classes skilled in rural industry, and each individual must possess at least £10 on landing at Sydney.

We spend immense sums of money in educating, training, and otherwise caring for the children of our rural population; and when they arrive at manhood or womanhood we are asked to spend further large sums in order to get rid of them.

No doubt the capitalist classes are exporting their money for the development of undertakings in other countries; but that is a secondary matter, though, for obvious reasons, an important one. Money so exported can, as a rule, be got back again, often increased

¹ "Emigration and Immigration Reports," Board of Trade, 1905, No. 137. The number of British and Irish male agricultural labourers (excluding women, and children under age) who emigrated in 1904 was 21,028, of whom 10,778 went to the United States.

in amount ; and if lost, being only money, it is not of vital concern. But to export "carefully selected" able-bodied persons—shiploads of English sinew, muscle, and lustihood—is a suicidal proceeding. It is to send away the real wealth of the nation, which, once gone, can never be recovered.

This proposal for wholesale assisted emigration is an object-lesson for foreign countries, especially for those who protect their agricultural industries. It shows the humiliating position to which the "richest country in Europe" has been reduced by its fiscal and agrarian policy. But where is the necessity for this big, complicated, and costly scheme? Is it because something sensational is needed to arrest the attention of the general public to a crying evil and so induce them to deal with it?

The object of the foregoing pages is to show that a remedy, commonplace perhaps in its character, but cheap, natural, and effective, lies at our doors. It is for the State—for the State alone can do it on the required scale—to provide machinery for the purpose of re-peopling our own sparsely peopled villages and country places, and for the cultivation of the great areas of land now lying idle, or akin to idle, and which are "crying out" for the very kind of labour it is proposed to send abroad. There is room in Rural England not only for the "20,000 carefully selected families," but for at least fifty times that number. Each family thus settled, instead of being a burden on the rates, would become ratepayers and be an additional stay of the nation.

The enduring character of the benefits, social, economic, and political, which a re-peopling of our country-sides would secure to the general community

—who after all are the State—has been dealt with in previous chapters, and should cause the public to hesitate before they give sanction or support to a proposal for the wholesale deportation of the choicest of our working classes. For a Government to support the scheme would be an act little short of criminal in its character.

Two arguments are often used in favour of this emigration, first, that it will increase the ties between the colonies and the motherland, and, secondly, that it will develop and strengthen our empire over-sea; but our great empire will remain sound, strong, and undiminished in size so long, and only so long, as its heart and centre abide strong and sound. That strength and soundness can be retained not by the riches of this country, but only by the quality of its manhood.

In the eighteenth century there was a far-seeing French statesman, of whom it is stated that his reforms, if they had been carried out and not been frustrated by the “classes,” would have either hindered the great revolution altogether, or at least made it less violent and ungovernable. Bearing on the question under consideration this eminent man wrote:—

“Is it not evident that the only real wealth of the State being the yearly productiveness of its land and the industry of its inhabitants, its wealth will be at its greatest when the produce of each acre of land and the industry of each individual shall be carried to the highest possible point? And is it not evident that each proprietor has more interest than any other person to draw from his land the greatest possible return?”¹

¹ “Life and Writings of Turgot,” by W. W. Stephens. Longmans, 1895.

CHAPTER XXIII

CONCLUSION

LAND REFORM is a hackneyed subject. Legislative and other attempts to deal with it have been, as a rule, attempts to graft improvements on the present system of landlord and tenant with a view to better the condition of the agriculturists as a class; consequently they have had little or no interest for the public at large. In these pages the subject has been treated, however imperfectly, as a national one, with the object of bringing home to the minds of all members of the community, whatever their position and whatever their occupation, the fact that they have a living interest in agriculture, and that their happiness and well-being depend upon it. The farmer is put in a secondary place, and regarded only as a necessary agent through which the general welfare is to be secured. Agriculture (in its widest sense) is held up as the parent industry of the world, of which trade and commerce are but the offspring and handmaids.¹

The ancients regarded that industry as the basis of civilization. They had their goddesses of agriculture, to whom temples were built and splendid offerings made. Our harvest thanksgivings, feasts, and other rural festivals, so real even up to recent times, were

¹ "The Earth, which having a divine and everlasting youth bestowed upon it, is called the *common parent* of all things." ("Husbandry," Columella, Book i.)

"The land is mother of us all; nourishes, shelters, gladdens, lovingly enriches us all." (Carlyle.)

also offerings of gratitude for the fruits of the earth on which human life and welfare depend.¹

Amongst the ancient writings which exalt agriculture the Pastorals and Georgics of Virgil may be said to take the first place. Though written about two thousand years ago they are fresh and living to-day. With the exception of some errors, which have been corrected by later discoveries, they are wonderfully applicable to the agricultural industry of the present time. The advice given to cultivators has never been bettered. The poetic treatment, to which no other calling lends itself, glorifies the common incidents of country life. "The plough-share glitters by the furrow worn." "The earth herself, solicited by none, freely each want supplied." "All things are full of Jove. He gives to earth her fruitfulness." The peasant's homestead is called "his little realm." Honey, no doubt a more important article of food than it is now, is "a gift from heaven."

Virgil, himself a practical farmer, deals with every operation and phenomenon connected with agriculture: ploughing, planting, improving the land, horses, flocks, cattle, implements, the seasons, the animal and vegetable world, nature of soils, etc. etc. Apart from their practical value to the agriculturist, the teachings of Virgil, through the beautiful language in which they are given, create a universal interest in the calling they exalt, and impress on the general reader a sense of the paramount moment of the cultivator's art.

¹ In olden times the prayers "For Rain," "For Fair Weather," "For Plenty," that "Our Land may yield us her fruits of Increase," etc., were not mere forms. But the harvest thanksgiving of the present day seems almost an irreverent act, and the wheat-sheaf in the church a mockery, in a country the policy of which is to lessen and destroy the harvest and to spoil the husbandman.

“Where moisture sweet
Gladdens an unctuous loam, and where the glade
Is full of grass, with fruitful riches stor'd,
On which from lofty rocks glide falling streams,
And from them draw a fertilizing slime.”

. . . . “But in a hilly tract
The hungry gravel scarce yields humble plants
Of casia and of rosemary for bees.”

. . . . “Too happy they, the tillers of the fields,
If their own bliss they knew. To whom herself,
Far from the strife of arms, the grateful Earth
Yields from her lap an easy sustenance.”

. . . . “Still with his crooked plough the husbandman
Goes on to cleave the ground. His labour hence
In annual course returns. Hence he sustains
His country's weal, and his own household small,
Hence herds of kine, and the deserving steers.
Nor finds he in the welcom'd tasks a pause ;
For each advancing season still abounds
With fruits, or new born flocks or harvest sheaves,
And loads from furrows more than fill his barns.”

After invoking the gods of agriculture and pouring out libations to them, the husbandmen indulge in recreations :—

“Erects a mark, at which the herdsmen aim
Swift rival javelins. Then their sturdy frames
Are stripp'd for wrestling in the rustic ring.”

The leading ideas throughout these charming pages are that agriculture is a divine calling, and that on it and on nothing else the strength and glory of nations depend :

“This life of yore the ancient Sabines led,
This Remus and his brother. So in strength
Etruria grew. So Rome herself became
The beauty and the glory of the world.”¹

¹ The “Georgics” of Virgil (Rann Kennedy's Translation, 1849).

However the scheme of land reform (including rural education) which has been propounded in these pages may be criticized, it cannot be disputed that it is both complete and practicable. If the agricultural part of Mr. Chamberlain's proposals were added to it, its success would be more speedy and assured. The two sets of proposals hang together, each the complement of the other. If anyone not let by party views, or not so bound by traditional bonds as to be incapable of original thought, were seriously to consider these proposals as a whole, he would become convinced that by them, and by no other means, can a solution be found for the anxious problems that afflict the life of our country, and which, if let alone, or dealt with in a piecemeal and haphazard way, will grow into an unmanageable national danger. To that end it would be useful to examine the nature of some of these problems.

Taking "National Defence" as the first in order, for we are told on high authority that "Defence is of more importance than Opulence," we have seen that on this subject a veteran soldier whom the nation trusts has been sounding grave notes of warning.¹ Lord Roberts and other eminent men, while not lessening the importance of the navy, seem to regard the doctrine of the "Blue-water" school as being founded on theory, and they are not content to trust to a theory—however well supported—for the defence of our coasts.

Lord Roberts has sketched out a scheme for train-

¹ See the following by Lord Roberts: Letter to the "Daily Telegraph," June 12th, 1905; Speech in the House of Lords, July 10th, 1905; Address to the Drill Association, "Standard," July 20th, 1905; Speech to the London Chamber of Commerce, August 1st, 1905.

ing the youth of the country in physical fitness and in the use of the rifle. He urges that rifle-shooting should be made a national pursuit, so that skill in the use of the rifle may be got in the same way as skill in the long-bow was gotten in the olden days in England.

With this view he suggests that rifle clubs should be formed and means of practising rifle-shooting provided in towns and villages. He makes the important and assuring assertion that a system such as he has sketched "would not only place the country in absolute safety against invasion, but would render any attempt at invasion out of the question." Lord Roberts refers to the fact that one hundred years ago, with a population much less than half of that of the present time, our military force was much greater in numbers than it is now. But he must remember that one hundred years ago our villages and country towns were still teeming with people, while now they are deserted. It is for Lord Roberts (and the country) to consider whether or not his patriotic aims would not be more naturally and effectually secured by the advocacy of a scheme of Land Reform that would surely have the effect of re-peopling our country-sides, for "it is the plough that yieldeth the best souldiers" (Lord Bacon). If these conditions were restored, Lord Roberts's task would be an easy one. He could say with effect of the rifle what Roger Ascham said of the weapon of his day, the deadly long-bow, "Youth should use it for the most honest pastime in peace, that men might handle it as a most sure weapon in war."¹

¹ This is another instance of the gain we should get by a study of the wisdom of our forefathers. Roger Ascham lived and wrote in the sixteenth century. He was a great scholar, but being weak in body he

Bishop Latimer, a yeoman's son, following the old-time vogue, now unhappily abandoned, of dealing in the pulpit with things affecting the daily life of the people, exhorted the folk to practise shooting. "In my tyme," he said, "my poore father was as diligent to teach me to shote as to learne anye other thyng, & so I thynke other menne dyd theyr children. He taughte me how to drawe, how to laye my bodye in my bowe, and not to drawe wyth strength of armes as other nacions do, but with strength of the bodye. I had my bowe boughte me accordyng to my age and strength, as I increased in them, so my bowes were made bigger and bigger, for men shal never shot well, excepte they be boughte up in it. It is a goodly art, a holsome kynde of exercise and much commended in phisike."¹

The next question in order and one nearest akin to

took to archery as a healthsome pastime. His treatise on shooting, "Toxophilus," is a most interesting book for the modern reader. Those who wish to promote the practice of rifle-shooting would find that a cheap edition largely circulated would be useful for their purpose, as most of the hints, maxims, and directions are applicable to shooting generally. "By shootinge," he says, "is the mynde honestlye exercised and of all other is the most honeste pastyme (not lurking in holes and corners) . . . whereof followeth healte of bodye, quickness of witte, habilitye to defend our country as our enemyes can bear record, everye body should learne to shoote when they be younge," so that they may defend the country when they are older. But he says, "these things cannot be done mightely except they learn it perfectly when they be boys . . . for much use maketh men shoote both strong and well." The eye, he urges, must be well trained, because it is the "guide and succourer of all other parts . . . for having a man's eye always on his mark is the onlye way to shoote streighte." The footing, standing, and setting of the limbs and body of the shooter must be "comely to the eye and to the most advantage," while the instruments and tackle should be clean, in good order, and ready for use.—"Toxophilus," or "Schole of Shootinge," Roger Ascham (Bennett's edition, 1761).

¹ "Sixth Sermon." Preached before King Edward VI (Arber's Reprints).

National Defence is that of "Physical Deterioration." According to the "Army Medical Department Report" for the year 1903 (Cd. 2434, 1905), the number of recruits inspected during the year was 69,553. Of these 22,382, or 321·80 per 1000, were rejected as unfit, and 47,171, or 678·20 per 1000, passed fit for service; 1022 of the latter, however, were discharged within three months of enlistment as unfit for service, thus making the total number of rejections equal to 23,404, or a ratio of 336·49 per 1000. Compared with the corresponding ratios of the previous year (1902), an increase of 14·61 occurred in the ratio of rejection on inspection, but a decrease of 3·54 is shown in those rejected within three months of enlistment. The total ratio of rejection therefore increased by 11·07, the ratio of men found fit having decreased in the year by the same proportion.

But recruits come mainly from those classes which, from their condition in life, may be expected to be low down in the scale of physical strength. There are grounds, therefore, for hoping that the enormous percentage of young men rejected as unfit for the public service does not accurately represent the actual state of the health of the people, but at present there are no tests by which this information can be got.

In 1903 the Duke of Devonshire appointed a Committee to inquire into the subject.¹ With regard to the

¹ The Terms of Reference to the Committee were: (1) To determine with the aid of such counsel as the medical profession are able to give, the steps that should be taken to furnish the Government and the nation at large with periodical data for an accurate comparative estimate of the health and physique of the people; (2) To indicate generally the causes of such physical deterioration as does exist in certain classes; and (3) To point out the means by which it can be most effectually diminished. For Report and Evidence see Cd. 2175, Cd. 2210, Cd. 2186, 1904.

first part of the reference, the recommendations of the Committee are very valuable, and would, if carried out, furnish trustworthy information from time to time as to the actual physical condition of the people. With regard to remedies for "those evils the existence of which is admitted" the Committee offer suggestions rather than recommendations. In this respect their Report is disappointing. In face of the evidence placed before them their reference to rural depopulation is halting, insufficient, and lacks decision. "With a view," they say, "to combating the evils resulting from the constant influx from country to town; the Committee recommend that every effort should be made by those charged with the conduct and control of rural schools to open the minds of the children to the resources and opportunities of rural existence." But at present there are no "resources and opportunities of rural existence," and the Committee do not suggest any scheme by which these inducements might be created, but content themselves with giving advice to the local authorities to put the Housing Acts into operation, and with the statement that "It should also be seriously considered whether the experiment, for which there are legislative facilities, of dividing land into small holdings, might not be tried more frequently."

The chief worth of this inquiry is the great amount of evidence that it has brought forth, and which is of exceptional value. That evidence is given by eminent persons who have deeply studied the subjects on which they speak. Their testimony unfortunately lies buried in Blue Books instead of being, as it should be in a reduced and popular form, in the hands of the public generally, who would then know on authority

the appalling conditions under which masses of the people of this country are living. It should then be the duty of those who feel responsibility in connection with the subject to seek for the cause of the evils of which these conditions are but symptoms. Let the perplexed philanthropist read the dismaying accounts of low vitality, overcrowding, underfeeding, infant-mortality, diminishing birth-rate, anæmic and neurotic disease caused by coarse diet, and of physical decay generally; let him read them in connection with the arguments and proposals contained in the foregoing chapters, and then judge for himself whether or not these proposals are the fittest and only effective solution of the problem. In the evidence referred to there are a few hopeful opinions given by those who are best qualified to give them. We are told that 80 to 85 per cent of children are born physically healthy, "whatever the condition of the mothers may be antecedently," and that deterioration sets in later.¹ Another eminent witness, after referring to the influx of the rural population into towns as being detrimental to national physique, states that those bodily defects which are the result of poverty and not of vice are not transmissible from one generation to another, and adds:—

"To restore therefore the classes in which this inferiority exists to the mean standard of national physique, all that is required is to improve the con-

¹ Evidence of Dr. Edward Malins, President of the Obstetrical Society of London, and Professor of Midwifery in the University of Birmingham. Bearing on this question is the fact of the steady decrease in the birth-rate during the past thirty years. According to the reports of the Registrar-General the births in 1874 were 36 to every 1000 persons living. In 1904 they were but 27 to every 1000 persons.

ditions of living, and in one or two generations the ground that has been lost will be recovered.”¹

In an eloquent appeal for funds to form a “National League for Physical Education and Improvement” Sir Lauder Brunton refers to the causes of physical deterioration and states: “Amongst the first may be placed the gradual withdrawal of the peasantry from the country and their aggregation in towns.”

At the inaugural meeting of this Association, held in June of the present year (1905) important speeches were delivered by the Bishop of Ripon, the Lord Chief Justice, Sir William Broadbent, Mr. Haldane, Sir James Crichton-Browne, and others. These speeches, which should be read by every one interested in the subject, reveal the grave state of things that exists, and show also that the self-denying efforts made by so many earnest men and women to mitigate the evils “have only touched the fringe of the question.”²

The next subject to be considered is that which is the root cause of most of the social evils that exist. Poverty is not the right word for it; that is a relative term, and what is poverty for one would be plenty for another. It is indigence—a hopeless destitution—which exists in England to an extent that can be found in few other countries in Europe.

¹ Dr. D. J. Cunningham, F.R.S., Professor of Anatomy of the University of Edinburgh. Dr. Cunningham states (Q. 3307): “I do not think it would be possible, even under the very best forms of town life, to produce conditions which the poor could live in which would equal those of the country.”

² Froude speaks of the effect on the children of our overcrowded towns, “where the whole of the life of the vast majority of the inhabitants from infancy to the grave would be a dreary routine of soulless mechanical labour. Such an England as this,” he says, “would not be described by any future poet as ‘a precious gem set in the silver sea’; still less would

An alleged decline in pauperism is frequently put forward as a proof of an improvement in the position of the poorer classes; but pauperism, whether increasing or decreasing, is not a trustworthy gauge of the actual condition of the mass of the people of this country. As a matter of fact, the decrease in the number of paupers is too small to allow any useful argument to be founded on it.

The returns of the Local Government Board dealing with pauperism are compiled in an admirable and exhaustive manner. It can hardly be expected, however, that the ordinary ratepayer can devote the necessary time to examine the large number of tables in which the information given is contained. A few facts, obtained by condensing and dissecting the figures given in the Report, might be instructive.¹

During the past 25 parochial years (1881-1905) the mean number of paupers returned in each year varied between 30·8 and 24·3 per 1000 of the estimated population. In 1881 the ratio was 30·8 per 1000. In 1901 (the lowest in the 25 years) it was 24·3 per 1000. Since 1901 the rate has been rising, till the present year (1905) it was 26·2. In the same period of years the ratio of able-bodied adults, excluding casual paupers, varied between 4·1 per 1000 of the estimated population in 1881 (in 1882 it was 3·9) and 3·4 per 1000 in 1905.

But if we turn to the money cost of pauperism we find that the demands on the ratepayers are ever increasing. In the year 1881 the total expenditure on

the race, hereafter to grow there, maintain either the strength of limb, or the energy of heart which raised their fathers to the lofty eminence which they achieved and bequeathed."—"Oceana," J. A. Froude (Longmans).

¹ "Thirty-fourth Annual Report," Local Government Board, Cd. 2661, 1904-5. The figures in all cases relate to England and Wales.

relief of the poor was, in round numbers, 8 millions sterling, and the mean number of paupers in that year was 790,937. This expenditure rose steadily, till last year (1904) it was above $13\frac{1}{4}$ millions, the mean number of paupers for that year being 837,680, or 46,743 more than in 1881. Of this total cost the amount of "salaries and superannuation allowances of Union officers, etc.," was in 1881 just over one million sterling. Last year (1904) it was considerably over $2\frac{1}{4}$ millions.

In 1881 the "principal of loans repaid and interest on loans" amounted to £338,419. This item also rose, year by year, till in 1904 it was over one million sterling.

"The cost per pauper," calculated on mean numbers of paupers of all classes and total expenditure on relief," was £10. 4s. 10d. in 1881. Last year (1904) it was £15. 19s. 2d.

"The State Children Association" (the term "State Children" is significant) in its fifth report refers to the enormous sums sanctioned by the Local Government Board for the "building of village communities and blocks" for pauper children. The buildings erected by one Board of Guardians, buildings "which include several blocks for 50 boys in each, entailed the expenditure of £280 per bed for 800 children." The upkeep of these children communities seems to be equally costly. One Board of Guardians reports that "for the half-year ending Lady Day, 1903, each child cost the ratepayers, inclusive of all charges, 23s. a week."

Dealing with the increase and cost of vagrancy, the Report states, "apart from the loss to the nation in life, morality, and wealth, entailed by vagrancy, the

system of relief at present in force entailed in 1901 the expenditure of over £80,000 in erecting casual wards alone." "I have known," says a provincial workhouse master, "a tramp and his wife with two or three children come into the casual wards, and a few years later the eldest girl of the family come in with her husband and an infant. I have known several cases like this." Another master reports: "This autumn four babies were born in our tramp wards."¹

In addition to rates paid for relief of paupers, there is the cost of criminals, beggars, workless people, and non-producers generally, all of which cost, in some form or another, falls on the community. If the yearly sums paid for legal pauperism alone, during the past twenty-five years, had been invested say at 3 per cent interest and compound interest, the amount standing to the credit of the account at the end of the period would be the enormous sum of above 340 millions sterling, or not much less than one-half of the national debt. It must be remembered that a very large proportion of those who have to pay these rates are themselves poorly off, many of them hovering on the brink of pauperism.

The ratepayers as a body grumble at what they call the "heavy rates," but they pay them without caring to

¹ Fifth Report of The State Children's Association for the years 1901, 1902, 1903. Viscount Peel, Chairman; Lord Herschell, Earl Grey, and the Earl of Crewe, past Chairmen. The chief object of the Association is: "To obtain the dissolution of large aggregated schools, so that the children may be brought up when possible in families or in small groups, where they will be in daily touch with the varied interests and activities of social life."

The Report of a Committee appointed by the Council of the Charity Organization Society to consider measures of relief for the unemployed states: "Both pauperism and vagrancy have grown with the accommodation provided for paupers and vagrants."

make any intelligent inquiry into the reason why such a load of taxation is placed upon them. In previous chapters it is claimed that the reforms, definitely described therein, are the chief means, if not the only means, by which this vast waste of national substance can be checked. Let ratepayers of the working class, and especially those of the struggling shopkeeping class, fairly examine the proposals made, and they will come to the conclusion that by them not only would their heavy rates be lessened, but their general prosperity—their paying power—be greatly increased.

In considering the cost to the State which the proposed scheme of land reform might involve, the vast expenditure detailed above must be taken into account. From an economic point of view the balance would be in favour of the scheme, while from the social point of view no further argument in its favour is needed.

To the cost of legal pauperism must be added the enormous sums spent annually in what is called—to a large extent miscalled—charity. One might say that the two arch-evils of English economy are “cheapness” and so-called “charity.” The keen rivalry in trade caused by the competitive system makes cheapness the chief aim of the trader. Hence the adulteration of food, the lowering of the quality of products, and other hurtful results. It is worth considering whether or not these mischiefs arise from putting the supposed interests of the consumer before the interests of the producer and of the nation as a whole. It is true that after the abolition of the duty on imported silks a woman could buy silk dresses at a much lower price than before, but by the cheapening process many thousands of silk-workers were thrown out of employment. To take a more humble example, by

free import of matches six boxes of these articles can be bought for a penny. The so-called "free trader" may regard this as a triumph of his policy, and the housewife as a gain in domestic economy, but this cheapness is secured at a cost of human suffering and want such as the following case, by no means a rare one, reveals. "One of the women, Sarah Ann Young, aged seventy, of Shoreditch, died, and at the inquest yesterday her daughter, who was a widow with three little children, said she and her mother had worked together at home at match-box making. They earned 1s. 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. for seven gross of match-boxes. For some work they were paid 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gross and for other 2d. a gross, and had to find their own paste. The post-mortem examination showed there was not a particle of fat about the body. Death was due to exhaustion, consequent on disease and want of food." ("Daily Express," February 4th, 1904.)

Passing from the question of "cheapness" we come to that of "charity." The name is a beautiful one, but the nature and attributes, of which the name is a symbol, are more beautiful still. "Charity is the desire to do your neighbour grace, the one source of all human glory, power, and material blessing." (Ruskin.)¹ To deal effectively with the horrors of the rookeries of town life, the evils resulting from "unemployment," the state of things revealed in Blue Books and in the

¹ In this connection the word "charity" is altogether degraded and misapplied; we want some other name properly to represent the point under discussion. "Eleemosynary" is too long and pompous for common folk. "Dole-giving" and the scriptural word "alms-deeds" are perhaps more apt; but these, in fact, amount to little more than doling out to the poor the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. At all times and in all grades of society the need for the exercise of "charity"—in its true sense—will ever remain.

works of Mr. Charles Booth and others, is not within the domain and the power of private charity. It is the work of the State. It is legislation that has caused the hideous pass; it is only by legislation, carried out on some definite principle, that a remedy can be provided. Many thoughtful men have come to the conclusion that the results of private charity are but palliatives at the best; that such charity is to a very large extent an aggravation of the evils it seeks to remedy, and, like the Poor Laws, is sapping the foundation of self-reliance and self-respect among the people.

It is tiresome to listen to the perpetual talk about the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. No one can justly judge of what the poor deserve unless he knows the circumstances of their lives, unless he knows how hard and how long were their struggles against poverty, disease, temptation, and trouble before the yielding point was reached.

"What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."

Poverty may be caused by drunkenness, but drunkenness is equally or more largely caused by poverty.

After all, the condition of the individual is mainly the outcome of the economic and social systems of the nation. As a great thinker puts it: "Making due allowance for differences in kinds and degrees of temptations to which they are exposed, the respective grades of society are tolerably uniform in their morals."¹

There are thousands of "Humphry Clinkers" in the country, poor wretches who suffer punishments

¹ "Essays," Parliamentary Reform. Herbert Spencer.

which in justice should be laid on society. "Hark ye, Clinker, you are a most notorious offender. You stand convicted of sickness, hunger, wretchedness and want."¹

There is not another civilized country in Europe in which the contrast between penury and wealth is so marked as it is in England. As the Bishop of Liverpool said in his sermon at Oxford (see Introduction), "vast wealth and hideous squalor, shameful luxury and gaunt hunger, lived side by side." The West End with its vast superabundance abuts on the East End with its appalling want: 15,500 guineas are given in the sale-rooms for a small rock crystal ornament,² while there were forty-two deaths from starvation last year in London alone.³

It is far from the wish of the present writer to in-

¹ Smollett's "Humphry Clinker."

² Reckoning 3 per cent, this represents £465 a year, or about £9 a week, or 25s. 6d. a day, for the possession of a single luxury. At this sale, and similar sales, the unsuccessful bidders are numerous, which shows that the scale of wealth is not confined to the actual buyer.

³ See "Deaths from Starvation or Accelerated by Privation (London)," No. 285, 1905. It is not the actual deaths that are to be considered, as each sufferer could have got relief at the workhouse, so much as the circumstances attending each case and which are fully given in the Report. "Found dying in a room of starvation, removed to the workhouse and died there"; "found dying in the street"; "exposure, destitution, and self-neglect"; "syncope, caused by want of food and clothes and exposure to cold," etc. etc. The particulars given in the Report show the widespread destitution that exists among the poor.

A few years ago, under the guidance of a well-known Socialist leader, I spent a night (9 p.m. to 3 a.m.) in the East End of London, and visited the shelters, doss-houses, work-rooms, tenement-houses, lodging-houses, public-houses, houses of amusement (!) and other places. I shall not readily forget the strange ugly conditions of existence, and the hard hand-to-hand struggles with life which are to be found there. As "brighter the light, deeper the shadow," so the shadow of penury and misery there is deeper from its nearness (within cannon-shot) to another part of London, where boundless wealth and luxury reside.

dulge in anything of a sensational kind, but the cases reported, almost daily, in the Press would be recognized by those who work among the poor and minister to them, as truthful examples of the suffering and indigence that exist. One or two among large numbers of these cases might be quoted.

“Evidence was given at an inquest held yesterday at the ‘Walsall Arms,’ Walsall, relative to the death of Clara Anderson, aged 43 years. Charles Anderson, the husband, stated that for eight months he had been out of work. His society allowed him 6s. per week. With this he had to keep his wife, who was ill in bed with paralysis, and two children. The children were taken away to the workhouse, and his wife became very depressed in consequence. A verdict of ‘Death from natural causes’ was returned.” (“Birmingham Gazette,” April 29th, 1905.)

“At an inquest in Shoreditch on a widow named Emily Higgins, it was stated that she and her three children lived in a room for which 4s. per week was paid. The mother’s earnings at ‘wood-bundling’ amounted to 6s. per week, and the eldest daughter, aged 15, received 3s. 2d., leaving 5s. 2d. for the keep of five persons after the rent had been paid. The room was almost destitute of furniture, and Mrs. Higgins had to borrow some clothing from a kind-hearted neighbour before a doctor could see her.” (“Clarion,” September 29th, 1905.)

“At the Mansion House, before Alderman Burnett, Rebecca Nowell, 32, was charged with begging and exposing her two children in Gracechurch Street in such a manner as to cause injury to their health. The police-constable stated that on the previous evening he saw the prisoner standing on the kerb begging with her two children. The weather was bitterly cold, and when he asked the prisoner why she was

exposing her two children, who were 5 and 9 years, she said she was not begging. The Alderman: Where does she live? Witness: In Pearl Street, Spitalfields, sir. The prisoner, her husband, a girl of 19, and four boys of the ages of 17, 9, 5, and 2 years, all live in one room, for which they pay 7s. The Alderman: Is the husband a drunkard, officer? Police-constable: No, sir; he's a dock labourer, but unfortunately cannot get work. He has done half a day's work this week. The Alderman: Well, Mrs. Nowell, I shall discharge you, but we shall take charge of the children for you. Prisoner: Oh, sir, don't take them away from me. I should not like to part with them. The Alderman. I shall give you 10s. out of the poor-box. The prisoner left the court weeping, and the children were sent to the workhouse until the court decides what is the best course for their good." ("Daily Telegraph," January 22nd, 1904.)

"At West Ham, William Ashworth, 43, a labourer, of 4 Rendel Road, was charged with stealing a coat and vest. The prisoner was seen to take the clothes from a stall outside the shop, and when given into custody he said to Constable Shipway, 'I took the things because my wife and children are starving.' Mr. Fowler (the clerk): Have you made inquiries about that? The constable: Yes, it is quite true what he says. He is a dock-labourer out of work. Mr. Fowler: Things are very bad for them now. Is he a respectable man? The constable: Yes, sir, but he cannot find work. Mr. Gillespie (to the prisoner): Well, I shall bind you over, but if you are in trouble again, you should go to the workhouse and get relief. The prisoner: I have been to the relieving officer, and he told me to go into the workhouse, but I did not want to break my home up." ("Times," November 15th, 1904.)

"An inquest was held at Stoke Newington on Minnie Porter, 27, who hanged herself. Her little daughter was examined. Coroner: Had you any dinner that day? No; we only had some tea in the morning. I had a bit of bread and dripping, but mother had only tea. The jury came to the conclusion that this woman had become insane through poverty." ("Birmingham Daily Post," September 1st, 1904.)

"At Marylebone Police Court on Saturday a sad case of poverty was brought to light during the hearing of a prosecution in which a respectably dressed young man of smart appearance, named Frank Porter, 27, was charged with stealing a purse containing 12s. Police-constable Gale said he caught the prisoner as he was running away with the purse in his hand. He at once began to sob bitterly, and in reply to the charge he said, 'I have been out of work three months, and I was hungry. I went to the house to see a cook I once knew, and seeing the purse on the chest of drawers, the temptation was too much for me, and I took it.' Asked what he had to say in his defence, the prisoner burst into tears. For three months, he said, he had walked about and done everything he could think of to get work, but all his efforts had proved of no avail, and he felt ashamed to go home. 'I would have done anything,' he added; 'I would have even picked the roads if only I could have earned enough to provide food for my wife and our two poor little children. A man at a coffee-house has kindly sent us bones and bits of meat, and I'd have sold the home up, but it's all on hire. I have written dozens of letters for situations, and I have had to pawn my coat to get the stamps to post them, but nothing comes of it all. All the clothes I have are what I stand in.' His wife, who also appeared greatly distressed, said he had never been in trouble before, and she bore out his statement that he had

done all in his power to get work. For several weeks he had been laid up with an injured foot. The prisoner: 'I have always been careful and saved, and I don't drink, but all my savings have gone, and now we have none.' Mr. Curtis-Bennett was evidently moved by his story, and remanded him on bail for inquiries." ("Birmingham Daily Post," August 24th, 1904.)

"A sorrowful story was told in the Stepney Coroner's Court on Saturday, where Mary Ann Arnold, wan, pinched, pitiable-looking, gave evidence as to the death of her husband, Charles Arnold, aged 65. Her husband, who formerly did odd jobs at Billingsgate, had been 'very queer,' but they had no money for a doctor. After leaving him half an hour while she went in search of some cleaning work, she found him dead in bed. Coroner: Did he drink? Oh no, sir, we had no money for drink. I have been a teetotaller twenty-six years. Had he food enough? Oh no, sir (weeping bitterly). I had to sell a picture off the wall to buy our last meal (sensation). Coroner: Here is 5s. to buy yourself food. Oh thank you, sir, thank you. Why did you not seek parish help? I would sooner sell all I had and pray to Almighty God to restore him. Another witness deposed, amid renewed sensation, that the picture (for which Mrs. Arnold got sixpence) was about 'the last thing she had in the house.' Dr. Habbijam said it was undoubtedly a case of starvation, and the verdict was 'Death from want of food and attention.'" ("Birmingham Gazette," August 27th, 1904.)

"A frail-looking woman, named Sarah Woodfield, was charged at the Birmingham Police Court to-day with attempting to commit suicide. An officer of the D Division explained that prisoner had tried to strangle herself with a piece of tape, and when charged with the offence she made no reply. To-day,

however, she said she had been out of work three months, and could not get any. She was a widow and lived with her sister in Great Brook Street. The woman added that she was now very sorry for what she had done, and declared that she would not repeat the offence. Prisoner's sister came forward, and said Woodfield's story was true. She remarked that the woman had slept on her sofa for the last thirteen weeks. Prisoner was discharged, the Stipendiary advising her to go to the workhouse." ("Birmingham Daily Mail," September 20th, 1904.)¹

It is difficult for those of us who have warm beds and regular meals, and who look upon these and other comforts as matters of course, almost as natural phenomena, to realize the state of things which the foregoing circumstances indicate. The ignorance (not want of sympathy) which prompted the question, "Why don't they eat cakes?" is not confined to the French princess, but is shared by large numbers of the two or three million persons who constitute the wealthy classes in the kingdom. But it is a state of things that cannot last. It is an ostrich-like proceeding to ignore the social revolution—the war among classes—now actively going on. The centre of political power has been shifting during recent years. The Tory and Whig parties with their honestly held doctrines and convictions have all disappeared. The *laissez-faire* (let alone) tenet, once held as an article of faith by the old Manchester school, is no longer heard of. State interference with all trades, from

¹ At the same time, in the churches in and around our slums, that beautiful oblation, "A General Thanksgiving," is offered up: "We bless Thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life." Truly we love to whiten our sepulchres, and to put face-cloths on our dead!

the costermonger to the biggest mill-owner, is now the rule. State inspection of some kind escorts almost every one from cradle to grave. The working classes have become more and more organized, and are in fact becoming the governing power.

We have a proletariat such as does not exist in any other country in Europe. In a confidential document issued some years ago by a leader of the "International Society" it was urged that the head-quarters of the Society should be removed to London because "England is the only country in which a real socialist revolution can be made." England, the writer states, is the one country in which the landed property has fallen into the fewest hands. "It is the one country in which a vast majority consists of people paid by wages. It is the one country where the war of classes and the organization of trades-unions have acquired a certain degree of maturity."¹

But it is not from trade unions that any social danger is to be feared. These organizations are formed for certain definite, legitimate objects, such as common protection against the power of capital, common help, when needed, among their members, the promotion of all measures for the improvement of the conditions of labour, etc. Though representing probably less than a tenth of the total number of workers in the country, they have become powerful by combination. It is not their business to look after the great mass of unorganized workers further than to induce them to join the unions. While the policy of trade unions is to resist the encroachments of capital, it in no way interferes with the principle

¹ "Secret History of the International." Onslow Yorke.

of employers and employed—of capital and labour—on which our industrial system is now based.

It is with the Socialist party that the nation has to reckon. That party alone has a definite programme, which it contends is a practical one, and one that, if carried out, would realize an ideal, which, it cannot be denied, is of an attractive kind. It is not the intention here to deal fully with the socialistic creed, but it is necessary to refer to it, as it bears directly on the main question treated in these pages.¹

The doctrine of Socialism appeals, not only to the working classes, but to nearly all sections of the community, and among these sections it is noiselessly making rapid strides. Large numbers—increasing numbers—of professional and other educated men, taking to heart the social condition of the people, are leaning towards the doctrine. They may not take the name of Socialist or quite approve of the creed, but they adopt it out of despair of finding an alternative remedy for the evils that exist. Some among the clergy and other ministers of religion for the same reasons are taking the same course.

Socialist writers and speakers, by well-reasoned arguments, assure the working classes that under the present system they receive in return for their labour a bare sum for the necessaries of life ; that the surplus value of their day's work goes into the pocket of the capitalist ; that the "large-capital system of to-day

¹ For those who wish to know what the principles of Socialism really are, it will be sufficient to read "Das Kapital," Karl Marx ; "The Quintessence of Socialism" (a short and clear account), by Dr. A. Schaffle, translated by M. Bosanquet, M.A. ; "Fabian Essays on Socialism," published by the Fabian Society ; "Historical Basis of Socialism," H. M. Hyndman ; and the writings of Sidney and Beatrice Webb and of the late William Morris.

arose out of the destruction of small owners," etc. They further assure them that the evils now endured can be cured only by the abolition of the present competitive system; by the common possession of land and all other means of production, and by (in this manner) securing the distribution among all of the common produce of all. A party with a definite programme of this kind must ultimately gather into its ranks the bulk of trade-unionists and of the members of other working-class combinations.

As to the practicability of their scheme, the Socialists declare that that has been proved by the advances already made in the socialistic path. They point out that the State is now by far the largest employer of labour in the kingdom. They refer to the undertakings successfully carried on by municipalities—gas, water, tramways, manufactures, public parks, baths, libraries, etc. They point further to the vast undertakings carried on by the State, such as the post and telegraph office, army, navy, shipbuilding, factories of different kinds, education, etc. The Socialists claim, as a proof of the soundness of their policy, the ever-increasing extent to which small businesses are absorbed into large ones, and large trades joined together and converted into huge trusts. They assert that "the destruction of the small industries has broken down most of the gradations which used to exist between the large employer and the hired labourer, and has left in their place a gulf across which a few capitalists and a huge and hungry proletariat face each other." "Everything," they say, "which has been organized into a trust, and has been worked for a time in trust fashion, is ripe for appropriation by the community. . . . The trusts have taught us how to drive

competing capitals out of the market by associated capitals.”¹

Able members of the Socialist party are urging governments to adopt measures which contain the socialistic principle, and actual legislation is tending step by step in that direction. It is urged that “when distress was reported in any locality the central authority should see at once what work could be undertaken and decide how far it should be a local and how far an imperial charge.”²

An influential committee appointed by the Council of the Charity Organization Society to consider measures of relief for the unemployed, etc., reports on the scheme of the Local Government Board that “it represents the acceptance on the part of the State of an obligation of providing work for all comers.”³

Free meals for children, partly free dwellings, and partly free travelling for the working classes, are already within the range of practical politics, and when once the principle of State responsibility for such matters is conceded, there is no logical limit to the demands for State help. It must be borne in mind that not only have we a proletariat such as is not to be found in any other country in Europe, but that it is a *proletariat with votes*. Should the time come when the social democracy, by union and organization, and by legitimate action through the ballot-box, has

¹ “Fabian Essays on Socialism.” Fifth Essay.

² Speech at a conference with the Local Government Board (October 14th, 1904) by Mr. Crooks, M.P., Chairman of the Poplar Board of Guardians.

³ Mr. Loch, the able secretary of this Society, in his letters to the Press shows a great insight into the general subject of the unemployed, and plainly points out the direction in which legislation with respect to it is tending.

secured a majority in Parliament, there would be no limits to its power so far as financial matters are concerned. "Redress of grievances" must precede supply, and unless grievances, real or alleged, are redressed, supply might be stopped and the whole national economy be thus deranged.

These statements may be regarded by a certain class as too pessimistic, as mere Cassandra utterances; but it cannot be denied that they only scantily describe the facts connected with the social and political condition of England at the present time. They describe the problems which will have to be solved, and unless they are solved, and that speedily, it is the wealthy classes upon whom the consequences will fall. They recall the old fable of the Sphinx, who sat by the wayside propounding her riddle to the passers-by, and if they could not answer she destroyed them. "Answer her riddle, it is well with thee. Answer it not, pass on regarding it not, it will answer itself; the solution of it is a thing of teeth and claws." (Carlyle, "Past and Present.")

Fortunately the riddle contained in the sad contrasts in our social life, contrasts that shock and puzzle thoughtful men and lead them to favour any nostrum or palliative that promises a remedy, is capable of being solved in a surer and a more speedy way than that proffered in the socialistic creed. We have not space to answer the leaders and ministers of Socialism, whose arguments in favour of their doctrines are of a highly intellectual order, and such as cannot be met by airy, flippant, and casual replies. But the case of the mass of the people which is being leavened with these doctrines is quite different. To adopt the figurative language of an able labour leader, Socialism with them

“is an affair of the stomach.” The key of the social riddle is the providing of good, continuous, well-paid employment. In this direction alone can the curative principle be found, for the circumstances of good employment are such as bar the advance of Socialism.

The sociologist, as he pursues his study, will more and more find that poverty is the main cause of all the evils, physical and moral, that exist in our midst. Poverty, without doubt, in its true meaning, and in its actual working, has a degrading effect on the individual of any class, as well as on the people generally. It lowers character, saps independence, destroys energy, tries friendships, and hampers careers. “Poverty,” the Russian proverb says, “is not a crime, it is ten times worse.” Socialism, however, is not the remedy for the evils that confront us. If adopted it would, in its course, break down in every way. National workshops, where established, have turned out to be failures. Co-operative industrial societies have to a large extent abandoned the communistic principle laid down by Robert Owen, who may be regarded as the father of co-operative effort. Speaking generally, the marvellous progress and success of co-operative societies have not been achieved by the principle of collective ownership. Many of them are simply trading societies, joint-stock companies, with modifications favourable to the shareholders.¹

Socialism wars against “individualism,” which is the chief motive power of human action. It sets at naught the desire “to own” something, which is an

¹ One of the principal of the trade unions, the council of which is composed of men favourable to Socialism, has wisely but inconsistently adopted a scheme which enables members to become on easy terms private owners of their dwellings.

instinctive principle in human nature manifested daily and hourly in the actions of both child and man. It ignores the infinite variety that exists among men. Do what we will, the competitive race in life will continue: what we want is to revise the rules of the running. Private property—the “magic of ownership”—whether of field, farm, wife, child, or any other possession, will ever remain the natural and the best means to disclose a man’s capacity and to spur his activity. There will always be those who are inclined to an even tenor of life, averse from speculation or exertion, and content with a moderate guerdon for their services. On the other hand, there are many with whom the desire for a more strenuous life is inborn. It is part of their nature to attempt to achieve distinction in some one of the many careers that life offers. A desire to succeed in their careers is with these men the great dynamic of existence, a force so strong that it waxes with opposition and does not wane even with defeat. This is a legitimate ambition, bred of no unworthy motives, and its usual product is something which is good for the community. The pleasure of such men as these is more often in the fight than in the victory, if the victory comes at all.¹

Socialism attempts to deny the exercise of this splendid diversity of aims, powers, and character by reducing all the functions of life to a dead level. The

¹ The qualities here described exist among the agricultural labourers as well as among other classes. Fribblers criticize and doubt the capacity of the labourers, but the individual cases in which these men strive to better their condition are—considering their poor pollarded lives—both remarkable and conclusive. To give one case out of many cases that I could give: A labourer began life at nine years of age by working on a farm at 4d. a day. At fifteen he went into farm service, where he remained four years at wages from 10s. to 13s. a week. At the end of the four years he had saved £30. Later on he rented a small

whole case of the Socialists is well summed up by an historian as follows: "Their scheme utterly ignores liberty. The individual man is no more than a mechanical part of the whole community; he has no free-will, no independence of thought or action. Each act of his life is prescribed for him. Individual liberty is surrendered to the State. Everything that men prize most in their life is taken out of their hands, their education, their property, their industry, their earnings are dictated by ruling powers. . . they are required to prostrate themselves before their equals among men for the sake of an arbitrary scheme of government in which all are called on to sacrifice their liberty for the remote and speculative good of the community. . . . The natural effect of such theories would be to repress the energies of mankind . . . proscribe all the more elevated aims and faculties of individuals, and all the arts and accomplishments of life."¹

It is with some humility but with firm conviction that the present writer claims that the scheme set forth in these pages, especially if coupled with Mr. Chamberlain's fiscal proposals, would gradually but surely provide a cure for the evils described. He

holding of 12 acres, the rent of which, with house, was £45. He stayed there six years and saved £100. He left this holding because he would not submit to a rise in rent, and then took a farm of about 60 acres at a rent, with outgoings, of £175 a year. He stayed there about three years and lost money. He is now renting about 15 acres and, with a wife and six children, is making a living. If he could get 30 or 40 acres he would do well and save money. There are very many men of this class who are growing ordinary farm crops. They are doing fairly well, and would do very well if they could get enough land—say 50 acres. This they cannot do, though there are large—sometimes very large—holdings around them. The large farmers, as a rule, will not spare an acre of land, and landlords generally give these striving men but little sympathy or help.

¹ "Democracy in Europe," Sir Thomas Erskine May (Longmans).

claims further that in no other direction that has hitherto been indicated can a permanent remedy be found. What is wanted is a man able to place the scheme as a whole before the country and urge its acceptance as a *national* policy. He need not be an agriculturist, but he must be a statesman. Stein and Hardenberg did not act as agriculturists, but as patriotic foresighted men, who sought and found in the land reforms they adopted a remedy for their country's distress.

In discussing in these pages the general question of land reform, the writer has tried (how feebly he well knows) to revive a public interest in agriculture, to place that industry in the foremost place now occupied by commercialism, and especially to recall the parts played in our history by those grand classes, the "small landed gentry," the "yeoman," and the "peasant proprietor." These classes, though ruined, were not destroyed. Their offspring were scattered in many directions at home and abroad. Of this stock came the Raleighs, the Clives, the Drakes, and other empire-makers; many of the great inventors, masters of arts, science, and literature, as well as brilliant lawyers, soldiers and sailors.¹ Labourers still on the

¹ It is interesting to notice the distinguished men who have sprung from the peasant and yeoman classes. Thackeray was descended from a yeoman family. The father and mother of Telford, the great engineer, worked as labourers in the field. Sir William Cubitt was the son of a miller. Compton, the inventor of the spinning mule; Chantrey, the great sculptor; Scoresby, the Arctic navigator; John Forbes Watson, the physician; George Smith, the historian; James Beattie, the poet; Bewick, the wood engraver, and Samuel Butler were all sons of small farmers. W. G. Fox, the free trade writer and preacher; Clark, the antiquary; William Cobbett; Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood; Richard Baxter; De Foe, and many others were of the peasant or yeoman class. John Nicoll, the poet; John Mole, the mathematician; Montgomery, the poet; Ferguson, the astronomer; Sir Edward Banks,

soil could be rooted there, others who have left it could be sent "back to the land" by methods such as have been described. No matter how poor and deteriorated these latter may be now, we are assured on good authority that a generation spent in agricultural pursuits would restore what has been lost. These men (and women), if placed on the land with the same tenures and conditions under which their forefathers lived, would, by an atavistic law, quickly reproduce the same strength, health, and other qualities which then existed, and which are inherent in the race.¹

Here this book ends as far as its subject-matter is concerned, but an after-word might be spoken, and possibly be of some use. Past centuries are foolishly called the "dark ages," but the doings and writings of those who lived therein must be studied if the problems of present-day life are to be understood, and if future action with regard to them is to be rightly guided. Young men—and it is with them the future lies—would be fortunate were they to receive a systematic training in the knowledge of our priceless old English literature, the rich storehouse of wisdom. They would be assured of a full measure of the pleasure, not to say profit, of which the present writer has secured but a small share by his desultory and self-helped study. The thought-breeding utterances of the old writers, from earliest times, who had ever

the engineer; Captain Cook, the naval discoverer, and Alexander Balfour the novelist, were all either farm labourers or the sons of farm labourers. These are but a few examples of the great number of eminent men who have sprung from the classes named; indeed it may be said that the greatest men in art, literature, and science came from the lower and not from the so-called "upper" classes.

¹ See pp. 401-2. Evidence given by Dr. Cunningham and Dr. Malins.

something weighty to say and knew so well how to say it, are still the source whence most of what is best in modern writings is usually drawn.

If we turn to the actors in those days, great lessons are to be learnt from them; not from their methods—their methods were peculiar to the age in which they lived—but from the spirit that moved them, which was true for all time. The good and glory of our old country (old in the sense of endearment and not of decay) were their great objects. On them the spirit of cosmopolitanism—too common now—had not dawned. With them “God and country” was not a sentiment on the lips, but a living cause for which they were willing to be spent.

Lord Beaconsfield, with his alert mind, in the most charming of his books, sets out the case. “It is the past alone,” he says, “that can explain the present, and it is youth alone that can mould the remedial future. The written history of our country for the last ten reigns has been a mere phantasma, giving to the origin and consequence of public transactions a character and colour in every respect dissimilar to their natural form and hue. In this mighty mystery all thoughts and things have assumed an aspect and title contrary to their real quality and style. . . . We live in an age when to be young and to be indifferent can no longer be synonymous. We must prepare for the coming hour. The claims of the Future are represented by suffering millions, and the Youth of a Nation are the trustees of Posterity.”



"HARVEST TIME"

APPENDIX I

RECLAMATION of land is a question quite apart from that of inclosure of land. The statements in Chapters VII–XI with regard to inclosures do not apply to reclamation. Landlords and others who have spent money in reclaiming useless land are public benefactors. Whatever advantages they may have gained were not gained by injuring other persons. The first Earl of Leicester, a great practical agriculturist, reclaimed large tracts of land near Holkham, and the present Earl, also a noted agriculturist, has in his turn reclaimed hundreds of acres.¹ The greatest work in England of this kind was that of the "Bedford Level," where from two to three hundred thousand acres were "won from the sea and the swamps by patriotic enterprise, hard work, and lavish expenditure." An interesting account of this great undertaking is given in "The Story of a Great Agricultural Estate," by the Duke of Bedford (Murray).

On the 10th of February, 1777, a petition was presented to the House of Commons on this subject. The petition "sheweth that the Great Level of the Fens, called the Bedford Level, is a part of that Great Plain which extends into, and is bounded by the counties of Northampton, Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincoln, Cambridge, and Huntingdon, containing upwards of 300,000 acres of land." The Petition states that the drainage from these counties and the downfall in the Plain itself had for ages overflowed and drowned the land, "insomuch that no advantage redounded therefrom to mankind, but river fish, waterfowl, and reeds," that "Francis, Earl of Bedford, after many fruitless attempts by others,

¹ For a short and interesting account of the Coke family (sprung from real yeoman stock) see "Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society," Vol. VI, Part I, 1895.

actuated by the principle of public spirit, did in the sixth year of King Charles the First, undertake the great and public work of draining the same . . . that, the said Earl and his adventurers made a good progress therein with the expense of vast sums of money." The Petition goes on to show that William, Duke of Bedford (son of Francis), in 1649 continued the work, and prays for further parliamentary powers in order to complete it. According to evidence given before a Committee of the House of Commons (1821), some crops of oats were the only grain produced in the fens before this great enterprise was carried out. It is impossible to estimate the value of the splendid corn crops which these districts have since produced and added to the wealth of the county.¹

Many reclamations of different kinds have been made in continental countries. In 1856 a company was formed to reclaim from the sea a large area of land on the Channel coast of Normandy, near Pontorson, in France. In 1896 I visited the land under reclamation, provided with a letter of introduction to the manager of the works, kindly given me by the late Sir Edward Blount, who was Chairman of the Company. The manager, M. Deval, most courteously placed at my disposal the plans, estimates of cost, and all other particulars of the undertaking. The concession to the Company granted by the French Government was for the reclamation of 3800 hectares (about 9500 acres) of land in the Bays of Mont St. Michel and Des Veys. At the time of my visit the work was being carried on with the greatest activity. As fast as the land was reclaimed it was divided into small farms and small holdings, and either sold or let and put immediately under cultivation. Much of it had been sold at an average price (reckoning 25 francs to the pound sterling) of £48 an acre, and a great deal had been let on nine and

¹ The above particulars are from an old volume (167 pp.), dated February, 1777, which I met with accidentally in an old bookseller's shop. It was evidently published by the promoters of the work, and contains, in addition to the petition, a most interesting history of the great undertaking. Some idea is given of the extent of the work by one statement to the effect that the length of the banks within the middle and south levels alone was upwards of 170 miles. In some places the bed of the river was four feet above the level of the adjacent land.

twelve years' leases at an average rental of £2. 16s. an acre. The undertaking gave, for many years, good healthy productive employment for a large number of persons whose wages varied from 2s. 6d. to 3s. 6d. a day. For these labourers and their families a temporary village of comfortable dwellings had been built, with a garden attached to each cottage. The wages spent for manual labour only were about £200 a week. Besides this the machines, materials, and other things required for the work provided a great deal of outside employment.

In the Bay of Mont St. Michel alone at the time of my visit, in addition to sales, 3500 acres divided into 50 lots had been let to 43 holders, on leases from 9 to 12 years, at an average rental of £2. 5s. an acre. I noticed that the smallest holding was $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres and the largest 365 acres, the average size being 70 acres.

It was estimated that on the completion of the enterprise the total value of the reclaimed land—"Good land added to the national territory"—would be no less than about half a million sterling. This undertaking is another instance of the importance which French Governments have always attached to agriculture. I noticed that the reason given in the decree for granting the concession to the Company was "that to favour the reclamation of land from the sea and make it valuable is in the best interests of the community." Honours were conferred on the Managing Director of the Company, M. Maridor, "for important services to the country by the reclamation of land in the Bays of St. Michel and Des Veys and by putting into cultivation vast stretches of land conquered from the sea."

Most of the smaller holdings are used for the cultivation of vegetables. M. Touzard, one of the largest holders, has written an interesting pamphlet on the cultivation of the reclaimed land in the Bay of Mont St. Michel. He speaks of the special fitness of the soil for *culture maraîchère* (market gardening) and the very large profits which are made by vegetables of all kinds when cultivated with care and skill. As an instance, he planted about $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres with asparagus, and the fourth year after planting he realized, after paying carriage

to market, a net sum of £280 for the crop. Encouraged by this result, he increased the acreage until he had 22 acres planted with asparagus. Thanks to the splendid agricultural schools of all grades (see Chapter VI) which exist in France, the French peasantry as a rule are well trained in the best methods of cultivation. M. Touzard gives many useful examples of these methods as applied to the growing of such produce as onions, radishes, cauliflowers, artichokes, rhubarb (for the London market), etc. He speaks of the light implements of the *systeme Howard*, and especially of Howard's light harrows, as most suitable for the land.

In answer to an inquiry as to the present position of the undertaking, I received (in the present year 1905) a letter from the Managing Director which states: "The prosperity that you saw in 1896 has continued. All the land which is now the property of the Company, including 152 hectares (380 acres) reclaimed since 1896, is let. The average rent is 160 francs per hectare (about £2. 11s. 6d. an acre). Since 1896 about 580 hectares (1450 acres) have been sold at an average price of 2340 francs per hectare (about £37. 10s. an acre); but we have decided, with good reason, that no more sales shall be effected at less than 3000 to 3800 francs per hectare (£48 to £60. 16s. per acre)."

No doubt, in several parts of England, similar work might be done by the State (Board of Agriculture). Such undertakings would give productive employment to a large number of men, and the land when reclaimed could be readily sold to occupying owners and peasant proprietors on the terms named in the Land Purchase Bill.

APPENDIX II

REFERRING to the cost of the agricultural training in rural schools proposed in Chapter V, it is evident that—looking at the enormous sum now spent on elementary education—there ought to be no extra cost to the ratepayer, or taxpayer, by the adoption of these proposals. It is not easy to ascertain exactly what that sum really is. The Reports of the Board of Education are carefully prepared with a desire to give every information, but they are of necessity so complicated that it is difficult for the ordinary reader to draw exact conclusions from them. An estimate for the year 1904-5 may be given, though elementary education is now in a transition state, involving changes which will no doubt add largely to the expenditure in later years.

The following figures are given only as approximately correct, but they are sufficient to show the ratepayers and taxpayers what they are paying for education, and to enable them to judge whether or not they have "value received" for the large sums expended. Roughly stated, the total cost of elementary education in England and Wales for the year 1904-5 is at least about 19 millions sterling, of which amount not much less than one-half is raised from rates and other local sources.

The total amount works out at about £3. 12s. 7d. per child of the children in average attendance (about $5\frac{1}{4}$ millions, or 87 per cent of the number on the books). Of the total cost the rural ratepayers and taxpayers, nearly all of whom are farmers or others connected with the land, pay at a rough estimate about $4\frac{1}{2}$ millions sterling for an education absolutely unfitted for country life. Worse than that—for an education

most calculated to encourage young persons to leave the soil (see Chapter VI).

These figures supply food for reflection for all those who are interested in rural life. In marked contrast with this expenditure is the small sum of £136,000 granted for the promotion of agriculture. I have referred (Chapter VI) to the large grants made for that purpose by almost every other Government in Europe. If we take America we find that the appropriations for the Department of Agriculture of the United States for the year 1904 were (including the expenses of the weather bureau) no less than 5,428,160 dollars, or much above one million sterling. This is in addition to the sums voted for the support of agriculture by the Legislatures of the different States of America. Further than this, Congress has authorized an expenditure of £300,000 for a new building at Washington for the Department of Agriculture. This building, the plans of which are approved, is to stand in forty acres of ground, to be most complete for experimental and administrative purposes, and is "designed to combine dignity with beauty and utility." The Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture justifies this great expenditure in terms that might be useful to bring to the notice of the British public, to whom, mainly, the arguments in this book are addressed.

Under the heading "Agriculture as a Source of National Wealth" the Report states: "Favoured with continued prosperity in 1904, the farming element of the people had laid broader, deeper, and more substantial the foundation of a magnificent agriculture. . . . Thus it has happened the farms of the nation have been that sustaining power upon which a basic dependence must be placed in all stresses by a people endeavouring to maintain economic self-sufficiency. . . . An occupation that has produced such an unthinkable value as one aggregating 5000 million dollars (about 1000 millions sterling) within a year may be better measured by some comparisons. All of the gold mines of the entire world have not produced, since Columbus discovered America, a greater wealth of gold than the farmers of this country have produced in wealth in two years; this year's

product is over six times the amount of capital stock of all national banks . . . it is two and a half times the gross earnings from the operation of the railways; it is three and a half times the value of all minerals produced in the country, including coal, iron ore, gold, silver, and quarried stone" (Year Book of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1904). These utterances breathe a recognition of the paramount importance of agriculture, a recognition that in our country has decayed almost to extinction, but which in these pages I have made a feeble attempt to revive.

In Chapter VI the methods of giving agricultural education in France are described. The description applies with equal force to Germany. There is probably no other country in Europe that is better equipped than our own for higher agricultural education. The training given in our higher agricultural institutions is perhaps somewhat less practical than that given in similar places abroad, but the main difference is in the cost. Our higher schools, through lack of State aid, or any worthy of the name, are compelled to charge higher fees. For example, in the great agricultural school of Hohenheim, near Stuttgart, with which I am well acquainted, a pupil pays much less than one half of what he would have to pay in a similar institution in this country. But the State comes forward to supply any deficiency that may annually accrue. That deficiency for Hohenheim alone in 1901 was no less than £9700.¹

It is in the lower grades of agricultural education that we are so deficient. The theory of the German Government, like that of the French, is that in the present day agriculture, to be at its best, must be based on scientific training, and knowing the important part the industry plays in the economy of a country, these Governments do not hesitate to supply that training to all classes. Hence the numerous lower-class schools, where the education given is good and

¹ I should here like to acknowledge the courtesy and assistance I received from Prof. von Vossler, the Principal, and Dr. Behrens during the two visits I have paid to Hohenheim. A letter written from Stuttgart giving a full description of this institution appeared in "The Times," October 11th, 1894.

practical and low in price. There are hundreds of these lower-grade schools scattered throughout Germany, all carefully adapted to meet the different needs. For peasants' sons who have left the elementary schools and cannot, during the summer, be spared from the work of their fathers' holdings, there are winter schools established in which the fees are as low as 25s. the term. Farming schools are also set up in which the pupils pay no fees at all, but receive board and lodging in return for their labour. In all these schools the deficiencies are covered by grants from the State. In the instruction given in all of them theory and practice go together—learning by doing being the rule.

A few months ago I visited a typical agricultural school in the village of Zwätzen, near Jena, in the Grand Duchy of Weimar. It is a school for children of small farmers and of peasant proprietors. Most of the pupils come direct from the common schools. Through the kindness and courtesy of Dr. Otte, the Principal, and of Dr. Elsassens, one of the professors, I was enabled to examine the whole economy of the schools, and perhaps it might be interesting to quote from a few notes made on the spot. The farm, forty acres, and the buildings belong to the State. The instruction given comprises botany, geology, chemistry, and other sciences; butter and cheese making, land surveying, mechanics, etc. There are seventy lads in the school, strong, robust-looking youths, a few of them apparently as much as eighteen years old or more. Their working hours are divided between labour on the farm and lessons in the class-rooms. The stock of the farm consists of twelve cows and two bulls. There is also a number of horses, pigs, poultry, etc. The cows and bulls are worked about six hours a day (cows in calf are worked very little). It is held that cows when worked yield milk less in quantity than usual, but better in quality. The pigs are kept very clean and have fresh straw every day, it being recognized that the pig is naturally a very cleanly animal. There are no hired permanent labourers except one man to teach milking, the whole work of the farm being done by the pupils. During the holidays temporary men are employed to do what is necessary. The buildings are

plain, almost to bareness, and the rooms, class-rooms, bedrooms, etc.—are well arranged and adapted for their purposes. The stables, byres, outhouses, storehouses, etc., are clean and well kept. A well-furnished museum is an important part of the establishment. For teaching purposes there are—skeletons of horses and other animals; plaster models of cattle made to a scale of one-sixth of the natural size, and coloured to show the prevailing colour of the animals themselves. The red Devon, the English Shorthorn, the small Jersey, the big Swiss Semmenthaler, and all other well-known breeds are brought together. Different breeds of sheep and pigs are presented in the same way. There is a collection of agricultural implements. There are samples of honey and other produce, and of all kinds of grain; wax models of fruit, flowers, mushrooms, etc., and also of the organs and intestines of animals.

There is a good collection of stuffed birds, with descriptions of the habits of birds, whether good or hurtful for the farmer. The owl, so often destroyed in England, is held here to be very useful to the cultivator. There are large plaster casts, showing the configuration of the land, nature of soils, etc., for miles around. These objects are common to most of the agricultural institutions of the country. The models of cattle, for instance, are regularly made and sold in Berlin for the use of schools (cost 50s. each). One model was new to me, that of a grain of wheat enlarged to the size of a loaf. It was so made that it could be taken to pieces. The outside—the bran—first stripped off, then the next coat—the sharps—and so on to the white core within. Altogether these object-lessons illustrate the boundless interest with which the life of the cultivator of the soil can be infused if he is trained in the “why and the wherefore” of the things he does. The fees for board, lodging, teaching, and service in this school are £18. 5s. a year for those who belong to the Grand Duchy, and £21. 10s. for outsiders. There are no extras except that each pupil has to provide his own bedding and to pay a small sum—a few shillings—for which he gets medical attendance when needed and insurance against loss by fire of his clothes and other belongings.

The foregoing remarks are not intended to cast any reflection on our own Board of Agriculture. That Board does its very best with the money it has to spend. Out of an appropriation account of above 140 millions sterling there is the niggardly sum of £136,000 placed at the disposal of the Board for all purposes, and out of this amount there is less than £10,000 given for Agricultural and Dairy Education in all England and Wales. This is the money sign—a trustworthy sign—of the small importance attached to agriculture by successive Governments in this country.

APPENDIX III

IN Chapter XIX attention is drawn to the dangers to which this country is subjected by having to rely on foreign sources for supplies of food, and a passing reference is made to ancient Rome when she was in a similar position. Historical parallels are difficult to draw and are often misleading, because the conditions existing in the two countries compared are so different. But there are certain principles which are applicable to all time and certain actions that, by a natural law, are bound to produce similar results, no matter when or where they are carried out.

If some abler pen than mine were to trace the proceedings, legal and illegal, connected with land in old Rome, it would be found that these proceedings both in kind and effect were curiously alike to those which have been carried out in our own country. Popular histories of Rome, like those of England, deal too much with wars, foreign conquests, revolutions, party strife, changes of the constitution, etc. They too often treat effects as causes and ignore the root reasons of both the evil and the good. The solid qualities and virtues of the Romans were dominant while Rome was a nation of farmers. From the yeoman and other agricultural classes came the warriors who conquered Italy and afterwards the world. Weakness and decline of the Empire accompanied step by step the gradual destruction of these classes. The vast provinces, the great limbs of the Empire, dropped off when the centre and heart became rotten and nerveless through the decay of agriculture. As the effect of the change in her land system Rome had to abandon Britain after four centuries of beneficent occupation. From the same cause a landless proletariat appeared ; a class with vast

wealth and a class with miserable poverty were created, with a great gulf between them; and social disorders and national instability became permanent. As time went on the dispossessed and impoverished classes demanded the "cheap loaf," free meals, free corn, free amusements, etc., demands which had to be reckoned with by the ruling classes as a part of the national economy. In spite of the appearance from time to time of rulers with brilliant powers, of foreboding writers, and sage philosophers, Roman society dropped into the almost incredible conditions of luxury, wealth, idleness, and vice described in the pages of Gibbon.¹

A brilliant writer, referring to the time when the broad acres were still the staple of wealth in Italy, states: "It was not, however, the wealth of the moderate homestead which was to be won from a careful tillage of the field," but it was the wealth of the owners of vast slave-cultivated estates, a cultivation associated with a "belief in the superior value of pasturage to tillage which was to turn many a populous and fertile plain into a wilderness of danger and desolation." "The Latifundium" (a large estate), he says, "acquired, as it was believed, in many cases by force, fraud, and shameless violation of the law—was becoming the standard of cultivation throughout Italy."² The large estates in England corresponded with the latifundia in Italy. They were acquired by the same methods, and the accumulation of land into few hands had the same effect here as it had in Italy. They were, like the latifundia, cultivated by men whom the system had reduced to slavery in all but the name. The financial results of a system might be good for the few, but the social effects of that system might at the same time spread ruin among the people generally. It was the large estates in England and the way in which they were acquired, that, like the latifundia in Italy, "turned many a populous and fertile plain into a wilderness of danger and desolation."

If the circumstances connected with the Roman land system were put side by side, in parallel columns, with those

¹ For a further description of these conditions see "Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius," by Samuel Dill, M.A. (Macmillan, 1904).

² "A History of Rome," Dr. Greenidge, 1904, Vol. I, p. 36 onwards.

connected with the English land system, it would be seen how striking was the likeness between the two. "From a very early period the Roman economy was based on two factors—always in quest of each other and always at variance—the husbandry of the small farmers and the money of the capitalist. The latter, in the closest alliance with landholding on a great scale, had already for centuries waged against the farmer-class, a war which seemed as though it could not but terminate in the destruction first of the farmer and thereafter of the whole Commonwealth." The issue was delayed by great wars and other events; "but the ultimate result was in both cases the same—the depreciation of the Italian farmers, the supplanting of the petty husbandry, first in the large provinces and then in Italy, by the farming of large estates. . . . The capitalist continued to buy out the small landholders, or, indeed, if they remained obstinate, to seize their fields without title or purchase." "Desolation advanced with gigantic steps over the flourishing land of Italy where countless numbers of free men had lately rejoiced in moderate and merited prosperity."¹

These records refer to a time when Rome was at the height of her glory and renown. It took her between seven and eight hundred years to attain that position. (It has taken England about eight hundred years to gain a similar eminence.) Wealth and luxury were abounding. Money-dealing and commerce were progressing by "leaps and bounds," and the accumulation of capital into few hands was "daily increasing." As to the men reared under the old state of things, "death called one after another away, till at length the name of the last of them, the veteran Cato, ceased to be heard in the senate-house or the Forum." (Mommsen.)

In the midst of the vast wealth and prosperity which existed, it would at the time have been deemed madness to foretell disaster. Nevertheless the seeds of decay had been sown, and with the destruction of agriculture began the

¹ Mommsen's "History of Rome," see especially Vol. II, p. 393 onwards, and Vol. III, p. 77 onwards.

decline of Roman greatness. The austere virtues and simplicity of life of rural Rome were dying out. The country proletariat was flocking into the towns, leaving the countryside deserted, and the old military spirit and discipline were disappearing. The army became an army of mercenaries and proletariats, and even slaves were enlisted under the promise of freedom.

Throughout the centuries there were patriotic and far-sighted men in Rome, as there were men of the same class in England, who saw the cause of the evils that were shadowing their country and sought to remove it. But in both countries these men shared the same fate at the hands of an infuriated landed aristocracy.

The Agrarian Law of Spurius Cassius probably was the first notable attempt to save the old order of things, but though his law contained nothing but what was just and moderate, yet "Cassius had to die." The territorial magnates thought that by destroying the reformer the demand for reform could be stayed. "His law was buried along with him, but its spectre henceforth incessantly haunted the eyes of the rich, and again and again it rose from the tomb against them till the conflicts to which it led destroyed the commonwealth."¹ Later on Marcus Manlius, who, from accounts given of him, was among the noblest citizens of Rome, was condemned to death by the great patrician landowners for an attempt to revive this agrarian law. After him came a still greater man who adopted the same policy and shared the same fate. "A youth without achievements had the boldness to give himself forth as the saviour of Italy. . . . War was declared against the great landlords." (Mommsen.) There is a pathos in the account given by the elder of the Gracchi of the condition to which the rural districts had been reduced. As he was "passing through Tuscany and found the country almost depopulated, there being scarce any husbandmen or shepherds, except slaves from foreign and barbarous nations," he decided on his great project for land reform. It is stated that "there never was

¹ Mommsen's "History of Rome," Vol. I.

a milder law made against so much injustice and oppression. For they who deserved to have been punished for their infringement on the rights of the community and fined for holding the lands contrary to the law were to have a consideration for giving up their groundless claims. . . . But though the reformation was conducted with so much tenderness the people were satisfied, they were willing to overlook what was passed, on condition that they might guard against future usurpation. On the other hand, persons of great property opposed the law out of avarice, and the law-giver out of a spirit of resentment and malignity.”¹ By his appeals to the people this great land reformer bore down all open opposition. The people listened with eagerness to schemes for the recovery of lands of which they had been unjustly deprived. Dr. Greenidge describes their attitude: “The voiceless Roman people was seeking its only mode of utterance, a tribune who should be what the tribunes had been of old, the servants of the many, not the creatures of the few.” This great Tribune, Tiberius Gracchus, declared that it was the interests of Italy, not merely of the Roman proletariat, that were at stake. He pointed out “how the Italian peasantry had dwindled in numbers and how that portion that still survived had been reduced to a poverty that was irremediable by their own efforts.” (Greenidge.) “The wild beasts of Italy,” he said, “have their caves to retire to, but the brave men who spill their blood in her cause have nothing left but air and light. . . . The private soldiers fight and die to advance the wealth and luxury of the great, and they are called masters of the world, while they have not a foot of ground in their possession.”² Notwithstanding what is described as the “inherent reasonableness” of the Tribune’s proposals, these proposals received the most deadly opposition. The territorial magnates thought that the “cause would perish with the demagogue,” and accordingly by intrigue and treachery they accomplished his death. Referring to this event, the eminent writer already quoted states: “The murder of a young man who was under thirty at the time of his death

¹ “Plutarch’s Lives,” Tiberius Gracchus.

² *Ibid.*

and the slaughter of a few hundreds of his adherents may not seem to be an act of very great significance in the history of a mighty empire, yet ancient historians regarded the event as epoch-marking, as the turning-point in the history of Rome, as the beginning of the period of civil wars."¹

If some scholar, in sympathy with the subject, who could consult, in their own language, the many ancient writers on agriculture and note their statements and forebodings, would deal with the subject, he would find an almost complete analogy between the growth of the Roman land system and that of our own. He would find a similarity even in details, the methods employed and the spirit that animated the contending parties. The final issue with the Roman people was that they were conquered and humiliated mainly by the hardy races from the North.

What the final issue with England will be remains to be seen. It would be seen should we unhappily be involved in a great war. The conditions of a struggle between England and a first-class power (or perhaps two powers) would be such as have never yet been seen. On the one side there is a nation with 77 per cent of its population urban, and the great bulk of its people propertyless men who have little or no personal stake in the country. A nation dependent month by month on outside sources for its supply of food, and—what is almost as bad for a country that relies on commercialism—dependent on the same sources for raw material. On the other side there is a self-feeding nation (or nations) with a teeming rural population owning the land it tills; a nation which, being thus self-contained and secure of the industry on which it mainly depends, could afford to carry on a waiting contest.

Giving full weight to the fact that we have the finest navy and the finest income-tax payer in the world, is there a responsible statesman, soldier, or sailor who holds that a country, against such odds, could come out of a great war with success, or even without humiliation? If there be such he has

¹ Dr. Greenidge, "A History of Rome," 1904, Vol. I, p. 143.

not yet spoken. A strong Royal Commission has considered the question and practically avoided any conclusions with regard to it.

In times of wealth and prosperity men are apt to turn their thumbs downwards at the appearance of foreboders of ill, and probably the views here expressed will be regarded as foolish and pessimistic in a country where, as a rule, opinions do not much avail unless backed by rank and authority. But the question is, can the views be disputed—are the warnings ill-based? If not—well—a capitol was once saved by a meaner agency. In any case the experience of history—ancient and modern—seems to show that there is a natural law under which no nation can remain permanently in the front rank unless its economy is based on agriculture. If this be so, we know that natural laws go, slowly perhaps but directly to their ends. They cannot be turned aside by palliatives, regrets or entreaties. Their action is passionless and inexorable, knowing “neither wrath nor pardon.”

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