



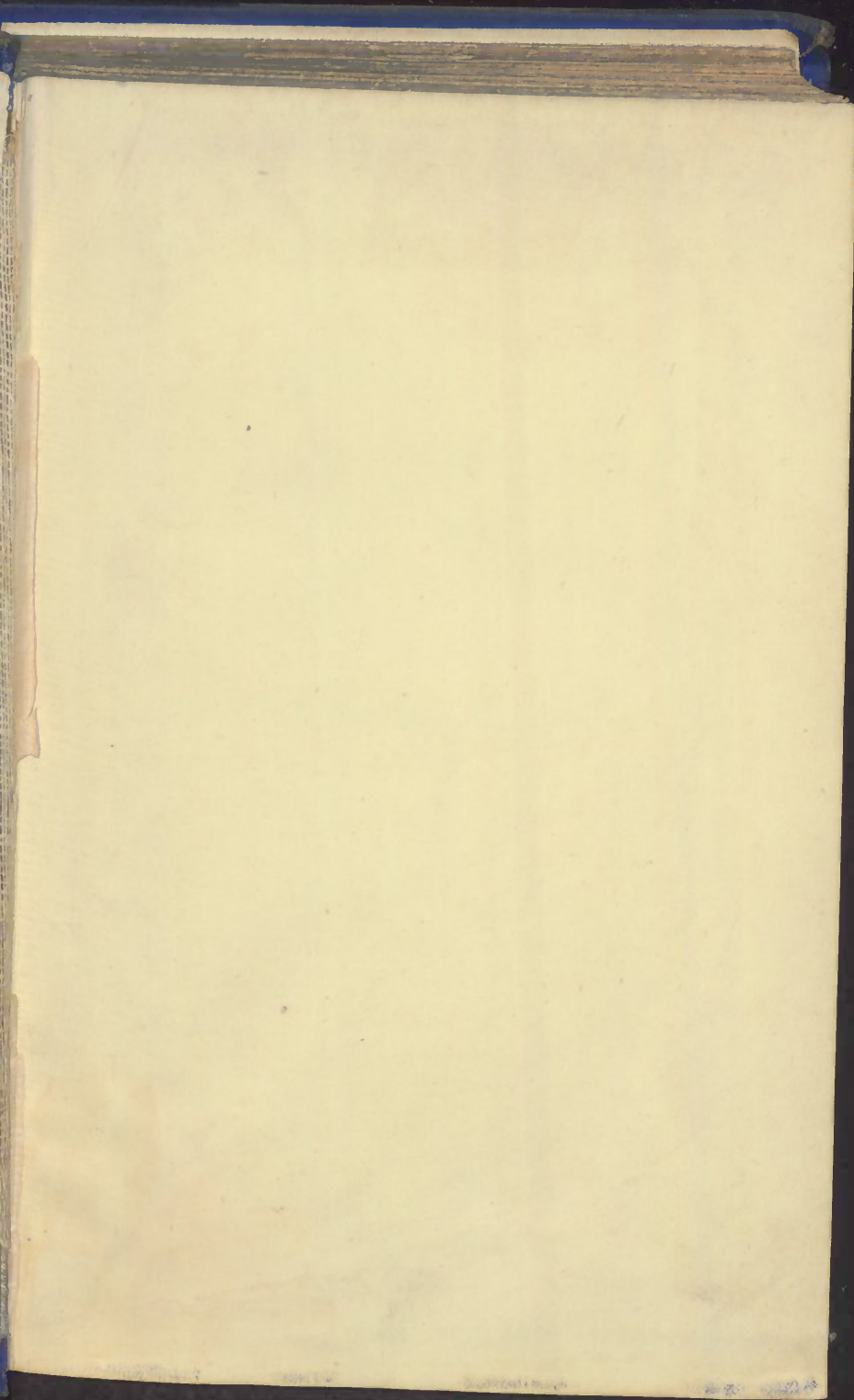
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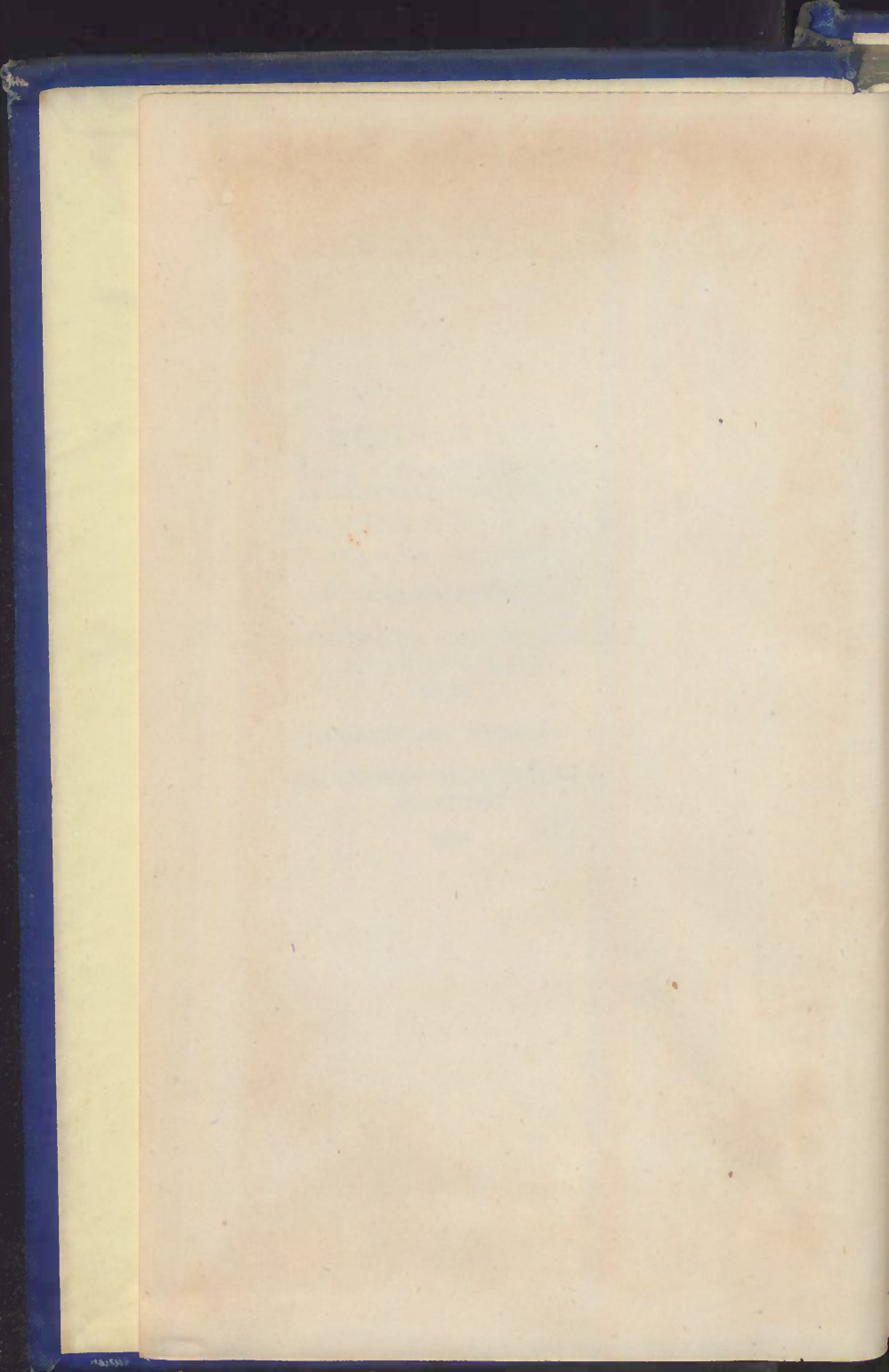
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1929







THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURER.





THE  
AGRICULTURAL LABOURER.

*A Short Summary of his Position,*

PARTLY BASED ON THE REPORT OF HER MAJESTY'S COMMISSIONERS  
APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN IN AGRICULTURE;

AND REPUBLISHED IN PART FROM THE "PALL MALL GAZETTE"  
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THE  
AGRICULTURAL LABOURER

LONDON:  
PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO.,  
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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
THE PRESIDENT OF THE POOR LAW BOARD,

This Work

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

HIS OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.





## PREFACE.

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**T**HIS little book is intended chiefly for that class of readers who, while they take a considerable interest in the subject which it deals with, have no opportunities of obtaining access to original sources of information, and but little leisure to wade through bulky Blue Books, even if they had. The earlier chapters are confined more exclusively than the later within the area of the Reports on which the work is primarily based, having first of all appeared in the shape of newspaper reviews. But into all alike I have allowed myself, in the course of reconstruction, to import whatever fresh matter appeared suitable for the purpose. Some subjects I have investigated independently for myself; and for a great part of the last four chapters I am scarcely, if at all, indebted to the Reports of the Commissioners.

I have, however, consulted the works of various other writers who have recently devoted much time and thought to the condition of agriculture, both in this country and abroad.

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

T. E. K.



## CONTENTS.

### CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
EXTENT AND EFFECT OF FIELD WORK UPON WOMEN AND UPON CHILDREN OF BOTH SEXES . . . . .	I

### CHAPTER II.

FOOD AND WAGES . . . . .	20
--------------------------	----

### CHAPTER III.

COTTAGES AND ALLOTMENTS . . . . .	43
-----------------------------------	----

### CHAPTER IV.

EDUCATION . . . . .	79
---------------------	----

### CHAPTER V.

HIRING . . . . .	103
------------------	-----

### CHAPTER VI.

INJURIOUS INFLUENCES,—THE PUBLIC HOUSE.—POACHING .	134
--	-----

CHAPTER VII.

WHOLESOME INFLUENCES.—BENEFIT SOCIETIES.—CO-OPERATIVE FARMS.—STORES . . . . .	PAGE 164
---	-------------

CHAPTER VIII.

LARGE AND SMALL FARMS, AND PEASANT PROPRIETORS . . . . .	188
--	-----


CHAPTER IX.

SUMMARY . . . . .	221
-------------------	-----

# THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURER.

## CHAPTER I.

### AGRICULTURAL LABOUR.

HE Commissioners appointed in 1867 to inquire into "the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture" have now completed their Report. This Commission, though ostensibly issued for the purpose described upon the title-page, is, in fact, nothing less than an inquiry into the whole condition of the agricultural peasantry. It was found, of course, that before offering any opinion upon the employment of women, children, and young persons in field labour, it was necessary to ascertain to what causes their employment was assignable, and to consider with great care how far it was desirable to abolish it

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altogether, or only to curtail and place it under certain restrictions. It was clear that to arrive at any satisfactory solution of these questions, the whole system of agricultural labour would have to be reviewed in detail. Wages, allotment grounds, cottage accommodation, the size of farms, the nature of the work required, and the influence of local manufactures upon the position of the peasant, all have a direct bearing upon juvenile and female labour; and we find, accordingly, that the Commissioners have instituted searching inquiries into most of them. The result of those inquiries forms the staple material of the earlier of these Essays.

It is satisfactory to learn that, by the operation of the "Agricultural Gangs Act," passed in 1867, the public gang system has not only been robbed of its worst evils, but is threatened with speedy dissolution. "A gang," as our readers may remember, is a body of men and women, boys and girls, who hire themselves out to one man, and are by him taken about the country from farm to farm as they are wanted, doing jobs of work on contract. The Act of Parliament now compels the

gang-master to obtain a certificate of fitness, to separate the two sexes, and not to employ children under a certain age. Under these conditions it is said the system is no longer remunerative; and the farmers in most parts have become so alive to its mischiefs as to view its extinction with equanimity. In Cumberland, indeed, Mr. H. Tremenhore found the system in full activity, and conducted in total defiance of the Act of Parliament. In Morecambe Bay, too, in Lancashire, it still flourishes among the "cocklers," who, however, are not agricultural labourers. The collection of cockles affords very remunerative employment to men, women, and children, who begin so early, and make money so fast, that at fourteen years of age the boys are able to be independent, and begin to spend their wages in drink. Indeed, this practice affords one of the very worst specimens of the gang system. The middleman, or foreman of the gang, is there appropriately styled a "badger," and these men have been known to collect their workers of both sexes in a barn overnight, to be ready for the early tide in the morning.

The private gang system, on the other hand, seems to be no system at all. It is merely a number of persons all working together under the direction of one of the farmer's servants, who are paid by the farmer himself, and treated in just the same manner as any other class of workpeople. The evil attaching to them is one that is common to all agricultural labour where girls go into the field at all, though certainly in an aggravated shape: we mean the mixture of the two sexes. The Commissioners, moreover, seem generally to be persuaded that the separation of them, even if practicable, would go a very little way towards remedying the evil complained of. The first difficulty is (Fraser, Stanhope, Henley, more particularly), that the value of the work done by them depends upon their working together; and that it is the compulsory separation of the two which, more than anything else, has proved fatal to the public gang system. But were this surmounted, it would still be impossible to keep them apart at meal-time or during their return home. The question then arises whether gangs ought to be allowed at all, and the Commissioners hesitate,



in the meantime, to recommend any interference with them. It is to be remembered that the system exists only within a comparatively limited area, and is not a generic feature of English agriculture.

With regard to the influence of field work upon the health and morals of very young children and women—the gang system being out of consideration—the evidence is of a very conflicting character. The preponderating weight of it is decidedly against such employment; but there is a very respectable amount of testimony on the other side. In some cases female agriculture is represented as absolutely beneficial to the sex; in others it is argued that it is the lesser of two evils. The only Commissioner, however, who reports in its favour from every point of view is Mr. Henley, and his evidence is certainly remarkable. In Northumberland he says that these daughters of the plough are physically a splendid race of women. “Their strength is such that they can vie with the men in carrying sacks of corn; and there seems to be no work which affects them injuriously, however hard it may appear.” On this point, however,

Mr. H. Tremenheere tells a different story. Speaking of Cumberland, he says he has been informed that women often suffer severely from the unsuitable character of the work they are called upon to perform. Mr. Henley cannot, indeed, deny that the rate of immorality in his district is a high one; but he explains it by other causes. He speaks of "the licence given in farms to night visitors" as one. But then this would apply only to such girls as are farm-servants, whereas the majority who work in the fields seem to live at home with their parents. "The prevalence of border marriages" in former times, whereby the people have been taught to regard the marriage tie with levity, has, in the opinion of Archdeacon Hamilton, a good deal to do with it. The overcrowding of cottages, and the statute fairs—evils, however, which are not peculiar to Northumberland—probably account for a good deal more. Mr. Henley points out "that there are several circumstances which tend to make a rural district seem worse than it really is." In towns fewer illegitimate children are registered; and many of them are registered as legitimate, facilities existing for such frauds which are not to be



found in the country. And again, the figures given by the Registrar-General show only the numbers of the children born alive, which will be greater in the country than in town. Mr. H. Tremeneere, however, who succeeded Mr. Henley in the Northern district, makes the following very remarkable statement—that the union workhouse of one district in Cumberland, where female labour was largely employed, had become little else than a great lying-in hospital. Concurrently with this he reports that, in many parts of that county, “farmers “seem to rely almost entirely upon the abundant “supply of female labour they can command;” and “that one of the largest farmers in the neighbour- “hood of Longton, near the Scottish border, who “rents two thousand acres, chiefly under tillage, “had not even thought it necessary to provide him- “self with a reaping machine, as he could get his “harvest in with equal speed by women ‘shearers.’” This is a fact of great importance, as the border farmers are supposed to be rather above the average of their class in liberality and intelligence. Of the effect of field work upon the manners of the female poor, Mr. Henley says that, in North



Northumberland at least, it is by no means unfavourable. People who think otherwise are recommended "to visit these women in their own homes, "after they become wives and mothers. They would "be received with a natural courtesy and good "manners that would astonish them." The explanation of it is, however, that the daughters of the family, instead of going out to service, remain at home and do farm work till they marry, thus leaving their mothers at leisure to attend to home work, and acquire domestic habits. Married women, he says, never work in the field in this district. One institution peculiar to this county is "the "bondager"—a woman whom the hind contracts to supply for farm work, he receiving her earnings and finding her in board, lodging, and wages. The system, however, has latterly been growing unpopular, and is not so much in use as formerly.

The other Assistant Commissioners agree in thinking that the employment of women in farm work is dangerous to their morals and injurious to their manners; yet in the opinion of Mr. Culley the nature of the work has been made responsible for more than its share of their unchastity. He

thinks, indeed, what is probably quite true, that hard out-of-door work is in itself a healthy corrective of the natural passions, and that lace-making, straw-plaiting, and other sedentary occupations are in this respect worse than agriculture. It is in the opportunities which it gives that the latter does so much harm. It should be added, moreover, in justice to the girls in question, that the vice of unchastity is in their case seen in its least aggravated shape. With deference to Mr. Burke, it here loses half its evil by losing all its refinement. The lace-maker, the milliner, or the gloveress is exposed to a class of temptations wholly different in kind from those which assail the peasant. It is among her class that seduction and prostitution find their victims; whereas among the peasantry the sin which they commit almost, like the brutes about them, begins and ends with itself. The idea of the young woman in nailed boots and a man's jacket, whose natural attractions hard work and exposure to the weather have long since ruined, being the victim of seduction is, could one laugh at such things, laughable. She suffers no social injury: she is



not plunged into a life of misery. She probably marries; and if she marries, becomes virtuous and respectable.

On the question of health there is considerable difference of opinion. There can, indeed, be no doubt that to all women some kinds of work, and to some women all kinds of work, are physically injurious. But it is very difficult to lay down any general rule. It seems pretty generally agreed that they should not be employed with machinery, or in weeding high wet corn. Mr. Portman thinks that field work generally is injurious to young married women. And probably, if the balance of opinion could be struck, we should arrive at the conclusion that if married women and girls under sixteen could be released from this work, as much good would have been effected as we could reasonably expect at present. At the same time there is something to be said in contravention of both these views. Mr. Boyle thinks that farm work does less harm to married than to unmarried women, and on the score of morals he is right; while, for the same reason, such employment must clearly be worse for girls over sixteen than for girls under.



On the whole, it seems that there is a great deal of work that can be done by women with advantage to the farmer and without injury to themselves; and when it does not expose them to special temptation, or interfere with more appropriate duties, it seems unreasonable to object to it. This is about the view which practical men will be found to take of this question. And if we supplement it with the admission that such employment is, nevertheless, in the abstract bad, and that the total extinction of it is one of the chief results to be looked forward to from raising the price and improving the quality of male labour, we should be satisfied to see it generally adopted. It appears that all over the country female labour is found to be gradually on the wane; so much so that many of the witnesses examined were inclined to think it better to leave the extinction of it to natural causes than to interfere by legislation, which would seem to many persons very arbitrary, while it might in some cases be actually oppressive.

We now come to the employment of children. And first as regards the girls, we see that the suggestion most generally received,

namely, that none should be employed in agriculture under sixteen years of age, would exclude from such labour the whole class of female children. We should be inclined, however, to doubt whether sixteen was the best possible age to fix. If the object of it be, as Mr. Fraser states, to keep girls out of the field long enough to give them a chance of taking to domestic service, or of settling in some other way of life before they can be sent upon the land, the age is perhaps too young. On the score of morality we should say it was either too young or too old—sixteen being, perhaps, the most dangerous age of all at which a girl can be suddenly emancipated from the restraints of home life, and be exposed to the influence of bad company. On the score of health, it is certainly too old; while as regards education, one of two things may be said—either the intelligent girl leaving school at sixteen would be above farm work altogether, or the duller girl, who was not so, would have lost very little by leaving school two years sooner. To those girls whose destiny it is to work in agriculture we doubt if the proposed limit would be of any use. But, no doubt,



as an indirect mode of keeping them away from it altogether, it would be to a large extent effective. Other witnesses would attain a kindred end by the force of a direct prohibition ; they would allow girls to work up to the age of thirteen, and not afterwards. And this we confess is what we should prefer ourselves. But as such a regulation would abolish the whole system of adult female labour at a single blow, it is open to all those considerations which we have already laid before our readers. The time may not yet have arrived when the sudden stoppage of so large a supply of useful labour would not be too hard upon the farmer, or the sudden loss of so much income would not be too hard upon the poor. But it would be a real advantage to the children, who would be invigorated during their earlier years by out-of-door exercise, and learn a good deal that might be useful to them in after life, while quitting it at the same time at an age when its ill effects could be hardly, if at all, felt. But while it is still a matter of doubt whether female labour is hereafter to be tolerated at all, either in children or adults, it is premature to discuss these details, and we turn accordingly to the boys, about



whom the chief or only question is how to reconcile the claims of education with the pressure of agricultural demands, and with the necessity of an early initiation into all the mysteries of their craft.

We say the chief or only question, because we find little or no evidence in this Report that boys are now exposed to anything like cruelty or oppression at the hands of their masters or supervisors. It is true that in several districts they were found to be working far too many hours in the day; and this ought clearly to be amended. Some of the evidence given by little fellows of eleven and twelve concerning their own work is almost touching in its uncomplaining simplicity. The medical and other testimony to the effect of such prolonged toil at so tender an age is, however, very various. In Northamptonshire, where a boy of eight years of age said he was at work from six in the morning till five o'clock in the afternoon, both the medical and surgical evidence was all to the effect that no diseases among the agricultural poor could fairly be attributed to over-work in childhood, though children were improperly exposed to accidents from machinery and from fire-

arms in bird-scaring. In Essex and Norfolk, on the contrary, three medical witnesses stated their belief that various physical deformities and diseases, such as dropsy or scrofula, were, some produced, and others much aggravated, by the long and often heavy work and exposure to wet and cold which these children were obliged to undergo. A pretty general agreement, however, seems now to be arrived at, that boys should not go to work before ten, nor work more than ten hours a day between that age and fourteen. If this object can be attained, it will be a great step in advance, in more ways than one. It is idle to expect that the lot of the agricultural labourer, child or man, can ever be wholly relieved from those hardships which are peculiar to the cultivation of the soil. He must encounter the snows of January, the winds of March, and the suns of August with equal indifference. He must lift heavy weights and wear grievous boots.

“ Pater ipse colendi  
“ Haud facilem esse viam voluit.”

But every pursuit in life has its drawbacks, and those which are peculiar to the farm are not one



whit worse than those which are peculiar to the factory.

Mr. Stanhope, whose district comprised Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire, is of opinion that the restriction to ten years is unnecessary. He thinks that such light work as scaring birds or "tenting" cattle—that is, keeping them out of the corn where there is no fence between the arable and pasture ground—may advantageously be performed by children seven or eight years old. Of tenting this may be true. But bird-scaring, to be effective, requires the presence of the poor little human scarecrow almost as soon as it is light, and almost till it grows dusk. Moreover, it is certainly fatiguing work if it is efficiently performed. The watcher has to be always on his legs; and the constant shouting that is required of him is no slight addition to his labour, as will be acknowledged by any one who knows what it is to shoot all day behind an ungovernable dog. Besides, this kind of labour involves, perhaps more than any other, that exposure to the cold cutting winds which is allowed to be so injurious to children of tender years. The only points on which all alike



seem to be agreed are, that some limits should be imposed first upon the age at which a boy is set to horse work; and secondly, upon the amount of Sunday work he may be required to perform. Ploughing, harrowing, and the like, are very hard work for little boys; while the stable work, night and morning, makes their day very often extend to twelve or thirteen hours. Driving-reins, however, are to some extent superseding the use of children in ploughing. And as to tenting cattle and scaring birds, which are works of necessity, and cannot very well be dispensed with on Sunday, there seems no reason why the same child should be employed at it all day, instead of taking turn about with another one, and so getting half a Sunday, at all events. Mr. Tremeneere, who is opposed to all other restrictions, is in favour of these two. And he would fix the age up to which children should be exempt from horse work at eleven. His reasons for dispensing with all other restrictions are worthy of great consideration. He regards it more as a labourers' question than a farmers'. The latter, he thinks, care little, as a rule, about the service of children

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under ten. But the demand is sufficient to turn the scale when added to the plea of poor parents. In quite half of our agricultural families, he thinks, the man is not in the receipt of wages at once permanent and adequate. "And to these the earnings of their children, from the earliest age at which they can earn anything, are in their eyes, at least, of importance." Take, again, a case which might be got very easily, of a family in which all the children are under ten years of age, and the father's wages precarious, and how can *their* earnings be dispensed with? We should agree with Mr. Tremenheere but for a statement which so often meets the eye in running down the columns of evidence, to the effect that the earnings of very young children barely equal the difference between the expense of keeping them at work and the expense of keeping them at home. At the same time it is urged, with a good deal of truth, that the 1s. 6d. a week is ready money, while the boots, the bacon, and the cheese are procured on credit, payment for which only looms in the remote future. Thus much, however, must be acknowledged, that the conditions of agriculture are



so different in different counties, that it would be a very hazardous experiment to lay down any general rule which should apply to all alike. At all events, supposing such rules to be laid down, there must be a power of dispensation lodged in the hands either of the local magistrates or of persons appointed for the purpose; and probably that would be the safest and most prudent form into which legislation could shape itself. Though here, again, we find Mr. Tremenhoe opposed to us. He hopes to reconcile non-interference with the requirements of education "without imposing on the magistrates the difficult, invidious, and undesirable task of granting dispensations from the requirements of an Act of Parliament."



## CHAPTER II.

### FOOD AND WAGES.

*“THE lowness of wages is the most usual  
“reason assigned for the necessity of fe-  
“male and juvenile labour. When told  
“that you cannot expect a man with a large family,  
“living on 8s. or 9s. a week, to support his wife  
“and children at home in idleness, it is difficult  
“to find an answer to the objection. To say,  
“‘Raise the wages’ is easy; but it is very difficult  
“for the farmer to do so. There is a pressure  
“brought to bear upon him from above and below.  
“Every one, except perhaps the farmer himself,  
“wishes to see the wages raised; nay, he would be  
“willing enough to raise the wages if he could  
“do so without impoverishing himself; but with  
“the present great demand for land, the rents paid  
“by the farmers are gradually rising, and it is  
“impossible for them to pay higher rents and*

"higher wages at the same time. At more than  
"one meeting of guardians that I attended, it was  
"stated that the wages could never be raised till  
"rents were lowered, and that as long as rents  
"continue to rise, the least that can be expected is  
"that wages shall not fall. On one occasion, a  
"magistrate having suggested that the only means  
"to check female labour is to raise the wages, a  
"farmer retorted that the only means to raise the  
"wages was to lower the rent. It is equally dif-  
"ficult to expect the landlord to lower his rent  
"in the face of a rapidly-increasing demand for  
"land, and to expect the occupier to raise wages in  
"face of an increasing demand for rent. The Rev.  
"Mr. Hickley, of Walton, with whom I had some  
"conversation on the subject, said, that as long as  
"there is no combination among the labourers, it is  
"very unlikely that wages will rise as much as in  
"towns, where artisans are constantly thrown together.  
"Combination is the natural result; but labourers,  
"scattered all over a large agricultural county, even  
"if it occur to them to combine, find in the fact of  
"their being scattered an almost insuperable difficulty.  
"It is probable that the constant migration that is



*“going on will ultimately lead to a rise of wages.  
“The introduction of machinery is perhaps the cause  
“that has hitherto prevented any such effect, and the  
“fact that it is usually the strongest and best hands  
“that go to seek higher pay elsewhere, and that the  
“hands who stay behind are not worth so much money  
“to their employers as those who have gone.”*

We quote these words from the Report of Mr. Boyle, one of the Assistant Commissioners, because the rate of wages is at the bottom of all the difficulties which beset this question; but we fear he speaks rather too favourably of the disposition of the farmers in this matter. The present writer could point to more than one large estate where a very low rental has been paid for years, but where the wages of the labourer are perhaps at their lowest point, notwithstanding that the attention of the tenants has repeatedly been directed to the anomaly. Of course there are many parts of England in which a low rent simply means a poor soil, and where landlord, tenant, and labourer all share the effects of it together. But there are many exceptions to the rule. And it is difficult to persuade one's self that the social progress of the



farmer during the last hundred years has not been out of all proportion to that of the other two. If a larger share of the produce of the soil than he at present enjoys is to be awarded to the peasant, it must be taken from somebody else; and it is perfectly absurd to say that this ought to be the landlord. Legislation, however, on the subject is contrary to all our ideas. The remedy must be left to time. Hitherto the effect of migration has been to a great extent neutralised by the diffusion of machinery. But in a few years, when the demand for labour shall have again reached a permanent level, emigration will begin to tell, and wages will begin to rise.

Meantime, the reader will be glad to hear that most of the Commissioners agree in reporting that the English peasant is now as a rule by no means so wretchedly fed and clothed as formerly, though still badly housed. "Happily," says Mr. Tremenhore, "this inquiry has brought out the fact that the earnings of the best class of agricultural labourers in permanent employ are now, generally speaking, such as to afford them the means of living and maintaining their families in decency

“and comfort.” The present writer is of opinion that the condition of the labourer on the whole is even better than the Commissioners represent. Many things can be ascertained in the course of careless conversation which are not so readily discovered to an official inquirer; and long personal observation in one or two counties, widely differing from each other, leads him to a similar conclusion.

In point of physical well-being, the Northumbrian peasantry seem to bear away the palm. It is difficult to believe, however, that something of this superiority is not due to the race, since their actual food and wages do not seem sufficiently removed from those of more southerly districts to account for the whole difference. Still in their system of hiring they possess this advantage\* over agricultural labourers in general, being hired by the year, and certain of payment for the whole year, both in health and sickness. This arrangement, however, is peculiar to North Northumberland. The other peculiarity of the system is that they are here chiefly paid in kind. The labourer

\* Vide infra.



receives a cottage, keep for a cow and a pig, so much potato ground, and a fixed allowance of wheat, barley, oats, and peas. His coals are drawn for him, and he receives besides £5 or £6 in cash. It is computed that the whole value of his receipts represents about 14s. 6d. a week. But, in addition to this, he has the earnings of his children and unmarried daughters, at an average rate of 10d. a day for the one, and 1s. 6d. a day for the other, so that on the whole the general rate of incomes may be taken to be a pound a week.\* According to Mr. Henley's Report, the dietary of a Northumbrian peasant would make a poor man's mouth water in many other parts of England, though we are bound to add that in many he would turn up his nose at it. That, indeed, which is stated by Mr. Henley to be by far the more invigorating diet of the two which are in use in Northumberland, would furnish a very undesirable banquet in the eyes of a Leicestershire or Northamptonshire ploughman: porridge, barley cakes, brown bread, milk, cheese, butter,

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



and bacon. Oddly enough, there seems an irresistible amount of evidence to show that where this diet has been superseded by tea, coffee, and butchers' meat, there is a marked deterioration in the physical energies of the people. The midland counties man's ideal of a dinner, "a piece of beef as big as a brick," is evidently the growth of a grazing country unacquainted with the virtue of oatmeal. But, nevertheless, this same ideal is beginning to permeate the dales and make itself manifest, as aforesaid, in degenerated thews and sinews. The abundance of fuel enables every cottager to keep a glorious fire burning, and, what is most important to health, he always has a hot dinner. There are certain drawbacks to the system of payment in kind, which are these:—The labourer is, to some extent, at the mercy of his employer; in a bad season he may get bad wheat and bad potatoes; he has little ready money for clothes and other necessities, so that he is often driven to sell his allowances, doubtless at considerable disadvantage; and he is obliged to take any cottage that is offered to him, however miserable it may be.

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



having had all he wants during his work is less likely to go out to the public-house when he returns home. From an economical point of view the preponderance of opinion seems to be against it. The proportion of wages absorbed by the allowance of drink is too large, and deducts too much from the general household fund. Many farmers, however, object to the whole system upon principle, and not merely as regards the particular item of liquor. "If paid altogether in money," says one of the correspondents I have already quoted, "a saving, careful man and his wife can, without doubt, do more with it than they can with mixed wages." Of course, he adds, there may be here and there a careless couple, "who, the more money they have, the worse muddle they get into." But this is not confined to any rank in life.

Before quitting the subject of wages we may notice one vicious custom of which there cannot well be two opinions. We mean the system of payment at long intervals, and often irregularly. Even a large income is less useful when received in such a manner. From the labourer's income it



deducts a heavy percentage. It drives him into debt; debt keeps him under the thumb of the village shopkeeper; and any attempt at a more economical disposition of his earnings is made impossible.

Upon the whole, the average rate of wages throughout the counties visited by the Commissioners seems to vary from about 15s. to 11s. These, in each case, are supplemented by the earnings of the women and children; for where these last do not work in the field they work at some in-door employment. The average weekly cash earnings of an average English labourer and his family may be set down probably at 18s. a week, exclusive of "allowances," and, if harvest money is added, at £1; but when the wife works at the stocking-frame and the younger children at "seaming," it is probably, one year with another, a good deal more. A clergyman near Doncaster says it is the rule, and not the exception, for a labourer to leave at his death from £50 to £150. In Wiltshire they reckon that a man in regular employment makes his 12s. a week on the average. Mr. Norman,

indeed, treats this merely as a farmer's statement; but the present writer has received the same assurance from labourers who had certainly no interest in exaggerating the rate of wages. The peasantry, however, do not seem to be so well fed or clothed as in the northern and midland counties. We have seen how they live in Northumberland. Mr. Stanhope says that a Lincolnshire labourer has meat three times a day, and a Leicestershire labourer once. We rather doubt both these statements, unless by meat is meant bacon. But, after all deductions are made, we still have a much more satisfactory scale of diet than where meat once a month is a good deal nearer the mark than meat once a day. In Dorsetshire, vegetables flavoured with bacon fat, or bread and cheese; in Somersetshire, bread and butter, or bread dipped in cider; in Cheshire, potatoes, or gruel thickened with treacle, were found to be the commonest articles of food. In Staffordshire, Mr. Stanhope found a village where even bacon was unknown. But what the poor feel most is the dearth of milk, and of course,



where milk is dear, cheese and butter are the same. In some parts of Wiltshire, to the writer's own knowledge, cheese is inaccessible to the labourer; and at St. Giles's, in Dorsetshire, "a parish cow" has been established, by the advice of Lord Shaftesbury, to supply the cottagers with milk. But even in Wiltshire the poor have money in the savings-banks, and if they choose to deny themselves in point of diet, it is rather to their credit than otherwise.

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



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

Father's Earnings.						
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
46 weeks at 12s. ....	27	12	0			
4 weeks, harvest .....	6	0	0			
2 weeks, hay .....	1	15	0			
Extra, 10 weeks' piecework .....	3	0	0			
„ 20 days' threshing and chaff-cutting } by steam. ....	0	10	0			
				38	17	0

MANNING LEE, eldest son, 19 years.

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

TOM LEE, second son, 16 years.

52 weeks at 8s. ....	20	16	0			
Extra for harvest .....	1	0	0			
„ hay .....	0	9	0			
„ overtime .....	0	5	0			
				22	10	0

JOB LEE, third son, 14 years.

52 weeks at 4s. ....	10	8	0			

Total earnings of family ..... £103 9 0

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

The following table was furnished to the present writer by a farmer in Hampshire, on the borders of Wiltshire, a district not hitherto associated with

the most favourable ideas of the condition of the agricultural labourer:—

## MICHAELMAS 1866 TO 1867.

	£	s.	d.
Man, 3 weeks at 11s. ....	1	13	0
„ 26 „ 12s. ....	15	12	0
„ 23 „ 13s. ....	14	19	0
1st boy, 3 weeks at 5s. 6d. ....	0	16	6
„ 49 „ 6s. ....	14	14	0
2nd boy, 52 „ 4s. ....	10	8	0
3rd „ 29 „ 2s. 6d. ....	3	12	6
„ „ 23 „ 3s. ....	3	9	0
4th „ 35 „ 2s. 6d. ....	4	7	6
Wife at harvest work ....	2	3	4½
Money instead of beer, for all ....	1	5	1½
House and garden free, worth.....	4	0	0
Wood or coal.....	1	4	0
1d. each for all lambs weaned.....	1	7	0
Man, Michaelmas money.....	4	0	0
1st boy, „ ..... 2	0	0	0
2nd „ „ ..... 0	16	0	0
3rd „ „ ..... 0	10	0	0
	£86	17	0

## MICHAELMAS 1867 TO 1868.

	£	s.	d.
Man, 52 weeks at 13s. ....	33	16	0
1st boy, 52 „ 7s. ....	18	4	0
2nd „ „ 4s. ....	10	8	0
3rd „ „ 3s. ....	7	16	0
4th „ 43 „ 2s. 6d. ....	5	9	2
Money instead of beer, for all ....	1	8	5
House .....	4	0	0
Wood or coal.....	1	4	0

Carried forward ..... £82 5 7

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## MICHAELMAS 1867 to 1868—(continued).

	£	s.	d.
Brought forward .....	82	5	7
1 <i>d.</i> each for lambs weaned .....	1	6	6
Man, Michaelmas money.....	4	0	0
1st boy       ,, .....	2	0	0
2nd „       ,, .....	1	5	0
3rd „       ,, .....	1	0	0
	£91 17 1		

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

“I think there can be no doubt but that agricultural labourers and country mechanics are in much better circumstances than they were twenty or twenty-five years ago in every way: better wages, better dwellings, better food and clothing, and more comforts. The bricklayers and carpenters had then about 15*s.* a week, now from 18*s.* to 21*s.*, and upwards.” Yet is curious that in the subjoined table of weekly wages there seems to have been no rise during the last quarter of a century to account for this improvement.



## LABOURER'S WEEKLY WAGES.

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

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

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

“You will, I know, excuse my not writing before, as I have been very busy. I shall give the account of wages year by year without including the corn or hay harvest.

CORN LAWS REPEALED, 1849.

Average of wages in 1846 11s. per week.

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

Now, 1870, only 10s. per week.

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

"hay harvest, three pints and table-beer as  
"above."

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

"March 4, 1870.

"To the best of my recollection, labourers'  
"wages did not fall after the repeal of the Corn  
"Laws. Wages are now higher than they were  
"at that time: at the present time, the wages of  
"a good labourer, fit to send to any work upon a  
"farm, are at least 12s. per week, with ale; lower  
"class of men, only fit for rough work, are having  
"12s. without beer. In fact, you can't get an able-  
"bodied man under 2s. a day. For ten weeks in  
"harvest time, for the last year or two, good men  
"have had 15s. per week, with lots of beer, or 18s.  
"or 19s. per week without beer, except on carrying  
"days, when they usually expect some drink.  
"Extra hands during harvest time want 2s. 6d.  
"per day and some beer. To the best of my belief,

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



“this information is correct as far as this neighbourhood is concerned.”

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

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

peasantry are. We cannot imagine, then, that the inferiority complained of is the wilful and deliberate doing of the workmen themselves in the majority of our rural districts, though it may be so in some. If, then, we fall back upon the other alternative, and suppose that their strength is really less, how are we to account for that? That the present generation of English peasantry are worse off than the last—that they get, that is, smaller supplies of nourishing food, less warmth, and worse clothing—is a proposition abundantly refuted by the evidence above given. For the last two or three years meat has been extremely dear, but the dearness has not lasted long enough to have permanently affected any large class of the community, while at the same time it has been to a large extent neutralised by the cheapness of other articles of food. Many people think that the quantity of tea which they now drink is hurtful to them. And they certainly do get a very inferior quality of beer to what they could obtain formerly. Others throw the blame upon allotments. On the whole, however, we are disposed to doubt the fact, or to consider it, at all events, a specimen of agri-



cultural exaggeration. That there was a time when the peasantry were better off we *do* believe. That, however, was not the time of our fathers, nor scarcely of our grandfathers. If the condition of the labourer has declined during the last hundred years, it has risen during the last fifty. Before the American war it was better than it is at present. About the beginning of the French war it was much the same. After the peace it was a great deal worse. When we are told, as the present writer has been told, that no traditions still survive among the poor of a time when they were better off, the only explanation of it is, that material prosperity is not one of those things which affect the imagination. At the accession of George III. meat was  $3\frac{1}{2}d.$  a pound, cheese the same, butter  $6d.$ , wheat under  $30s.$  a quarter, cottage rent from  $20s.$  to  $25s.$ , and the cottager had his share of the common for cow, pig, poultry, and fuel. In 1792 the commons had mostly disappeared; meat was  $6d.$  a pound, butter  $9d.$ , wheat  $40s.$  a quarter, and rent about  $\pounds 1$   $15s.$  per annum. In the former period the labourer had, on an average,  $7s.$  a week, and  $10s.$  a week at harvest.



In the latter he had, on an average, 8s. a week, and 18s. a week in harvest. Thus, while the increase in the cost of living was more than one-third, the increase in weekly wages was only one-eighth; and the supplemental source of income afforded by the commons had been cut off. Still, as we have said, it would seem that the position of the labourer, even at the present day, is not much better than it was at the last-mentioned period. If wages have risen in proportion to the rise in prices, it is all that they have done. We have not, of course, been including the earnings of women and children in either of the above estimates, these having borne much the same proportion to the man's as they do now. But on the whole we have no hesitation in saying that up to the end of the eighteenth century the condition of the labourer was generally much better, and never at all worse, than it has been since. There has been, however, an intermediate period during which it reached its nadir of degradation, and to the other side of that dismal swamp rural tradition is not able to pierce. The improvement during the last thirty years has been marked and rapid, and we can hardly, therefore, attribute

the alleged inferiority of the present generation to any physical declension. Two Scotch labourers, it is said, are worth three English, because they are better fed and better taught. (Rep. I., p. 160.) But the English peasant of to-day is better fed and better taught than his father was. Why, therefore, this degeneracy?

## CHAPTER III.

### COTTAGES AND ALLOTMENTS.

**T**HE cottage accommodation of the poor seems to be at its worst where their physical condition is, in other respects, the best, namely, in Northumberland. The explanation of this is, we suppose, that until lately the cottages were in the hands of farmers, and that these had no incentive to provide anything better, the labourer having no choice, but being obliged to take what was offered to him. Recently, however, an improvement has become visible. Some of the larger landowners have set the example of building good cottages on their estates, and the peasantry, having a higher model placed before them, strike for higher wages if forced into the old-fashioned hovels. But the great cottage difficulty all over the country, like the great school difficulty, is simply a question of wages. It is calculated that



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

culture by Professor Buckman. And it will be seen that his view of the cottage question is a novel and courageous one.

*"Looking around you and seeing cottages built at the cost of £100 apiece, the sum of 1s. weekly being received as rent, can it be possible for the landlords to care about improving them? What inducement is there in this country for landlords to spend money on cottages? There is no margin for profit nor common interest. Suppose a landlord has money in the funds, and takes £1,000 out to improve his cottage property. He pays no poor-rate on that money as long as it remains in the funds; but as soon as he invests it in cottages the poor-rates are 10 or 12 per cent. Can it be possible to expect that a man will improve his cottages under these circumstances? But if poor-rates were properly arranged, so that all property should bear its fair proportion,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 per cent., instead of 12 per cent., would cover the whole. If the charge of 12 per cent. taxes were reduced by 9 per cent., it would be an incitement for landlords to attend to their cottage property, and build better cottages than they do at present. Under existing circumstances I am convinced there is no inducement*



“to build. Any landed proprietor who builds cottages  
“which the improved circumstances require must be a  
“loser by the transaction, unless he can make it up  
“in other ways by the general improvement of his  
“property. So far as cottages are concerned, they  
“really cost so much money to build that, at the  
“present price at which cottages in this county are let  
“—lower than in any other county—the landlord  
“must lose if he spend any considerable amount of  
“money upon his property. Therefore it is quite evi-  
“dent that it does not pay to improve cottage property.  
“My own notion is simply this: If I owned one of these  
“parishes, as I find many gentlemen in Dorsetshire  
“do, I should at once double the rent of every cottage.  
“Whether I should get the money I don’t know, but I  
“would double the rent, and I would ask my farmers  
“to double the rent of every cottage they let to their  
“labourers. I would take care I made the cottages  
“doubly as good as they are at present. You would thus  
“have better labourers, and I believe it would be worth  
“your while—I know it would be worth my while—to  
“add another shilling a week to the labour list, with  
“the idea that it should be paid with reference to im-  
“proved cottages. This improvement would lower the



*"rates very considerably, there would be less sickness, less illness, fewer illegitimate children, less unpleasant concomitants with reference to our parishes."*

The last part of this extract, which is thoroughly practical and sensible, seems in some degree to answer the first. Build better cottages, and you will effect thereby that heavy reduction in the rates which is now said to be indispensable before better cottages can be built. It shows, moreover, that in the opinion of the speaker wages either are, or might easily be made, adequate to the payment of a higher rent than is now exacted. Finally, the question arises whether it is better that cottages should be let to the labourer by the farmer, the landlord, or by some third person. Here, again, there are many conflicting considerations. When we speak of cottages being rented from the farmer, we are now referring only to cottages attached to the farm, and let exclusively to his own labourers. Then the system cuts both ways. On the one hand, the cottage is likely to be kept in better condition, and perhaps let for lower rent, because it is to the farmer's interest to keep his labourers, if good ones,

as long as possible, and a good house and garden are of course a great inducement. The farmer, too, is always on the spot to see that repairs are executed. On the other hand, the cottager himself is less free, under this system, to carry his labour to the best market, being entirely at his master's mercy, and liable to "eviction" at any time—a serious disaster to a poor man where cottages are not very abundant. The labourers are said to prefer renting from an indifferent person, and thereby keeping themselves free, although perhaps they have to pay more money for a worse house. Cottage house property not being a good investment, people who own them without farms look merely for the best interest they can get, not caring much about the condition of the house. But held from either the landlord or the clergyman of the parish, they are free from both these objections. And there seems a great concurrence of opinion in favour of cottages as well as of allotments being as much as possible in the hands of the clergyman or the squire. Some people, indeed, will tell you that there ought to be no business relations between the parson and his



parishioners. This seems fanciful. But at all events no such objection can be raised to the lay proprietor.

Before noticing a plan by which it is hoped that the cost of cottage building may be greatly lessened without any sacrifice of convenience, we must advert to the rules laid down by the Enclosure Commissioners, which are said to be so stringent (Mr. Henley, 187), that few landowners have availed themselves of their assistance in borrowing money for the purpose. The Commissioners are understood to require—firstly, three bedrooms; secondly, that no part of the walls of an old cottage be used in the construction of a new one; thirdly, that the money borrowed shall not be used merely for converting and improving; and fourthly, that the timber supports used shall be of a certain given strength. Mr. Henley thinks there is some misunderstanding about the second and third of these provisions, and that, properly construed, they would throw no unreasonable impediment in the way of repairs and restorations. As to the first there can hardly be two opinions. But there seems to be a general agreement upon these two points, namely,

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that the Lands Improvement Act requires amendment, and that the Labourers' Dwelling-house Act, at present applicable only to towns, might with advantage be extended to the country.

From page lv. to lx. of the Report will be found a very interesting account of the latest improvements and suggestions in the matter of cottage building, from which it appears that by means of a new kind of material introduced by Mr. Benjamin Nichol, sufficiently commodious cottages may be erected at a cost of £85. This process is far too complicated a one to be described here.\* We may state briefly that the walls would be composed of slabs consisting of a kind of straw mattress enclosed in an iron frame, and coated over with Portland cement, a new kind of concrete, on which the highest expectations have been founded. These cottages, being "proof against fire and impervious to damp," would cost very little in repairs, so that it is calculated that 5 per cent. would be a sufficiently remunerative return. According to this estimate, therefore, they could be let out to the poor at a little over 1s. 6d. a week; and the cottage

\* *Full Mall Gazette*, February 24, 1869.

difficulty might be considered to be almost solved. The properties of the new cement, however, seem not yet to have been sufficiently tested to justify any positive assertions; while, on the other hand, it is alleged by the architects to the Board of Works that Mr. Nichol has underrated the cost, and that the expense of his patent apparatus, an adaptation of the sewing machine, with which the mattresses are made up, would swell the whole outlay to a much higher sum than he has named, except where a large number of cottages were to be erected at the same time.

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



landowners, we understand, are returning to the system, which was once general, in spite of the increased cost.

Mr. Tremenheere, fortified by the testimony of the Assistant Commissioners, attributes the defective state of our cottages in a great measure to the embarrassed circumstances of the landowners, who, succeeding to encumbered estates, have really no money to spend upon cottage improvements. He thinks that "an absolute power given to every one "who succeeds to an encumbered estate of selling "as much of it as is required to pay off the encumbrances would have a strong tendency to keep settlements within 'reasonable and proper bounds,' "and would prevent their being exceeded for "any length of time to the injury of the public." (Rep. II., p. xli.) This is a vigorous remedy. But the worst of it is that, until the labourer appreciates a good cottage, it is waste of money to build one for him. Education will make him conscious of new wants; and when he shall have become so, neither gentleman nor farmer will be able for long to disregard them. But one great difficulty in the way of introducing greater decency into the do-



mestic arrangements of the poor the Commissioners have barely noticed, and that is the system of taking in lodgers. For it is manifest that you may go on enlarging cottages till they are as spacious as the Grosvenor Hotel without doing any good, if the labourer continues to huddle up his own family into one corner, and let the remainder. Stringent regulations to provide against this abuse are usually imposed by landlords; but it is one not easily detected, and, when detected, not easily removed. It is further encouraged by the great change which has taken place in the domestic habits of the farmer. The polite couple who drink claret, read the magazines, and dress like the gentry, find the old system of boarding and lodging their unmarried workmen an unmitigated nuisance, and would as soon think of sitting down to dinner with them, after the fashion of Mr. and Mrs. Poyser, as of riding to market on horseback one behind the other. The result, of course, has been that single men and lads, expelled from the farmhouse, have been driven perforce into the cottage. And, in considering the question of cottage accommodation in general, too little allowance,

we think, has hitherto been made for the exigencies thus created.

To obtain, however, at all a comprehensive view of the all-important question of cottage accommodation, we must have recourse to the Report of Dr. Hunter, presented to the Privy Council in 1864. The first point that stares us in the face is this fact—as the labouring population has increased the number of cottages has diminished. Dr. Hunter found this to be the case at least in 821 villages; the average proportion being a diminution of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. against an increase of  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. This increase, however, is but partial; for though it is a doubtful point whether the actual number of agricultural labourers in England has fallen off during the last thirty years, of those who live in villages the number has certainly declined; and the above figures are given by Dr. Hunter only to illustrate that disregard of the labourer's necessities which it is his main object to expose. At the time of his tour of inspection, as it is to a great extent still, the country was divided into close villages and open villages, the former being the property of one, or very few large landowners,



the latter of small proprietors and speculative builders. Partly to lower the rates, partly for the sake of order, and partly for the sake of appearances, the population of the former had been gradually weeded of the inferior class of labourers, till none were left but those who could afford to live in "model cottages," the remainder being compelled to take refuge either in the open villages or the small towns adjoining, where they herded together in indescribable squalor and misery. But even when the destruction of cottages had long been carried on, the cottagers would cling to their native place if there was no one to prevent them, and the same system of crowding would be found as in the free and uncivilised rookeries. The Union Chargeability Bill, however, may be expected to destroy the most powerful of the above motives for the suppression of cottages; while sounder views with regard to the proper construction of them may enable the landowner to make his money go a good deal further, and to do much more real good to the class which he desires to benefit. To build houses for the peasantry which are good enough for the curate or the doctor is almost as bad as not



to build them at all, because sooner or later they are sure to fall into the hands of that class to whose means they are naturally adapted. "Without presuming," says Dr. Hunter, "to question the calculations of professional men, it is submitted that they have started from a wrong idea of the labourer's wants; that in providing him with a third bedroom they have only filled his house with lodgers; that in such matters as porches, windows, and chimneys they have consulted the landlord's taste rather than the tenant's comfort; and that by making cottage building dear, they have deterred gentlemen who wished to relieve the grosser scandals with which their estates were charged." He reckons that out of forty-one families only three would require three bedrooms, ten one bedroom, and twenty-eight two bedrooms. And this is the proportion, he says, in which gentlemen should plan their cottages. Dr. Hunter, moreover, affords no countenance whatever to the view adopted by the Commissioners with regard to the necessary cost of building. He says that sufficiently good cottages, *built in a row*, need cost no more than £50 apiece.

In saying that it is mere mockery to talk of the law of supply and demand as regulating this question, Dr. Hunter perhaps goes too far; for it is not so, strictly speaking, except where cottages are the property of the farmer, who can compel his men to take them. Instances in which the village publican or the village grocer is the owner of cottages, and forces his tenants to be his customers, are surely very rare. But altogether Dr. Hunter's evidence goes a long way to confirm what has here been said of the expediency of keeping as many of the cottages as possible in the hands of the landlord or the clergyman. He bears constant testimony to the great good which is effected by the influence of a wealthy resident proprietor, so much so as to make us wonder at his words when, in giving an account of Somersetshire, he says, "It is a matter of great advantage to the inhabitants that it is very free from great estates." The destruction of cottages, at all events, has gone on as rapidly in that county as anywhere else. Nor is the Doctor's sentiment at all in accordance with the evidence supplied by Mr. Boyle, who inspected Somersetshire in 1868 and '69. He complains



much of the state of cottage accommodation ; but what does he say ? “ *The worst cottages are generally the small freeholds, inhabited by the persons who own them, and who, being unable to make more money than absolutely necessary for their immediate wants, are too poor to afford repairs of any kind. Next to these, the worst class of buildings are generally those belonging to small proprietors, such as tradesmen in towns, who have invested in them as a money speculation, and to make it pay are forced to charge a high rent and spend little in repairs. The best cottages are usually those belonging to the larger proprietors, most of whom, from a wish either to see the estate present a flourishing appearance, or to see their people well off, charge a rent far too small to repay them for their outlay.* ” Both Mr. Boyle and Dr. Hunter come to the same conclusion finally, “ that the cottage ought to be considered in the light of farm buildings, from which the landlord expects no return, except in the shape of part of the rent of the farm.” (Mr. Boyle, par. 39. Cf. Dr. Hunter, p. 133.) No doubt this cuts the knot. But we fail to see on what principle any rent at all could be charged



from this point of view. And we own what we should prefer would be to see remunerative rents made possible by augmented wages.\*

Dr. Hunter seems to think it hard that a whole family should be packed off into the open village because one girl has had a child, and he truly says it is not the way to reform them. Still the owner has a duty to the rest of his dependants which he is bound to discharge; and if what Dr. Hunter reports elsewhere, and appears to believe, is true, namely, that the immorality of the peasantry is *not* produced by the crowded condition of their cottages, there is less reason why the landlord should look over it. In two or three cases Dr. Hunter, no doubt, is much too hard. For instance, when he predicts that the poor man will soon be robbed of his cottage garden, he casts an imputation on other people which we are sure was wholly undeserved six years ago. And when he says that game-preservers like to get rid of the population, he is evidently unaware that the worst kind of poachers are those who haunt the back slums of country towns.

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

The unhealthy construction of cottages, and the extraordinary abominations with which they are frequently surrounded, are the result, generally speaking, of pure ignorance. But they point clearly to the necessity for a more stringent system of inspection.

One of the most interesting passages in the Report of the Commissioners is the one that gives a short history of the connection between the peasantry and the land from the earliest times down to the present date, from which the conclusion\* is irresistible that there *have* been periods in England when the labouring man was a great deal better off than he is now. Without taking our readers all the way back to the fourteenth century, it may be sufficient to state that, in Acts of Parliament passed in the reigns of Edward VI. and Elizabeth, the right of the peasantry to have a certain quantity of land attached to their cottages is clearly recognised. Nor was this the only right in connection with land which they derived from the feudal system. They were privileged to pasture their cattle and to cut their firewood on the lord's wastes; and it is

\* Cf. p. 43.



obvious that the condition of comfort to which they were raised by these combined advantages is only fairly described as one of "rude abundance." During the Wars of the Roses the condition of the peasant had declined, and the Acts referred to were intended to revive his prosperity. Whether by means of them, or in spite of them, his prosperity did revive, till, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, he was as well off as he had been in the fourteenth. He languished again during the Civil War and under the Protectorate, but experienced a second *renaissance* after the Revolution; and for the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century he enjoyed a kind of golden age. At the end of that time two events occurred, almost simultaneously, which had a marked effect on the condition of the English peasantry—the Enclosure Acts, which were passed between 1760 and 1774; and the American war, which broke out the year afterwards. The first curtailed his means; the second, by raising prices, increased his expenditure. Such, at least, is the account given by the Commissioners. But Tooke, in his "History of Prices," denies that war, *per se*, has any tendency



to raise them. The price of wheat, in fact, did not rise during the first years of the American war, and from 1742 to 1748, the war of the Austrian succession, the average price was much below that of the ensuing six years. The great expansion of the population after the Peace of Paris (1763), followed by a long succession of very bad seasons, produced a great rise in prices *before* the American war; but from 1771 to 1791 there was little difference. Of course, when we happen to be at war with a great grain-producing country like Russia, or when the ports of the Continent are shut against us, as in the last French war, the case is very different.

By an Act of Parliament passed in the thirty-first year of Queen Elizabeth it was enacted that no cottage should be erected without having four acres of land attached to it. And in 1648 special attention was called to this Act by the judge at York assizes. It is probable, however, that, as land grew more valuable and cottages more numerous, it was found impossible to comply literally with this enactment. By the accession of George III. the ordinary labourer had probably

ceased, as a rule, to be a cultivator of the soil on his own account; but he still enjoyed to the full his rights of common. And these, combined with a rate of wages high in proportion to the cost of necessaries, enabled him to live in great comfort. But when, almost at one and the same moment, the rights of common were abolished and the cost of living was increased, a rapid revolution took place. Those who had small freeholds were obliged to sell them. Those who had derived from their daily labour, and from the cow, the pig, and the poultry which roamed over the adjoining common a comfortable and substantial livelihood, found themselves reduced to penury. The yeoman sank into a peasant, and the peasant sank into a pauper. From that time to this, in spite of the efforts of philanthropic individuals, charitable societies, and even Acts of Parliament, the position of the agricultural labourer has never recovered itself. A society was set on foot in 1796, by Mr. Wilberforce and Sir Thomas Bernard, for improving the condition of the cottager and renewing his connection with the land, and in that association lay the germs of the allotment system. And Sir Frederick



Eden reports (vol. i. p. 569) that in 1795, in the neighbourhood of Mount Sorrel, in Leicestershire, the poor in some parishes had "four or five acres each assigned them for a garden at a very moderate rent." This, however, must have been a very exceptional state of things. And such a quantity of land as this, supplying the occupiers as it did "with cheese, butter, and milk," is altogether different in kind from the modern allotment.\* In 1801 and in 1845 Acts of Parliament were passed intended to protect the rights of "commoners" in any subsequent enclosures. But of course these Acts were not retrospective, and could not undo the wrong which had been done already; while even in those cases to which they were applicable they seem to have been strangely ineffective. The fact is, that the right of the peasant to compensation for the loss inflicted on him by enclosure is just as clear as any other right which rests on usage and prescription. Allotment grounds, wherever such rights have been extinguished, are not a question of benevolence, but of simple justice. A hundred years ago this seems

\* Cf. Stanhope, II. 175—179.



to have been wholly overlooked. Everybody was compensated but those who stood in need of it most, and the rapid rise in poor-rates which followed this policy, though it sometimes punished those who were the chief gainers by it, was but cold comfort to those who were the chief losers. And even now, we repeat, but little has been done, compared with what it seems reasonable to suppose might have been done, towards carrying out the intention of the Legislature, and preventing such mistakes in future. The Act of 1845 provided that out of every enclosed waste a proportion of land should be set aside for the use of cottagers, in lieu of their rights of common, subject, however, to the discretion of the Enclosure Commissioners, of which these gentlemen seem to have availed themselves very largely. The land was to be vested in trustees, to be called the "allotment wardens," who should receive the rents and devote them to parochial purposes. But out of nearly 500,000 acres which have been enclosed since the date of this Act, only about 2,000 acres have been so assigned. And the point is one of great practical interest, as several millions of

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acres of waste land still exist in England capable of cultivation, and, doubtless, destined to the plough.

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



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

Of the practical utility of the allotment system, apart from its justice in some places, and its moral benefit in all, doubts are still entertained; but the preponderance of opinion is in favour of it. One cannot, however, shut one's eyes to the fact that the system is no longer an experiment. Though little has been done in the way of public allotments, private allotments have been steadily on the increase for nearly forty years, till they are now, we should think, no longer the exception, but

\* Now withdrawn (July 7).



the rule. And it is only fair to inquire how far they have succeeded in enriching the agricultural labourer. To this inquiry, however, we find no satisfactory answer in this Report. The system is recommended as a probable cure for an acknowledged evil, almost as though it was a new discovery, and had not already been in operation for nearly half a century. It certainly does not *seem* to have produced any effect upon the employment of women and children; but this is just one of those questions on which we want further information. The Commissioners tell us that the average loss to the labourer by the withdrawal of children under ten from field work would be £4 or £5 a year, and that the profits of a rood of ground come to just about the same sum. Well, the natural question to ask is at once this: Do we find that the occupation of this rood of land *does* induce the labourer to forego the earnings of his children? There can be no want of opportunities for investigating this question. But our own impression decidedly is, that it has had at present no such effect. Again, there is the wife's labour to be taken into account, and that can hardly be less than £10

a year. If the allotment system is in time to lead to the abolition of female work, it must clearly be conducted on a scale that will bring the labourer a much higher annual return than £5. The Commissioners say that if he could be advantageously trusted with two roods he would be in a position to do what is required of him. But then, on their own showing, it is just this quantity of land that he cannot advantageously be trusted with. Then, too, there is the question of the effect of allotments upon wages. The Commissioners assure us that this is purely imaginary, and they quote in support of their opinion the evidence given before the Committee in 1843. We confess we are not satisfied on this point. Whether or no the allotment system has actually lowered wages is a point capable of proof, and so far we need not hesitate to accept this evidence. But whether or no it may not have prevented them from rising is another question altogether, which it is much less easy to decide. Farmers, at least, always take allotments into account in discussing the subject. If you say the rate of wages is low, the invariable answer is, "Ah! but you see they have their gardens." And



this not in those cases where the garden is part of the wages, but where the labourer rents it independently.

On the first introduction of the allotment system, early in the present century, it met with the most violent opposition, not only from the farmers, but also from the clergy and landlords, though it is only fair to say that some of its earliest and most ardent supporters were clergymen.\* The farmers feared that they would no longer get the same amount of work out of their men if these had their own ground to cultivate. It was thought probable that they would be tempted to steal seed corn, straw, and potatoes, and that they would always be in arrears of rent. None of these apprehensions appear to have been verified. Farmers do, indeed, complain that their men do not work as the last generation of labourers used to work, but probably there is a good deal of fancy in this; and there are others who still contend that allotments lying apart from the village are "an excuse and "cover for poaching, and other kinds of thieving

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



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

advantages of another kind are so great and so indisputable, that the Commissioners are abundantly justified in all they have said in its behalf.

Under the head of allotments we have all along been including cottage gardens, which are, of course, a much more beneficial form of the same system. But in many parts of England where, owing to the superior value of the land, villages have been built without cottage gardens, it would be difficult to introduce them now; and the only thing to be done is to get land for allotments as near the village as possible. This is a very important point, and it is considered doubtful if allotments which are placed on the outskirts of a parish, especially if consisting, as they often do, of inferior land, are not worse than useless. One rood is said to be the average quantity of land which a labourer can cultivate to advantage without neglecting his master's work, though there are peculiar cases in which an acre or more may be let to him with equal safety. These, however, are few and far between; and it is agreed that the line should be drawn at that point above which the labourer becomes a little farmer. An allotment of two or



three acres seems to work badly for all parties. Mr. Fraser found an estate in Gloucestershire where the allotments ranged from three to ten acres. No wonder that both the schoolmaster and the farmer condemn them. They take his scholars from the one and his workmen from the other. An allotment of this size can only be worked by the whole strength of the labourer's family, who are thus kept away from school; and he himself cannot do justice to both his own ground and his master's. Mr. Fraser thinks that the material welfare of the peasantry is promoted by the system. But his opinion is not borne out by the evidence of practical men.\* In fact, for a day labourer to farm an allotment ground of several acres is to try to do two things at once, and must generally, we should think, lead to the proverbial consequences.

Another point in connection with allotments is whether the occupants should be allowed to grow corn, or be restricted to vegetables and fruit. The propriety of this restriction was much upheld at one time, but we should think it is declining now. It

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



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

There is one kind of allotment, peculiar to a few counties, which we have not yet noticed, and which is an exception to some of the above rules. We mean the "cow run," or grass allotment, which is to be met with in Derbyshire, Shropshire, and Cheshire. In these more or less pastoral districts it is quite common for an ordinary day labourer to rent as much grass as will enable him to keep one

or two cows, and he is unanimously considered to be much better off than the small farmer. These grass grounds extend from four or five to as much as ten, twelve, or even twenty acres. But one of more than ten acres defeats its own object. It converts the labourer into a farmer, and usually ruins him. One man who was reduced from twenty acres to ten told the agent that he had "made a gentleman of him." The cow, moreover, interferes in no way with the labourer's daily work. His wife can manage her, and her annual value to the labourer is about £12. It is strongly recommended that these plots of land should always be rented direct from the proprietor of the soil — the squire or the clergyman, that is — and not from the farmers, who have a propensity to exact monstrous rents in return for the accommodation, not less sometimes than fourfold the rent of their own farms. Although the produce of an acre of land, cultivated by spade husbandry, may be greater in proportion\* than the produce of a large farm, yet it is properly maintained by the Commissioners that the labourer should not be

\* This, however, is a moot point.



charged any higher rent for it on that account, as he is entitled to the benefit of his own better tillage, which if he does not get, the object of the system is defeated.

The absorption of small farms into large ones, whereby the life of the peasant has been robbed of what constituted its chief solace—the hope, namely, of some day coming to be “a master man”—is classed by the Commissioners within that category of inconveniences which are inaccurately described when we call them necessary evils. Allotment grounds can never, of course, be a substitute for small farms. But the expediency of these last, from an economical point of view, is far from unquestioned; while the possibility of reviving them is, upon any hypothesis, very doubtful. At the same time a line is to be drawn between two classes of small farms; the farm, that is, of eight or ten acres,\* and the farm of fifty or sixty. Both come under one denomination; but they are fraught with very different

\* These must be distinguished from allotments; and it must be borne in mind that small and large mean different sizes in different parts of England.




results. The one, generally speaking, is the reward of the best class of peasants. The other, generally speaking, is the refuge of the worst class of farmers. The smaller plot of ground is cultivated with the nicest care. The larger is too often like the field of the slothful, grown over with thorns and nettles, and the walls thereof broken down. The disappearance of the former class has been injurious to society in more ways than one. But it seems probable, nevertheless, that the amelioration of the English peasantry is to be sought in another direction. The population has increased so much, that the multiplication of small farms in anything like proportion to its wants would seriously affect the space of ground available for large farms. And whatever tended to reduce the number of large farms would tend to reduce the amount of capital invested in agriculture. And this consummation, by discouraging scientific experiments, could not fail in the long run to be extremely mischievous.\* It is to a substantial and permanent rise in wages that we must ultimately look for the advancement of the English peasant to that degree of material

\* The whole question is treated separately in Chap. VIII.

prosperity at which he will consent to forego the profits of juvenile and female labour. The allotment system is an admirable subsidiary, but it can never be a real substitute for wages. And our own opinion is, that the more its operation is studied, the more clearly will it be seen that it is in its moral and social rather than its pecuniary results that its chief excellence consists.

## CHAPTER IV.

### EDUCATION.

HE children of the agricultural labourer are only, *mutatis mutandis*, in the same position as many other children who are unable to "complete their education." The problem which they present to us is fundamentally the same as that with which we are confronted in many other ranks of life—how, namely, to reconcile the claims of practical work with the development of the intellectual faculties; in other words, the necessity for technical training with the conditions of general education. As far as the English peasant is concerned, the shape it assumes is this. By sending his boys to farm work, instead of sending them to school, he at one and the same time increases his own income, and secures for his children that early familiarity with their work which



is, in his own opinion, necessary to their future welfare. In trade, in commerce, in law, in the scientific professions, we see the views of parents and guardians governed by the same consideration. It is idle to find fault with the labourer because he acts upon it too. But several further questions are suggested by this aspect of the case before we can approximate to a conclusion. Is the view itself a sound one? Is it universally, or only partially, sound? Would any rise in wages, within probable and reasonable limits, enable the labouring man to dispense with the earnings of his children?

The theory, we suppose, in the abstract is quite sound. It will hardly be disputed that early familiarity with the details of any kind of work is a very great advantage to the man whose lot it is to live by it. In some kinds of work it may be said to be indispensable; and the farmers contend that agriculture is one of these. They say, for instance, that boys can never learn the management of horses unless they begin very young. And we are quite prepared to believe it, since it is observable that a thorough insight into the nature of animals is seldom possessed but by those who

have played with them as children. And we must recollect, too, that an intelligent boy is being educated, in a way, all the time he is at work. He learns

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

It is by exercising his powers of observation on these and kindred subjects that he rises to the top of his profession, and is revered, like old Kester Bale in “Adam Bede,” who “knew the natur of all farming work” better than any man in the three parishes. It is men of this stamp who do well on little farms of their own, if they are ever lucky enough to get them. And it is questionable what equivalent a boy would get for this untaught wisdom by being kept at school till he was twelve. The mind is more open to receive deep and lasting impressions from outward things in early childhood than during the years which immediately succeed it. It seems at first sight hard for the Legislature to step in and prohibit prompt initiation into these Saturnian mysteries. Certainly City men would think it very hard if they were forbidden to send their sons to the counting-house

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or the solicitor's office at any age they liked. Fancy, it may be said, Parliament enacting that no lad should go to business under, say, eighteen years of age, lest his intellect should be cramped by professional studies before it had been properly cultivated by a due course of the "higher education." At the same time, there are arguments to be adduced on the other side. It is urged that if children go to farm work very young, they are liable to physical injury, which will do more to damage their prospects than physical training to advance them; that purely technical training must be accompanied by some of that general intelligence which a certain degree of schooling is required to develop; and that this is especially true in these days, when agriculture is becoming a highly scientific industry, and machinery, demanding skilled labour, is being introduced into almost every operation. Still we must not allow ourselves to be carried away by either of these arguments. There is abundant evidence to show that the physical injury which young children are said to sustain has been greatly exaggerated; while it seems probable that much of the machine



work which the labourers now have to conduct is as purely mechanical as anything else upon a farm, and often, indeed, requires less intelligence and less knowledge than the old methods of agriculture.

We have next to consider the effect upon this question which any rise of wages within the bounds of probability might be expected to exercise. Those who think with Mr. Tremeneere that the average labourer, in steady work—the “wet and dry” man, as he is called—is able even now to dispense with the earnings of his children, and to pay for their instruction at school, may see nothing improbable in the supposition that before long all may be in that position. All, however, depends on the view we take of what ought to be the labourer’s style of living. If we think he is at this moment as well fed, clothed, and lodged as he ought to be, then no doubt any surplus income accruing to him from a rise in wages ought to go to the education of his children. But it has frequently struck the writer of this article that, until that level is reached, we should be wrong to require him to do more than he does at present. Even

without taking altogether so unfavourable an estimate of his condition as Canon Girdlestone and Professor Rogers and other authorities, he has still an immense deal to do towards bettering his physical circumstances before he can be expected to sacrifice much to education. Should he not begin by withdrawing his wife and daughters from field labour? Would not some improvement in his clothes, his food, and his cottage be the next best thing to which he could address himself? Suppose his children's earnings are just what make the difference between living in a decent house and herding with his family in a pigsty, could we tell him he ought to elect squalor with schooling, to decency and comfort without? This question may be asked in a hundred different forms, and we must say we can see only one answer to it. If we are told that the labourer won't appreciate a good cottage and the decencies of life until you *have* educated him, the answer is, Let him take his choice, and see what he will do.

The whole subject presents four questions for solution. First, up to what age, if any, children may legitimately be debarred from field work and



kept to school altogether; secondly, to what extent they can be expected to attend school afterwards; thirdly, shall attendance, either before or after the period aforesaid, be compulsory? fourthly, if compulsory, how shall it be enforced? Upon the first point there seems a general concurrence of opinion among her Majesty's Commissioners. Mr. Tremenheere alone, whose scheme we shall discuss presently, is against all limitations upon labour for any purpose whatsoever. The rest all think that ten years of age is a reasonable limit to fix within which children shall be kept away from farm work. It seems to have struck all the Commissioners that this was a question which must be finally settled by a compromise—a compromise in which the interests of the farmer, the parents, and the child must all be more or less consulted. Juvenile labour is exceedingly valuable to the farmer; but under ten years of age it is not indispensable. The earnings of the children are extremely useful to the parents; but children under ten frequently do no more than pay for the extra food and clothes which they require when at work. Education is very valuable to the children; but,



by the time they are ten years of age, they may have learned as much as it is reasonable or practical to expect. This, upon the whole, seems to be the gist of the Reports on this question. It is thought that every child attending school two hundred days in the year, from five to ten years of age, would come up to Standard Five of the Revised Code, which exacts an adequate knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic. And then comes the second of the four questions—How are we to provide against their forgetting all they have learned, which it is feared they will do if at ten years old their education is finally concluded?

For the continued education of boys after they have once been hired three plans have been suggested—namely, half-days, alternate whole days, or a certain amount of attendance during the six months preceding each successive hiring;\* the last of course taking for granted that boys are only required continuously for six months out of the twelve. It will probably turn out that each of these methods will have its own particular fit-

\* Cf. p. 95.

ness for particular localities. Where the boys live a long way from their work the first plan is impracticable. Where the population is thin and every pair of hands is wanted at particular seasons, both the first and second are impracticable. Where the work of children is wanted through the whole year the last is impracticable. But if there is no district which combines all these adverse circumstances in itself, there is none, we should hope, that may not avail itself of one or other of the plans proposed. We ourselves should be inclined to think that the third-mentioned plan will be found the most generally useful, though it must be made to work with great elasticity. Mr. Henley suggests eighty-eight attendances during the six months preceding any regular engagement\* as what might safely be exacted. But one of the clergy in his district thought that even an every-day attendance was not too much to require. The season of the year in which boys are most in request varies in different places; but it seems to be generally admitted that everywhere there is *some* season in which boys up to twelve or thirteen

\* Cf. p. 95.



could continue to get a little schooling after they had begun work. Night schools are admitted to be very useful supplements, but they are not so well fitted for children as for adults, the former being too tired and sleepy after their day's work to profit by them. This, we say, is the general conclusion to be collected from the Reports of the Commissioners. But it is not to be supposed that there is not a strong counter-current of evidence. Competent witnesses think that after boys have once been sent to field work they would become unmanageable in the school; and also that there would be considerable difficulty in dovetailing them into the classes. And at p. 19 of the second Report of Mr. Stanhope is to be found a very forcible statement of the reasons which make it unlikely that night schools should ever be very serviceable to children who have left the day school.

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



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

But this much does seem certain, that if you debar young children from going to work with-

out making them go to school, they are pretty sure to get into mischief. It may be said, of course, that if it was a mere question between idling about the village and going to school, all parents would send their children to school. And where the parents of the child are intelligent and thrifty, and appreciate education, there might be no difficulty. But though a great many of our agricultural poor correspond to this description, a great many do not, and, considering the interference of the law as an unmitigated act of oppression, would endeavour to discredit it by every means in their power. And there are many ways in which a child of nine years old in a country village can earn a few pence besides regular farm work. By running errands, by opening gates, by mushrooming, by acorning, by stick-picking, to say nothing of more questionable pursuits, to which, under the circumstances supposed, the temptation would be unusually strong, a sharp boy of that age can earn some considerable addition to the family fund. Apples, gooseberries, and plums still grow in unprotected situations; hens still lay their eggs where the prowling urchin has a much better



chance of getting hold of them than the rightful owner; while the pig-tub and the wood-house are always at hand to stimulate his youthful energies.

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

We have stated that, in the opinion of the Commissioners, children under *eleven* years of age should be exempted from some kinds of farm work (*e.g.* stable work), and children under ten from all. It is on this latter point that Mr. Tremenheere joins issue with his colleagues. He contends, first of all, that the earnings of children under ten are



often indispensable to the parents, while in many of the most important agricultural counties there is an "imperious demand" for their labour. He denies that their earnings are more than absorbed by the extra food which they require, and the extra wear and tear of clothes which ensue when they are at work;\* and he scouts the notion that, with the exception of horse work, young children are put to any kind of agricultural labour which is physically injurious to them. He draws a very clear distinction between the farm and the factory. "In a factory or a workshop a child is liable to work in a close and heated atmosphere; and when working in connection with machinery, its attention is ever on the stretch, and its movements are often rapid and continuous for various periods of time together. The effect of such a mode of employment upon the very young was shown to be physically injurious to them, and therefore to justify legislative measures for their protection. But it has been seen that employment in the healthy occupations of agriculture cannot be shown to be attended with physical

\* Cf. p. 18.

“injury, even to the very young, with the exception which has been pointed out above, and for which the interposition of the Legislature has been suggested.

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



"consequently, are to them periods of entire  
"rest."

There being, therefore, such very strong grounds, on the score both of domestic economy and agricultural requirements, for permitting the use of juvenile labour below a certain age, and no adequate grounds on the score of health for prohibiting it, is there any *other* reason to justify the intervention of the Legislature? Such a reason, of course, is to be found in the necessity of insuring a sufficiency of education to the children of the poor. And here we are confronted by Mr. Tremenheere with his strong point. You may, he says, in fact, either forbid the child to go to work, or compel him to go to school; but you cannot *do both*. You cannot deprive the father of his child's earnings with one hand, while you add to his expenses with the other. There seems great common sense in this view, it must be admitted. And certainly, if we have to choose between relief from farm work without schooling, and schooling without relief from farm work, for the reasons we have already assigned (pp. 81, 82), if for no other, we should unhesitatingly prefer the latter. In the belief that these



are the two alternatives which we *shall* have to choose between, Mr. Tremenheere has devised a scheme for carrying out the last-mentioned one, which, if a little intricate at first sight, would not, we think, be found so in practice.

There is to be no limitation upon labour at all. But every child, until it attains the age of twelve years, must complete 160 school attendances in every year, beginning from the time when its first period of labour expires—a period of labour to be defined to be seventy-two days in the year, either continuous or intermittent. To complete the above number of attendances would take four months. If any child after the age of nine can pass an examination in the Fourth Standard of the Revised Code, the number of attendances required will be reduced to sixty, which will occupy only six weeks; and it is proposed that night-school attendances may reckon among them. “It is acknowledged on “all hands that when once a child has been able to “satisfy the requirements of the Fourth Standard, “it does not readily forget what it has learned, “and that a moderate amount of after application “is sufficient to keep up and extend it.” This is an

important admission. Thirdly, Mr. Tremenheere would allow the obligation of further school attendance to drop altogether in the case of every child who, at eleven years old, could pass in Standard Five.

This plan has the obvious advantage of reconciling, to an appreciable extent, the claims of education with the necessities of agriculture, and also of making farm work a direct stimulus to school work. And these—especially the latter—are most important points gained. The only doubt is, whether four months' schooling in the year would be enough to give any chance to proposals two and three of ever coming into play. Of all the children who got eight months' schooling between seven and nine years of age, how many would be able, at the end of it, to write from dictation, or to do a sum in compound division? It is perhaps worth notice, also, that a child who was nine years old in March would have a manifest advantage over one whose birthday happened in November. For the latter would have to apply for his certificate immediately after a period of field work, and the former after a period of school work. We cannot



## EDUCATION.

quite follow Mr. Tremenheere in his estimate of the pecuniary results of this system (108—112). But, without his assistance, it is easy to see that, if a child earns 1s. 6d. a week for six months, which comes to £1 19s., the deduction of 2d. a week for four months will be no very monstrous oppression. The fact is, that the processes of earning and learning must for a time go on together. The first, without the second, is injurious to the child; the second, without the first, is intolerable to the parents.

The penalty of evading the law Mr. Tremenheere proposes to distribute between parents and employers. When the child has either passed in the Fourth Standard, or has begun to get "permanent" employment—that is, employment extending through six months out of the twelve—the employer is to become liable; previously to those events the penalty would fall upon the parent. Mr. Tremenheere thinks that it would be too much to demand of the former that he should make himself acquainted with the history of every young child to whom he gives a chance job; whereas, when he takes a boy into regular work, he is

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naturally the proper person to be held responsible. And this point carries us direct to Mr. Forster's Bill. As that stands at present, the adoption of the compulsory system is left to the discretion of local School Boards, who may, if they like, enact bye-laws to give effect to it; though even then, on an address being presented to her Majesty in deprecation of such bye-laws, they are liable to be abrogated. The powers conferred upon the Board enable it to enforce the attendance at school of all children between five and twelve years of age; to determine how many attendances shall be sufficient; to accept or reject excuses for non-attendance; to pay the school fee where the parents can show that they are too poor to pay it themselves; and, finally, to inflict a fine, not exceeding five shillings, upon those parents who, in the absence of any reasonable cause, violate the bye-law. This, as will be seen, is the very mildest possible form in which the compulsory principle can be administered; while those variations in the conditions of agriculture to which we have before adverted, instead of being subject to the operations of one uniform law, which could not fail to be injurious in

a large proportion of cases, will, by this Bill, be left to the consideration of men who are sure to take due care that educational arrangements are accommodated to local circumstances. This last arrangement is admirable, and we trust will be retained through all the chances and changes to which Bills are subject. The dispensing power which it is proposed to lodge in these Boards is, perhaps, less entirely satisfactory. Mr. Tremenhore protests against "imposing on the magistrates the difficult, invidious, and undesirable task of granting dispensations from the requirements of an Act of Parliament." And the objection applies equally to a School Board. The suspicions of favouritism, and the facilities for deception which the system must inevitably involve, seem to us heavy drawbacks on its utility. At the same time, it is exceedingly difficult to see how in every case the delinquent could be made to pay. Those who keep their children from school would be those generally who stood most in need of their earnings; and thus the penalty would be most frequently incurred by those who could afford it least. As long as the penalty is made to fall upon the



parents, this result seems to be inevitable. And the only escape from it is by shifting it wholly to the employer, since Mr. Tremenheere's compromise would only transfer the liability to the farmer in a comparatively small number of cases. We do not think the hardship of making the farmer find out what the child's position is, before he gives it even a chance job, so great as Mr. Tremenheere seems to think. The parents would hardly venture to deceive him, and he could always learn the truth from the schoolmaster. We believe, therefore, that in every case the penalty should be levied exclusively on the farmer; and this provision would relieve the dispensing power of the District Boards from its most invidious feature.

Mr. Tufnell, the other Chief Commissioner, appears to have little faith in any such plan as Mr. Tremenheere's. He thinks that the difficulties in the way of examining the children would be insuperable, that the clergy would refuse the responsibility, and that the schoolmasters would be exposed to pressure from the children's parents. His other objections, however, do not apply to



Mr. Tremenheere's particular proposal, by which, on the contrary, they are to some extent overcome. He is in favour of the prohibition upon farm work in the case of children under ten, but considers that it *must* be accompanied by "a general system of education."

Setting aside the religious difficulty, which is not within the scope of this volume, the next great obstacle to the progress of education among the peasantry is the trying to effect too much. But, nevertheless, we cordially agree with the sentiments of Professor Buckman, who has been already quoted in this volume, and who expresses a strong opinion in favour of teaching children something about the objects which they meet with in their daily life; something, that is, of natural history, of which the ordinary school reading-book might be made the medium. He complains that in Dorsetshire the children know nothing of these things. They believe that three dragon-flies will sting a horse to death; that a cow sickens at once if a mouse creeps over her; and have other superstitions of an equally absurd kind. The daily dose of reading,

writing, and arithmetic might be beneficially varied with an occasional lesson on birds, beasts, and fishes, which would possess the inestimable advantage of constant practical illustration.

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

## CHAPTER V.

### HIRING.

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

The practice of yearly hiring for a certain class of servants still prevails generally in England,



and in some districts all kinds of servants are hired for a term. Servants who have skilled labour to dispose of, and are required for special departments of industry, such as carters, ploughmen, and shepherds, are almost everywhere, though not invariably, hired by the year. In the North of England all alike, as a rule, are hired for a term of six months. Women are hired either by the day, if out-of-door servants, or by the year or half-year if in-doors. With these exceptions the English agricultural labourer is hired from week to week.

There seems to be a general agreement that the whole system of hiring is at present on a bad footing. The practice of yearly hiring is looked upon by the farmers as their only security against something worse; that is to say, being left in the lurch by their men at critical seasons of the year. Mr. Fraser thinks this security illusory. "The only security that can guarantee good treatment to a servant, or good service to a master, is the security of mutual confidence and mutual regard. I cannot see what good it can possibly be to a farmer to be tied to, and unable to rid himself of, a worthless servant for a year. If the

"man is good for anything, the master can always make it worth his while to stay. The mere settlement of him in his cottage is a sort of "lien upon his continuance." These are plausible generalisations, no doubt. And if men were either perfect, or else mere machines, they would be unanswerable. But suppose a man hears at harvest time that a higher rate of wages is being paid in a particular locality, neither "confidence" nor "regard" will restrain an average specimen of agricultural humanity from trying to "better himself." And, secondly, the relations between master and servant are not governed exclusively by pecuniary considerations. A man may quarrel with his master about his work, when one perhaps is as much in the wrong as the other; or conceive a spite against him for any one of the hundred and odd reasons by which ignorant people will be actuated. Those who know the poor best, know best the extraordinary motives which occasionally prompt them to act in defiance of their own interests, and the impossibility of making them hear reason when once a prejudice has seized upon them. We can fully



believe, therefore, that the farmers do find the yearly hiring some kind of security, though it may be less substantial than it seems. On the other hand, as it provides security of labour to the master, it brings certainty of employment to the men—a certainty of employment during the whole year, with maintenance during sickness; and, where the men board with the farmer, better food than they could get in their own cottages. The moral effect of the latter system, as it was practised in former days, is commended by Mr. Norman, though others speak less favourably of it. “In consequence of this change the farmhouses which are now being built are not generally provided with the accommodation necessary for boarding labourers, and however much the science of agriculture may have advanced while this change has been going on, the friends of labourers must, I think, regret the abandonment of a system which supplied farm lads with good food, and subjected them, in many cases, to wholesome control at a time when they particularly required it, and relieved the overcrowded cottages in the villages of some portion



"of their inhabitants." Mr. Fraser writes to the same effect. But the evidence in favour of this "wholesome control" having been exercised either now or at any former time is rather slight, while the evils which arise from the mixture of male and female servants in the same house are beyond dispute. However, this is beside the mark. The two great drawbacks upon yearly hiring are, first, the corresponding yearly change which seems to be inseparable from it; and, secondly, the vagrant population which it has a tendency to generate. The periodical recurrence of the hiring season suggests to the peasant mind the necessity of being hired. Besides, there is the irresistible attraction of the "statty;"\* and yet why is he to go there unless he goes to get another master? Under the influence of these combined stimulants, men change their masters every year who have no earthly complaint to make against them, and who might otherwise have lived and died in the same service. "No sooner do the master and the servant get into the knowledge of each other's ways, and the latter to understand the master's methods

\* Statute fair. *Vide infra.*

“and his land, than Michaelmas comes round and “unsettles all again, and the same thing generally “occurs year after year.” (Frampton.) The second objection to the practice is even more serious. The day labourer is generally a native of the parish, and a constant resident therein. He and his family feel the full effect of all those local influences which contribute so much to the character of English rural life. They are in continual contact with the clergyman. They have an hereditary respect for the squire. They take a pride in the village. And they have, in fact, all the habits and instincts which are created by a settled life, and the action upon each individual of a local public opinion. The reverse is the case with the labourer who revolves from master to master through a circle of villages, and has no permanent connection with any of them. He becomes like the gipsy,

*Ἀφρήτωρ, ἀθέμιστος, ἀφέστιος.*

“Many of the clergy complain that the greater “part of their parishioners change every year. A “kind of vagrant population is created, who lose all



"home ties" (see Stanhope, II., 196); and it is impossible to expect from young men of this description a higher degree of morality and respectability than they generally exhibit. They grow up mere animals. In their demeanour they are rude, coarse, and insolent, and are at the bottom of half the evil which goes on in country parishes. These are the choice spirits among the Sunday loungers who contribute so prominent a feature of village life. They are to be seen, for the most part, gathering together in the street on Sunday afternoons, with their hands in their pockets, and occasionally short pipes in their mouths, and setting up a horse-laugh at nothing as the respectable inhabitants go by. The above, by-the-bye, is a singular moral phenomenon which human naturalists have not yet adequately explained. These knots of loutish lads, who regularly assemble at the same hour under some favourite wall or sheltered corner, never seem engaged in talk. There they stand, like the cows, apparently finding pleasure in the company of their fellows, and possibly communicating with each other through some organs which, to ordinary mortals, are unin-



telligible ; but to all appearance they are as dumb as the brute creation, from continual contact with which they may perhaps have acquired these mysterious powers. If it is asked, Would they not be just as bad though hired by the week ? the answer is, that they would not leave home for an engagement of a week's duration. Where carters and shepherds are hired by the week, they are taken from among the residents, who are more amenable to humanising influences.

In the North of England, which, by-the-bye, supplies exceptions to most of the general rules to be collected from the Commissioners' Reports, the system seems to work well in some important respects. Coupled with the system of boarding, it checks early marriages, and prevents a redundant population, though at a considerable cost to morality. And the men are so well paid that they know, if they are frugal and remain single for a certain time, they can save enough to take a small farm, the *ne plus ultra* of their hopes. To such an extent, indeed, have these considerations prevailed, that the labour market in Cumberland and Westmoreland is now under-stocked. Still,

that is the lesser evil 'of the two. Small farms, indeed, are not, upon the whole, desirable. Still, the hope of obtaining them tends to thrift, sobriety, and steadiness.

Finally, and taking England on the whole, we must remember that this system of yearly hiring tends to circulate the population, and to infuse new blood into the rural communities. The carter or ploughman who takes a place at some distance from his native village chooses a wife among the strangers, and settles down there, perhaps, for the rest of his life. At all events, he has done better physiologically than if he had remained at home and married a relation. And the love of change, and desire to see more of his little world than is open to him in one village, which prompts the young rustic to take service at a distance rather than in his native place, is far from being censurable in itself. The "vagrant population" aforesaid is a considerable evil; but it has its compensating advantages.

The advantages and disadvantages of the weekly system are obviously the reverse. There being no regularly recurring period for weekly hirings, there



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



"farmers in many places so bitterly complain." Yet, after all, it must be considered that if the farmer was not at liberty to adjust the supply of labour to the demand, and was obliged to pay his men whether he wanted them or not, the average of wages would be lower. Still the poor, doubtless, would prefer a lower rate with a certainty to a higher one without it. The second disadvantage is one which is explained at some length by Mr. Frampton, a farmer near Newbury. He says that payment by the day has a tendency to bring down the best workman to the level of the worst. His evidence is worth quoting. *"For instance, we have three men, A., B., C. A. is an able-bodied, industrious, trusty, persevering man, with a good head upon his shoulders, able and willing to turn his hand to anything, not given to eye-service (by which I mean working hard when the master is in sight, but very different when absent); in short, he is a man that tries to do his duty. We pay him, say, 2s. per day. B. is a man of equal powers and ability with A., but with an unwilling mind; can do anything, but would as soon not; rather given to eye-service, and does not see it necessary to do a fair*

*" day's work for a fair day's pay. We pay him also  
" 2s. per day. C. is a man with very little ability; in  
" fact, requires educating all over and all day long;  
" one that it matters but little how he goes through his  
" day, and what he does, whether it is right or wrong.  
" We pay him also 2s. per day. Now is this justice?  
" and what are its effects? Naturally to bring down  
" the best gradually to the level of the worst; and what  
" can it be but a degrading system? If A. does not  
" care to see it, B. and C. will soon prove to him  
" that they get as well paid as he does; and if A. at  
" first conscientiously objects, yet the natural bias of  
" his human nature, combined with the taunts of his  
" fellow-workmen, will gradually bring him down.  
" This I consider a system the very reverse of the one  
" we want to instil, and one that must have a great  
" tendency to keep down the price of labour, because  
" rendering it of so little worth. We want a system  
" that will cause emulation, a striving each one to do  
" his best, with a knowledge that his efforts will be  
" rewarded. But how is this to be attained? Some,  
" the uninitiated, may say, ' Turn off B. and C., that  
" ' is, the bad men, and get some more A.'s.' But where  
" are they to be found? Are you sure of getting any*



*"A.'s? And will the demand for labour allow it? I confess I know not the remedy. Individually, I believe nothing can be done except in exceptional cases, and collectively it must be a great undertaking. Could any kind of class system be introduced? I am fully aware that the opposition to any great change would be great, but I most sincerely wish some system better than the present might be found."*

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



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

Both Mr. Fraser and the gentleman from whom we have just quoted, Mr. Frampton, seem to think that a monthly hiring, with a month's notice, would be preferable to either the weekly or the yearly system; but the latter contends that it would not secure the farmer from being deserted by his men just, perhaps, when he wanted them

most. The monthly hiring would, doubtless, relieve the workman from a good deal of uncertainty; and it would possess the still greater advantage of being unconnected with a system which is a standing provocation to a change of situations, the statute fair; but it certainly would be open to the objection raised by Mr. Frampton. It would be too short a term for the indispensable men, the carter, ploughman, &c., where these have been used to yearly hiring; and though to the ordinary day labourer it would give greater certainty of employment, one does not see that it would in any way facilitate classification.

Piece-work is applicable to only certain kinds of agricultural labour, and at certain seasons of the year. If several men are employed upon the same job, they are all paid the sum agreed upon when it is finished, though some of them may have worked a great deal harder at it than others. The "shirker," therefore, gets his advantage out of it as much as out of day-work. And it is not conducive to the domestic economy of the cottager to have lump sums coming in at irregular periods, instead of the fixed weekly wages. On the other hand, it



enables the farmer to apply his labour most advantageously to himself, to get work done quickly, and, *on the whole*, it is more capable than the day system of giving its reward to merit. Mr. Culley thinks that piece-work entails physical injury upon men ignorant of the laws of health, and how to exert their strength to the best advantage.

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

A departure from the system of yearly or half-yearly hiring would likewise have the good effect of abolishing the statute fair, which is now the recognised labour mart for all but day labourers. For though yearly hiring can exist without statute fairs, statute fairs could not exist without yearly

hiring. These institutions have still their advocates; and it is certainly possible that by stricter supervision a different character might be imparted to them, and that they might in time become as innocent festivities as the village feast. Some efforts have already been made in this direction; but hitherto they have been few and far between, and the "statty," upon the whole, we should fear, with less of its original utility, retains most of its original licence. To lovers of old customs, however, who can for the moment put morals in the background, these scenes are not without a certain charm. All along the roads in the vicinity of the market town appointed for the ceremony, the young men and women of the neighbourhood are to be seen trooping along in their best clothes, and congregating eventually in the market-place, where they stand for hire like the labourers in the parable. The candidates indicate by a badge the peculiar service which they seek. The shepherd decorates his cap with a bunch of wool; the carter with a bit of whipcord; the housemaid with a sprig of broom; and both sexes alike, when they have been hired, pin a knot of bright-coloured



ribbons on the breast or shoulder, just as if they were "agoing for soldiers." When the business of the day is over, the evening is devoted to amusement—in other words, dancing and drinking, which produce their natural results, and are to a large extent accountable for that low standard of female honour which, according to Mr. Fraser, is characteristic of the English peasantry. The servants like the system, of course, because it gives them, at all events, one good outing in the year. The farmers like it, because, as they say, "they get a lot to pick from," and can compare the thews and sinews of a great many candidates for service before finally engaging one. We do not mean, of course, that they feel them over as they would a horse, or as their wives would thumb a couple of fowls; but they scan them critically, as the slave merchant would have scanned a negro, and naturally regard them in no other light than that of animals. It must be understood, however, that we are speaking only of one class of farmers who stick to the old road. We are aware that there are many others of a wholly distinct character, who dislike the system as much as any one can,

and would willingly abolish it could they find any practicable substitute.

This, however, is what it is very difficult to find. Mr. Portman, in Yorkshire, heard the system generally condemned as the source of much immorality, but observed that it was so deeply rooted that it would take many years and much trouble to establish anything in its place. Mr. Stanhope, on the contrary, insists that the statute fair is no necessary part of the system of yearly hiring; and that in Cheshire, where the system is universal, the fairs have been abolished. Mr. Henley, Mr. H. Tremenhore, and Mr. Portman seem to look with hope to some intermediate course, namely, the reformation of the system, and its subjection to more refining influences. In many towns rooms have been provided to insure the separation of the sexes. In one town the clergyman tried the experiment of providing tea and coffee for the girls, but they declined to come in without the men; and both alike seemed to prefer the open air. The most efficacious reformer of the "statty" promises to be the railway, as the men and women are gradually falling into the habit of going and returning by



train ; in which case half the mischief of the evening revel, and all the dangers of the walk home through dark lanes and lonely fields, are averted. On the degrading effect of men and women standing to be looked at like cattle, and selected only upon physical grounds, the Commissioners are not all agreed. Mr. Norman and Mr. Stanhope condemn it strongly. Mr. Henley and Mr. H. Tremmenheere see less harm in it. The former quotes the opinion of Sir C. Anderson, to the effect that there is nothing more degrading in the practice than in the examination of recruits for the army, or the selection of men for a racing boat. Where physical strength and activity are required, such inspection he considers indispensable.

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

"Hiring fairs in Northumberland and Durham are of two kinds, for hinds and single ser-

"vants; the former are hired for the year, the latter for six months. The hiring fairs for hinds usually take place about March, the service commencing on the 12th of May.

"Nothing can be more important to a man than hiring himself for a year. He must ascertain the house he will be compelled to occupy with his family, the character of master and steward, and what the wages are to be for himself and family. He is more likely to ascertain this in an open market, where he sells his only produce, his labour, than in any other way. The labour of every member of his family must also be taken into account. No register office would supply the information of an open market."

This view of the case is strongly corroborated by Mr. Tremenheere. In the open market the labourer meets his "master," and the characters of the various masters form the subject of free discussion. An amusing instance of this is given by the last-named Commissioner. "I shall inquire into your character," said a farmer to a man who offered himself for hire, "and you shall know my decision in the afternoon." At the appointed



hour the man reappeared, and addressing the farmer who desired to engage him, said, "Since I saw you this morning I have inquired into *your* character, and my decision is to have nothing more to do with you." But the fact is, to repeat it for the third or fourth time, the condition of the North is exceptional. The demand for labour exceeds the supply; and the consequence is that the labourer is master of the position. It is curiously illustrative of this condition, that what the labourer looks to first in the farmer with whom he is in treaty is not what wages he gives, but whether he is good-tempered, and keeps "a liberal table."

Moreover, the two last-named Commissioners evidently look with an indulgent eye on the statute fair, as one of the few opportunities of amusement which the poor possess, and of which we ought not too hastily to deprive them. "Personal observation at several fairs," says Mr. Henley, "did not impress me with anything objectionable; but the usual enjoyments of race-meetings, flower-shows, &c., were making many very happy faces." Well, this is kindly said; and

we honour Mr. Henley for his sympathy with these poor people, "whose long life of labour is "so seldom cheered up with a gleam of sunshine." Still, these relaxations may be bought at too high a price; and whatever be the case in Cumberland, where the women, it seems, have little to lose, there can be no doubt that the price is a high one elsewhere. There is more force in the argument, that where there's a will there's a way; that is to say, that if they don't have their statute fair, the young men and women will devise some equivalent for it. They would come to the market-place on market-day, it is said, and that would be just as bad. They would not do this, however, if yearly and half-yearly hirings were abolished; and though there is no necessary link between the two, we suspect that wherever the one exists the other will be found also, in some shape or another.

The passion for dress and dancing, which prevails to an extraordinary extent among the canny daughters of the North, goes some way to explain the attachment of the peasantry to the "mop." Incredible as it may sound to southern ears, a day labourer in Cumberland, who calls himself



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

Against the combination of the *utile* and the *dulce* which the "statty" thus presents, register offices have as yet waged an ineffectual war. The best suggestion on the subject which has yet been made appears in the Report of Mr. Portman, wherein it is suggested that the schoolmaster in every village should keep the register. Such a system, however, presupposes that the young people in each village are willing to remain at home, which even, *ceteris paribus*, we don't believe to be the case, though in the case of district schools, such as we may have in future, the scheme would probably be successful. Mr. Thomas, the clergyman of Warmsworth, near Doncaster, says that he had himself extemporised a kind of registry which answered very well indeed. He used to leave lists of boys and girls wanting places at the principal shops in Doncaster, so that the farmers from the whole neighbourhood used to apply to him. But how many clergymen could afford time for this? He adds, that if you did it solely for the girls, it would be sufficient, as the young men at the "statties," without the women, "behave tolerably steadily." We can believe it; but the



effectual and permanent separation of the two is beyond the power of authority.

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

hiring, and the extent to which good conduct ought to be enforced afterwards. The latter question, no doubt, is one which every farmer must answer according to his conscience. But it is easy to see that his material interests suffer by his not requiring some testimony to character from the servant whom he hires at a fair. For instance, take the evidence of Mr. Frampton, to which we owe so much already. "Last Michaelmas," says he, "I hired a carter by the month. He stayed 'till the days got out, made some frivolous excuse, and gave me notice. I said, 'What, throw yourself out of a place, and me out of a servant!' 'Oh,' he said, 'I have a better place, and more money.'"

Now it is evident that this man could never have behaved in this way if every employer made a point of demanding a written character from the last place. The tendency of servants "to better themselves," as they call it, without the slightest regard to the interest of their masters, of which farmers so bitterly complain, would be effectually restrained by this practice—a practice, too, which it is in their own power to set in action to-morrow. As to requiring testimonials to morality, we don't

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exactly see how these could work. It is the business of a dairy-maid to make cheese, as it is of a ploughman to make furrows. And the farmer, who has to live by his cows or by his corn, can hardly be expected not to make proficiency in those arts his primary object. We should be sorry to treat so serious a subject with anything like levity or ridicule, but the complaint about the dairy-maids reminds us irresistibly of the advertisements for a pious lodger, or a Christian butler, which one occasionally sees in the *Times*. At the same time, if masters would combine together, so that girls who had met with "misfortunes" found themselves experiencing every year greater difficulties in getting employed, it cannot be doubted that vice would be materially checked, though at some hardship to individuals. It is questionable, however, whether the morality of female farm-servants is so very much below that of others, as we should be led to infer from these Reports. Ladies have no time to make searching inquiries into the past life of every housemaid they engage. If anything improper comes to the knowledge of the mistress while the girl is in her service, the former is bound, of course,

to take notice of it in any character which she may hereafter be called upon to give her. But even if we suppose that this obligation is always respected, it is certain that a good deal of immorality does prevail among domestic servants which eludes the knowledge of their employers, even where "misfortunes" follow. And if an inferior master takes less trouble about the character of a servant who is not a family servant than a superior master takes about the character of one who is, that is, perhaps, the whole of the difference.

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



might possibly be reformed, much in the same way in which, in many parts of England, village feasts and harvest-homes have been reformed. These festivals were at one time scenes of great excess, and the former of them, at least, one of great profligacy. But through the exertions of the clergy and other well-disposed persons, both have lost their worst features, and have become, the one a decent, the other even a pious institution. If statute fairs we still must have, why should not some regular and respectable entertainment be provided for the youngsters, and the evening dance be held under the auspices of the parish clergyman? Another generation would soon grow up to whom the rough romping and swinish merriment of the present system would seem as abominable as the spectacle of half-a-dozen gentlemen of birth under the dining-room table would seem to us. Lastly, although the conditions of agricultural service make it less the interest of the farmer to inquire into the character of his servants, yet to do so to a certain extent is manifestly to his own advantage; while he ought not to object to being told that of the young people living under his own roof he is bound, by

every tie which binds society together, to consult both the moral and religious welfare. If he regards his servants only as so many "hands," like the workpeople in a factory, he is violating, certainly, no law of political economy, but he is throwing away the advantages of the situation in which Providence has placed him, and neglecting to do the good which he *can* do, and which the majority of mill-owners cannot.



## CHAPTER VI.

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



VICE which is condemned by public opinion, and exposed, whenever it shows itself, to either unfeigned ridicule or unfeigned indignation, is, we may be sure, a doomed vice; for very few natures are really callous to the opinion of the world, and still fewer are strong enough to maintain a course of steady hypocrisy, so as to conceal their defiance of it. But, unhappily, there are two kinds of public opinion, one of which is the result of a deep moral conviction, while the other is only, as it were, an opinion *de convenance*—a kind of general understanding in the interest of social decorum. The influence of the latter is of course only superficial, and confined to those circles whose comfort it is found to promote. The influence of the former is felt everywhere, and

extends to the abstract evil of vicious habits as well as to the public inconvenience of them. The one kind of opinion, however, is frequently mistaken for the other; and we are not sure that this is not sometimes the case when the vice of drunkenness is discussed. Drinking to excess is now discountenanced in good society, and to enter a drawing-room drunk would be as bad as to enter it naked. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we shall confess it is very doubtful if this general unanimity on the subject springs from any deeper disapproval of sensuality in the abstract than was entertained by our forefathers. It is simply a matter of good taste. The spectacle of intoxication has become unpleasant; a better educated and more accomplished generation has other resources than the bottle; health is thought a great deal more of. But it would be rash to assert, dogmatically, that, if less coarse in our lives than was the generation which preceded us, we are not at least equally voluptuous. Now those classes in society who have not made the like progress in refinement have an instinctive perception of this truth. They are not to be taken in. Sobriety, they



see, is the fashion; and those who aspire to be fashionable endeavour to be sober. But we greatly doubt if the feeling goes deeper than this. And as soon as we come down to a class which is wholly unaffected by such considerations we see the vice as rampant as ever. If it is a little on the decline in some places, it has gained ground in others. And the difficulty of dealing with it by any other means alone makes the improved education of the poor a matter of paramount importance. But we hope we shall give no offence by saying that, even *with* an improved system of education, the labouring classes will scarcely be weaned from this habit as long as the class just above them continues to indulge it. With a certain class of farmers and tradesmen the brandy-bottle is still in daily requisition, and they are seldom seen absolutely sober after dinner. Their men overhear them joking each other on the subject; and if one of them has tumbled into the ditch coming home from market, or met with any other humorous incident of the same kind under the influence of Bacchus, he is the hero of the hour. The labouring man may see that drinking is a bad game—that it

impoverishes his family and impairs his strength; but he will never entertain that rooted aversion to it which is necessary to any real reformation while he sees his betters either continue to practise it themselves, or to regard it only as an amiable weakness in their neighbours. And here it may be as well to state that there is much in the private lives, as well as in the business, of both farmers and tradespeople, which Commissioners and clergymen do not very readily get at. The former, as a rule, come in contact with only the better class of farmers. From the latter, of course, excesses are to some extent concealed. It would be absurd to deny that there is a very numerous and growing class of tenant-farmers who might be trusted to drink with a bishop, and are as much alive to the grossness of the vice of intoxication as the greatest gentleman in St. James's. But it is equally undeniable that between these and the labourers there is another very large class of whom as much cannot certainly be said, who continue to look upon drunkenness as a way that men have, and one of those ambiguous habits which, as they cannot be suppressed, ought to be made to yield as much fun as



possible. Nor, indeed, is this view of the matter confined to farmers. At the present moment great allowance should be made for the English labourer. Everything is against him: tradition, example, the proximity of the beer-shop, the squalor of the cottage, the custom of the country, which dignifies drink by clothing it with the livery of wages; all these drag him one way, and that, of course, a very sloppy one. Some of these agencies are only to be cured by time, but others are amenable to legislation; and we may hope that ere long they will be reached by it. In the meantime we must not judge too harshly the unfortunate labourer who quits a comfortless home and a scolding wife for the bright hearth and the social circle which await him at the Dragon.

Mr. Fraser attributes a great increase in drunkenness to the new Excise Licences, which were introduced in 1863. Before that time, every keeper of a beer-shop, as distinct from a public-house, was under some restraint—not much, perhaps, but some. Before obtaining his licence from the Commissioners of Excise, he was bound to produce a certificate of good conduct signed by six respect-

able inhabitants of the parish. That the law was often practically evaded may be true, but it was better than no law at all. Now, in 1863 it was enacted that whoever took out a wholesale beer licence—that is, a licence to sell not less than four and a half gallons not to be drunk on the premises—was also entitled, if he chose, to a retail licence to sell beer not to be drunk on the premises, without any certificate or other guarantee of his fitness. The upshot of this has been an immense increase in the number of beer-shops, kept often by the worst characters, who easily evade the restriction as to drinking on the premises, and whose locality is the haunt of all the bad characters in the neighbourhood.

We have no doubt of the truth of this view. And the mischief which these houses generate spreads beyond intoxication. These are the haunts of poachers and other wild characters of the district, who “corrupt the youth,” and sometimes familiarise them with costlier game than hares, and more dangerous implements than nets. But these are not the places to which the married man in good employment is drawn after



his day's work, instead of going home to his cottage. They are very demoralising agencies in a country neighbourhood, but they don't do the particular kind of harm we are concerned with at the present moment. To effect this, the public-house must be in the village, and houses such as the above usually stand on the outskirts. The respectable paterfamilias who goes to the Crown in the evening doesn't want to meet such society as assembles at the Fox and Grapes. He desires to meet his coevals, and to discuss the news of the village, and perhaps a bit of politics, in quite a decent and quiet fashion. But even in doing this he spends more than he can afford, and drinks more than he can bear. Little by little he gets behindhand in the world, runs in debt at the chandler's, injures his health, and at last falls an easy prey to the first illness that attacks him; whereas the money spent at the public-house, laid out upon warm clothes and more substantial food, would have enabled him, with an unimpaired constitution, to weather any ordinary disease. No doubt these habits of tippling are encouraged by the multiplication of public-houses, for the more

competition there is, the more important a personage does each customer become. But it would probably be impossible at the present day to effect any such reduction in the number of beer-shops as would make an appreciable impression upon the vice of drunkenness. Mr. Stanhope calls attention "to the feeling which everywhere exists as to the "necessity of limiting the number of beer-houses, "obtaining more control over them, and of transferring their supervision to some more competent "authority;" but adds—"For my own part, I "look with far more confidence to the effect which "will be produced by an improvement in the "condition of the cottages, in enabling them to "compete in attractiveness with the warm and "well-lighted public-house. I say their condition, "because some believe that this object can best be "achieved by a change in their situation; that is, "by placing them on the farms, where the man is "further removed from temptation. In the same "way other landowners have endeavoured to check "the evil by not permitting any public-house to be "opened in the village of which they are sole proprietors. I cannot speak very highly of the suc-



“cess of these attempts. A drunkard will drink  
“in spite of the trifling obstacle of distance; and  
“considerable injustice is caused to others, who  
“are charged an exorbitant price for the poisonous  
“liquor which is sold to them as beer.”

We quite agree with this opinion; but at the same time we think some reduction might be made in the number of *public-houses*, and that shops for the sale of beer, in any quantity, not to be drunk on the premises, might advantageously be substituted for them, if the law were strictly carried out, as we see no reason why it should not be. It is not an uncommon thing nowadays to see two public-houses, or veritable inns, in a village of four hundred people. They cannot both be wanted. They never could have been in villages which lie among the lanes remote from the chief lines of traffic; while even in those which lie on turnpike roads they cannot be required now, whatever they might have been once. Before the introduction of railways, when goods were still conveyed by waggon, and still earlier, when journeys were performed on horseback, the village inn, with the great elm tree and horse-trough in front of it, and

the rambling old stables in the rear, was not merely a picturesque antiquity, but one of the necessities of life. Nowadays, the only useful purpose which it serves is to accommodate the village club at its annual dinner and its monthly meetings, or to pick up a stray guest when the parsonage happens to be full. At all events, if it does more than this, *two* such houses are not wanted in any one rural parish. Accordingly, if in each village there was only one place where people could meet and drink together, while, for the sake of competition, shops were licensed to sell beer exclusively for home consumption, and vigilantly watched by the police to see that this condition was observed, one great step would have been taken towards the diminution of drunkenness.

The next is the improvement of cottages. But, as this point has been discussed already, we shall pass on to the third—the quality of beer sold. The only one of the Commissioners who has made a point of this is Mr. Norman, but it yields in importance to none of the influences by which the sobriety of the labourer is affected. The abominable mixtures which are sold for beer in many



village inns not only stimulate instead of quenching thirst, but are so concocted as to produce immediate stupefaction. The peasant who goes in for his half-pint of beer on his way home—no very heinous crime surely—feels, when he has swallowed it, just as if he had been drugged, sits down helplessly in a corner, and continues to drink almost mechanically—with what result may be imagined; or even if he does not do that, the small quantity he has taken has such an effect upon him, that if his master or the clergyman meets him between the public-house and his cottage, he fancies him intoxicated, and forthwith registers him as drunkard. The natural result of giving the dog a bad name ensues, and one more character is gone. The keepers of these houses have been known to lament the necessity which compelled them to vend such stuff. But they have no choice. The house is a close house; that is to say, it belongs to some small brewer in the neighbouring market town, and the publican is little more than his agent. In London we believe the adulteration of beer mostly begins in the public-house; elsewhere it is completed in the brewery. Mr. Norman says that

any new Act of Parliament, of which the object is to check intemperance, should deal with the article sold as well as with the person selling it. And even now it is difficult to understand why the adulteration of beer cannot be detected and punished as easily as the adulteration of bread. The fact, however, remains that little or no effort ever is made to bring home this offence to the perpetrator. And in default of any enactment to facilitate the punishment of the criminal, we should say the only way to help the poor is to destroy the profits of the crime. To save them from drinking bad beer we must provide them with the means of getting better. Such was the opinion of Mr. Culley (Rep. II., 93):—"I do not for a moment desire that  
"the labourer should be denied every facility for  
"quenching his thirst in beer; on the contrary, I  
"should like to see beer sold across every counter  
"with as little restriction as bread and butter, save  
"only that it should not be drunk on the premises.  
"I would confine the licence to sell beer to be  
"drunk on the premises to that class of houses  
"which are also licensed to sell spirits. Under  
"such a system a man would probably take home

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“to his family only so much beer as he could conveniently pay for, and as they could consume without injury, and he would be robbed of the temptations to excess which it is the business of the beer-house keeper to provide.”

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

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

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

The other encouragements to drunkenness which



are independent of the public-house are chiefly urged by Mr. Fraser, though none of his colleagues contradict him. The harvest-home and the largesse are particularly obnoxious to this charge. At the former the farmer's hospitality is impeached if the men do not get "well on." He admits, however, that even the farmers are in many places endeavouring to correct the abuse; and in various parts of England we fancy the harvest-home is now carried on with much decorum. Some attempts which have been made to conduct it on a new system, we are aware, have been failures, but not all. Mr. Fraser mentions particularly the failure of Lord Albemarle at Banham, who tried to substitute a monster tea-meeting, attended by two or three thousand people, to whom suitable speeches were addressed. But the experiment was never repeated; and of the attempt Mr. Fraser says very sensibly—"A monster meeting is not "the remedy for a social evil. The mere conflux "of a crowd is what Roman Catholic divines call "*fomes peccati*." But he admits that in his own parish general harvest-homes have been conducted without drunkenness, and apparently to the satis-

faction of everybody. Many employers, we are told, have substituted a fixed money payment for the old harvest supper. But Mr Fraser does not approve of this. "These old English customs, "however degraded, point to a time when the "relation between master and man was ennobled "by a higher sentiment than the greed of gain; "and in this nineteenth century anything that "breaks down the distinctions of caste, and gives "an opportunity for the effusion of the feelings of "good fellowship and true hospitality, is a link in "our social system not lightly to be snapped in "twain." This gentleman evidently believes that the harvest-home is capable of being brought into harmony with modern ideas, and that there is no necessity for abolishing it. We ourselves have no doubt that a master who really took pains could, in a very short time, make his own men ashamed of getting drunk in his presence. And this step gained, the rest would gradually follow. Not so, however, with another custom, which seems thoroughly bad, and happily is far from universal, and that is "largesse," a sort of supplement to the harvest-home, which licks up whatever crumbs of



sobriety were left by the preceding entertainment. The custom, as described by a Norfolk rector, is as follows :—

“ The harvest ended, the master sometimes gives  
“ his men a supper at his own house, but that is  
“ the exception ; he more generally gives a sum to  
“ be spent by them in supper at a public-house.  
“ After this supper, which is sometimes attended  
“ by persons of both sexes, and at which the lan-  
“ guage, the songs, the utter absence of decorum,  
“ the drunkenness and riot, surpass, I believe, all  
“ and more than we can conceive to be possible  
“ amongst a society calling themselves Christians,  
“ the harvest party, half stupefied by the debauch  
“ of the previous night, start ‘ begging largesse.’  
“ This largesse gathering is not confined to their  
“ own parish, but is extended from house to house  
“ throughout the district, wherever a friend or  
“ tradesman of their employer is to be found. At  
“ some places they get beer, at others they collect  
“ money, stopping at all the public-houses on their  
“ way ; and the sum so collected, if sufficient, is  
“ spent in another supper, but more often expended  
“ wholly in beer. Respectable men, who at other

"times never enter a public-house, are frequently  
"thus seen disgracing themselves, and speak with  
"bitterness of the tyrant custom."

The present writer is not aware that any custom of the same kind prevails in either the midland, the southern, or the western counties; and it must be admitted that, for some reason or other, the peasantry of the eastern counties do seem a grosser race than is to be met with in other parts of England.

All the Commissioners alike, however, comment on the well-known fact that no business can be transacted in the country without beer. Every bargain must be wetted, and all sorts of odd jobs are just as often remunerated in liquor as in cash. If you want a lad to run an errand, "Tom or "Charles 'll do it, sir, for a pint o' beer, I dare "say," is the answer to your inquiry. And so strong is the tradition that, even if he didn't spend the threepence in liquor, he would still call it "a "pint o' beer." Generally speaking, however, he would scorn to spend it on anything else, whether he was thirsty or not. It is this general belief in drink as the *τὸ ἀριστον* which it is so exceedingly difficult to



eradicate from the working class. A holiday with them means drink; a legacy with them means more and better drink; a gentleman is one who can always get the best to drink; a lady is one who gracefully asks you if you want drink. All festivals are failures without drink. When a groom has carried a message, or a keeper delivered some game, he is instantly asked, on his return, did he drink? In fact, the idea of drink is interwoven with every action of their lives, and follows them from their cradle to their grave like a religion. This genial superstition is not to be uprooted in a day; nor will it even be shaken among the peasantry until it has disappeared among the farmers. As long as it meets with any kind of recognition, either at their hands or at the hands of a class yet above them, it will continue to flourish like an evergreen.

From public-houses to poaching the transition is a very simple one. The exact amount of demoralisation among the English peasantry with which poaching is chargeable it is not very easy to calculate; but the most demoralising form of it is directly encouraged by the beer-shop. Roughly

speaking, poachers may be divided into three kinds: the starving peasant, who steals a rabbit to provide his family with a meal; the professional gang, who supply the poulterer and fishmonger, and who, in the great lottery of crime, have simply drawn hares and pheasants, instead of bank-notes and jewels; and, thirdly, the idle scamp, who is to be found in all villages, who snares and shoots on the sly, and drinks out his booty at the public-house. Now, the first of these is a simple myth, notwithstanding the sympathy which has been showered upon him by philanthropists whose zeal outruns their knowledge. The second are not peculiar to the country; and, indeed, the larger and more formidable gangs are usually recruited from the towns. But of course they use the country public-houses of the worst sort, such as have thriven since 1863, which frequently combine together to form a kind of fund from which the poachers' expenses, in the way of fines, loss of implements, &c., are defrayed. Here, of course, they come in contact with the village population, and naturally with the worst effects. But, after all, we have reason to believe it is the facilities for



disposing of a single hare or pheasant afforded by these houses which are the greatest incentives to poaching among the agricultural poor, and teach many a lad to poach who would never have thought of it otherwise. Excessive preservation is not essential to this kind of poaching, and yet of all kinds it is the most demoralising. Egg-stealing is one form of poaching which has, no doubt, a bad effect on rustic morals, but we doubt if it be so wide-spread an evil as the pursuit of game. On carefully-preserved estates every nest is watched, and if the eggs are taken, the theft is sure to be known, and the thief is sure to be suspected. Labourers may steal eggs on outlying or non-preserved farms; but if they do it where the farmer himself shoots, they run a greater risk than they do even from the gamekeeper. So that, after all, the field of operations open to the egg-stealer is considerably narrowed, and the demoralisation which attends him must be very partial.

As to the general effects of excessive preservation, we cordially agree with Mr. Fraser in thinking it a grievous blunder. But it is a farmer's question, not a labourer's. As for saying that

game is a temptation to the peasantry, the fallacy involved in the assertion is so obvious, and yet so generally accepted, that it may be worth while to examine it with some care. The thesis is that the Game Laws are injurious to the morals of the people; therefore they ought to be abolished. This bare statement, however, implies the existence of a syllogism of which the major premiss is this—that all things which are injurious to the morals of the people ought to be abolished. It is plain either that this cannot be the case, or that the principle of property is a vicious one. For all property is a temptation, and all temptations are injurious to the morals of the people. By the common consent of mankind, therefore, we may assume that our major premiss is to be negatived. We then descend to a particular affirmative—some things which are injurious to the morals of the people ought to be abolished. Very good; but what things? And here we are plunged into a sea of casuistry in which we may toss ourselves about for ever. Generally we may say that all things which are both immoral in themselves, and exist only for the sake of immorality,



ought to be abolished. In this list would come gambling-houses and brothels. Then we come to things which are immoral in themselves, but of which the object or final cause is not immoral, such as bribery at elections; for there is no immorality in being a Member of Parliament. And, thirdly, we may come to things which, though moral in themselves, do nevertheless conduce to immorality, such as public-houses. Now it is clear that Game Laws come under neither of the first two heads. They are not immoral in the abstract. We have to consider them, then, as they come under the third—things which, in themselves innocent, conduce in their effects to vice. But we now find ourselves face to face with a very simple formula which it is common to apply to such cases; we mean the use and the abuse of things. And we set the one against the other. As De Quincey points out, the much-maligned science of casuistry is nevertheless in universal operation in the affairs of the world. We are always obliged to make cases. Now, in this instance, we can lay down no principle. We can only say that, wherever the abuse exceeds the use,

palpably, grossly, and to such an extent as almost to override and extinguish it, then such things should be abolished. Common sense is the only tribunal by which this point can be determined. We consider that in this respect the public-house question is closely analogous to the Game-Law question. Both are temptations to vice. But, on the other hand, it is contended that both serve other purposes, which are not only innocent, but in the one case necessary, and in the other salutary; of which the evil they do by the temptations they hold out is not great enough to justify the stoppage. On broad grounds it may be added that, as all classes of mankind are exposed to their particular temptations in the path of life, the poor must expect to have theirs; and that this system of removing all temptations *because they are* temptations is inconsistent with the theory of moral discipline, and the formation of virtuous habits.

It is pretty clear that no such effectual extinguisher could be placed upon poaching as a legislative enactment which should cut away his market from the poacher. At present it is beyond dispute that the source and root of all the evil is in



the fishmonger's back-parlour. It is obvious that for more than a century and a half this truth has been apparent to Government, and that they have been fruitlessly endeavouring to act upon it. But hitherto every attempt to check unlawful traffic in game has been a practical failure. The twenty-eighth clause of the 1st and 2nd William IV., which we have already cited, has remained a dead letter. Poulterers and fishmongers continue their dealings with the poacher in almost absolute security, and have been known to joke even a county Member about the pheasants which they had from his preserves. The difficulty of detection seems almost insuperable. Yet, until the "fence" can be got at, we shall do very little with the thief. The Act of 1862, which empowered the police to stop and search carts or suspicious-looking jacket-pockets, and apprehend the owners if they were found to contain game, has worked well. But, after all, it has but thrown one additional difficulty in the poacher's path: it has caused more poachers to be caught, but it hasn't diminished poaching. Neither will anything have that effect till a blow can be struck at the trade; till the poacher's pro-

fits are affected; till the springs which feed the stream begin to fail. Till that can be done we may throw obstacles in the poacher's way, but they will no more kill poaching than dams will dry up a river.

If all game-preservers were forced to take out a separate licence for selling game, it would have one of two effects: either they would pay the licence, and in that case sell a great deal more game, or they would not pay it, and in that case would preserve a good deal less. Either alternative would be attended by other good results. In the first place, the more game the dealers got from gentlemen, the less they would require from poachers. In the second place, the payment of this sum would form an additional contribution to the revenue, and would *pro tanto* diminish the odium of preserving, and proportionably the sympathy with poaching. On the second hypothesis, excessive preserving would be got rid of, the complaints of the farmer would be stopped, and the profits of poaching much reduced. We cannot help thinking that if this suggestion were adopted, means might still be found of bringing home



offences to the game-dealers, and of making their trade with poachers much more dangerous and precarious than it is at present. Moreover, there is no reason why gentlemen should not make a trade of rearing and selling game as of rearing and selling sheep. And if the system were regularly established and recognised, it is possible that a feeling would gradually spring up among the dealers adverse to buying from the poacher. There is many a butcher now who wouldn't buy stolen sheep, though he knew he shouldn't be detected. And we sincerely believe that, if poaching were more generally exhibited in its true light, and robbed of that mystery and romance which at present shroud it, such a feeling would become very common.

A word or two, in conclusion, of what is called "Justices' justice" in its relation to poaching. We constantly see convictions which have been obtained before country magistrates made the subject of very severe animadversion in the London press, and there are two observations which we desire to make upon the subject. One is this—that there is a border-land between the professional poacher

and the honest labourer, if not so wide as it used to be, still much wider than skirts any other criminal profession; and that the existence of this border-land is a source of great perplexity to magistrates. If a man is caught picking a pocket, or breaking into a house, or swindling by an assumed name, or anything of that kind, he is pretty sure to be a regular professional criminal. But the man who snares a rabbit is not equally sure to be a professional poacher. He is on the high road to become one; that is certain. But he may have done it for the fun of the thing; or from an idea of its cleverness; or merely from a lawless disposition in general. But there is very great difficulty in distinguishing between a man of this class and a confirmed offender; and probably hardly any one can do it but those who live upon the spot, and have constant opportunities of observing him. This is one reason why the evidence of gamekeepers and the decision of local magistrates have often more in them than meets the eye of the general public. This is a point in their favour. There is, secondly, one that tells against them in just about an equal

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degree. Between gamekeepers and poachers, and especially such poachers as oftenest come before the magistrates, there is a much more bitter feeling than exists between officers of justice in general and criminals in general. They are pitted against each other in a much more personal way; and the game which the poacher takes is what the keeper regards almost as his own. He has reared it and tended it early and late, and has an interest in it which it is quite impossible a policeman should feel for the stock-in-trade of a goldsmith or a watchmaker. Then, again, the policeman is one of a numerous and disciplined force, the lustre of whose exploits is reflected upon each member of it, whether he has done anything himself or not. But a keeper has his *own* reputation either to make or to maintain. What keepers in general may do affects not him. *He* would be thought none the better of, though a keeper in the next county had taken twenty poachers single-handed. Consequently, there is generally a tendency, kept in check, or developed, according to the character of the master, on the part of keepers to make business, and to demonstrate their own

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



## CHAPTER VII.

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

HAT benefit societies are frequently the reverse of beneficial to the unfortunate labourers who belong to them is what every one is now aware of. But still the principle itself seems sound enough, and if the machinery were amended, they would be properly included among the ameliorating circumstances of agricultural life. At the present time they seem to have gone altogether wrong. They do that which they ought not to do, and leave undone that which they ought to do; they squander their money upon beer, and repudiate their just debts; they lead a jolly life for a few years, and as soon as the necessity of meeting their original engagements begins to threaten them, they are dissolved, and the funds evenly divided. The young members join another

club. But what becomes of the old men, who had pinched themselves for many years to secure a provision for their old age? This selfish and dishonest practice is so general throughout the country as to have caused the Commissioners to report most unfavourably of the operation of benefit societies.

The Commissioners differ, however, a good deal in regard to the details of these institutions. Some think that the annual celebration, with its procession, its banners, its sermon, and its dinner, simply entails drunkenness and waste of funds, and that it ought to be abolished. Mr. Stanhope thinks, on the contrary, that these things are so great an attraction, and form so strong an inducement to the labourer to join a club, that, if we think it good for him to do so, we ought not to discourage them. We must say we think it doubtful how far the advocates of the opposite view come into court with clean hands. The intimate connection which exists in England between charity and conviviality is so old a joke that we can now refer to it without joking; and if rich people, whose life is one long holiday, or men of business, whose evenings are



devoted to enjoyment, find it necessary to keep up the system of public dinners, and so forth, we scarcely know what to say to the clubbists of a country village. Their annual dinners are not very expensive, and are usually tolerably decorous. And when we consider that to the majority of the members roast veal and batter pudding are viands too delicious almost to be realised, which they only taste once a year, and which they are actually paying for with their own money, we may easily forgive them a little boisterousness of animal spirits. And surely, if such dinners must be eaten, it is better that the clergyman of the parish should preside at them than that he shouldn't. Mr. Stanhope, while allowing the good policy of the dinner, apparently condemns the practice of its being preceded by a sermon, and being shared in by the preacher. He says that the club threaten the clergyman that they will go to the Dissenting chapel if he won't give them a service in the church, and that very few can "resist this pressure." But why *should* they resist it? If the whole ceremonial of which the sermon is a part meets with Mr. Stanhope's approval, why should

the clergy require any pressure? He is, however, perhaps right in saying that before lending their countenance to the meeting of the club, they ought to know something of its circumstances, and not to give the prestige of their attendance to a rotten or fraudulent concern. At the same time, this is easier said than done. Such bodies are very jealous of interference; and unless the club has been founded by the clergyman or the squire in person, it would be difficult to obtain the necessary information.

The connection between clubs and public-houses is not, however, confined to the annual dinner, which usually takes place on Whit-Monday; it is kept up throughout the year by monthly meetings, in favour of which nothing can be said. These meetings are held for the purpose of receiving subscriptions; and every member, on payment of his monthly 1s. 6d., is entitled to a pint of beer out of the club funds. But, in some cases, the practice goes much beyond this—as many pints of beer being drawn as there are members of the club, and the members present being entitled to consume it all. At a club in Bedfordshire, conducted upon



this system, it was stated to Mr. Culley that the average monthly expenditure on beer alone was £1 7s. 8d. One rule of this club was attended by a comic result. A considerable sum of club money was always left in charge of the landlord for the purpose of paying the sick members, &c. On one occasion the box was missing, and, after a search, was found in one of the landlord's fields, with all the money gone, but the papers all safe, and among them the guarantee given by the landlord for the safety of the cash. Whether he was obliged to make it good or not doesn't appear. At the same club the proceedings at club funerals were so scandalous that it became necessary at last to limit the attendance to the stewards.

Several causes, however, seem combining to extinguish this system. Young men are beginning to find out the superior advantages of larger societies—such as Odd Fellows, Foresters, &c.—and the old public-house club is growing daily less popular. Landowners, too, are beginning to take them into their own hands, and to compel the observance of better rules; while, “as the present Government “have undertaken to bring in a Bill to enable the

“Post Office to grant insurances on life for £5,  
“there is now, I think, no need of a burial fund, or,  
“still better, of burial societies; and as the Post  
“Office Savings Bank and Government annuities  
“are everywhere at hand to give a good account  
“of the investment of a labourer’s savings, there re-  
“mains only the need of a sickness club.” (Culley,  
Rep. II., p. 92.)

But wherever clubs are still kept up, it seems most desirable that they should supply the labourer with the means of making provision for his family after his own death. At present, as a rule, they secure him a weekly allowance during sickness, and after he is past work; they cheapen his doctor’s bill, and they pay for his funeral. But there they stop. And, as Mr. Portman well puts it, “take  
“the case of a man who never had a day’s illness  
“in his life; he makes the monthly payment to his  
“club for many years, and at his death there is a  
“sum given for his funeral, but all the hard-earned  
“savings of his life, having been paid into the  
“club, are lost to his family.” Of course it is these men who pay for the others, and all take their chance alike when they join the club. But



this does not make it any better for the particular sufferers; and several associations are now in existence whose object it is to meet this objection, and to secure a fund for the benefit of widows and children of deceased members. Some of these have been started by private individuals—as the Wiltshire Friendly Society, started by Mr. Sotheron Estcourt; the North Warwickshire, by Sir C. Adderley; and a society in Oxfordshire, by Captain Dashwood. Besides these, the Commissioners mention many other societies, in various parts of England, which carry out the same principle by grafting on to the ordinary business of benefit societies the system of deposits—*e.g.* the Hampshire Friendly Society, whose rules about deposits are as follows:—

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

“ 2. They may pay in to their own deposit or

"Rest any further sum they please, as into a  
"savings-bank.

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

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

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

The mere fact that labouring men are able to belong to these clubs, and at the same time to pay 3*d.* or 4*d.* a week to the village Clothing Club, shows that after all they cannot be in that condition of abject poverty which is too commonly supposed to be their lot. Several of the Commissioners appear to think that they would use these clubs even more than they do if it were not for the influence of the Poor Law. Many deserving and industrious labourers, says Mr. Stanhope, appear to be discouraged from making the effort to secure independence by self-help from the fear of losing their presumed right to relief from the poor-rate; and the guardians have no fixed rule by which to determine such cases. Sometimes they do con-



sider the receipt of club allowances a bar to parochial relief, and sometimes they don't. Uniformity of custom should surely be established upon this point. Mr. Norman wonders that the poor ever do practise self-denial for the sake of a maintenance in old age, when the Poor Law will give it them without, and feels sure that "this has a direct tendency to weaken those feelings of self-reliance and independence among the labouring classes, on the development of which qualities the amelioration of that class must necessarily depend." Mr. Portman (p. 165) writes to the same effect. But the problem which is raised by all three seems almost insoluble, except by abolishing the system of out-door relief altogether. As for going into the "House," the poor have not grown indifferent to that humiliation, and would still make sacrifices to avert it. But we don't see how it is possible to disconnect parish relief and improvidence. To tell a man to starve in the streets because he has not had sufficient self-denial to provide for his old age is to defeat the very object of the Poor Law. To say you will relieve none but those who have been provident is simply to say that you will relieve

none except those who don't want it. Our own experience goes to show that by a very large class of our English peasantry the shame of "coming on the parish," in any shape, is still felt. With the better education, the better wages, and the better position altogether, which we trust are in store for them, this feeling may be trusted to increase. But we fear that for those who *are* capable of looking forward to parish relief with equanimity, and of making it an excuse for doing nothing to assist themselves, there is no help. As they make their bed they must lie upon it.

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



relates to it has not been generally noticed, and even if it had been, it does not exhaust the subject. It must be premised that, as it is no easy matter to extort from any ordinary farmer a truthful account of his gains and losses, so in this case we found a similar indisposition to come to close quarters on the subject. And here, too, the reticence of the farmer is aggravated by the suspiciousness of the peasant; nor could we help being amused at the obvious struggle which was going on in the mind of our chief informant between his eagerness to represent the institution in as favourable a light as possible, and his reluctance to admit that the members made a great deal by it. However, the collation of different statements, and of hostile with friendly criticism, enabled us to make a pretty good guess at the financial merits of the system. But, before proceeding to discuss them, it will be better to explain to our readers exactly what the system is. It is wholly unconnected either with the small farm system or the allotment system. The members form an agricultural company, but the land is not divided among them so as to give each one a piece to himself, and, in fact, they have no more to

do with its cultivation than the shareholders in a railway company have to do with its traffic. The profits are divided among them every year, and are supposed to be paid partly in money and partly in kind; but for all they have to do with the actual tillage of the land they might as well live a hundred miles off, or have their money in the Crystal Palace. Here at once is a highly important distinction between this method of improving the position of the labourer, and all those which depend upon making him an actual cultivator on his own account. This, then, is the first point to be borne in mind. The "co-operative farm" is not intended to be a means of turning the labourer into a farmer; nor is it, except in point of money, any substitute for the allotment. The members continue what they ever were, ordinary day labourers, who work for the farmers of the parish at the ordinary weekly wages; as, indeed, they may work under their own manager on the same terms if they choose, and if out of employment they have a preferential claim upon him. But that is all. The only farmer in the case is the paid manager, and he is little, if at all, above the rank of an ordinary



peasant. He receives twelve shillings a week, and he is assisted by two other officials, elected annually, who play the part of directors. The manager occupies what corresponds to the farmhouse upon the farm, and he and his colleagues are supposed to meet in council once a week, when questions of cropping, manuring, and what not, are, if necessary, put to the vote; but, practically, the whole working of the machine is in the hands of the one man, who stands in the place of the ordinary tenant-farmer. All the members are obliged to be agricultural labourers, except, as we were told, three—but, as Mr. Fraser was informed, six—these being, according to one account, a blacksmith, a wheelwright, and a miller; according to the other, a shoemaker and two carpenters besides; so that the little settlement, aided as it is by a co-operative store, is complete within itself. No member is allowed to live more than three miles from the parish, to accept parish relief, or to retain his share if convicted of a felonious offence. All are obliged to belong to an approved benefit club, and the widow of a member may retain her husband's share during her own lifetime.

Assington is a pretty little retired village some distance from any railway, and lying in a thickly-wooded but rather flat country between Colchester and Sudbury. Mr. Gurdon, the representative of an old family and owner of nearly all the parish, died last November, but he had not been resident for many years; and, as Mr. Fraser very truly says, the success of his scheme is due to no artificial petting or coddling. He began it as long ago as 1830, and at the present time there are two farms on the property, cultivated by two different companies—one of 133 acres and 21 members, the other of 213 acres and 36 members. The latter farm, which is the one we saw most of, lies rather exposed, and a good deal of the land was till quite recently wood. As this company, which started in 1854 with only 70 acres, has been continually taking in new land, and as the expense of grubbing up the rough land has been considerable, we were not surprised to learn that the dividend at present was a small one. It was explained to us, moreover, that the roots which remained embedded in the soil made it impossible to use the steam-plough in fields which, from their size and flatness,

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were otherwise admirably adapted to it, and that it would not be till the stumps had rotted that the soil could be cultivated to the greatest advantage. But the land looked very clean, and the crops healthy, nor was there anything at all of a poverty-stricken air about the whole place. The older farm, which is now fairly on its legs, is of course doing much better.

In each case the company was formed by means of a loan from the landlord, supplementing the subscriptions of the members. In each case the loan was the same—namely, £400; but in the first company the subscriptions were £3 apiece, and in the second £3 10s. Both the size of the farms and the number of members have gone on increasing till they have reached the figures above given. The value of each share in the larger farm is estimated by the sum which the holder would receive if the whole stock were sold off, and that is calculated at about £30. The shares on the smaller farm, as they yield a larger income, are worth nearly £50. When a labourer buys a share he has to pay not less than £5 down, and he surrenders his proportion of the profits till the balance is dis-

charged. The rent paid is about 30s. an acre, which is something below the average rental of the neighbourhood. These societies started, on the whole, then, under favourable circumstances. It is true that the original capital in each case was rather below the amount which is thought desirable for farming in general; but still it seems to have been about £7 an acre; and no interest was charged them for the money advanced. In the next place, their expenses were and are limited entirely to the necessary expenses of cultivation. There is no establishment to keep up. There is no "black-coated man," as the local phrase runs, who has a station to maintain or luxuries to purchase. The farmer or manager lives like a peasant, and nothing goes on unproductive expenditure. Under these circumstances one is naturally very curious to know what the profits are, and how much each member really receives per annum. But this is just the point on which a good deal of secrecy is preserved. Every member gets a ton of coals, a certain number of sacks of potatoes, and one, if not two fat pigs every year. But how much money is divided between them we could not discover with



exactness. The manager of the newer and larger farm, which has not yet paid its debts, gave us to understand that the money dividend from that farm was at present something inappreciable. But, on being pressed, he seemed willing to allow us to suppose that as soon as encumbrances were cleared off, and the land got into good condition, each member's receipts would go near to constitute a livelihood. We found, too, that the general opinion in the village among non-members was that a share in the old farm was worth, in money and goods, from £20 to £30 a year. These accounts, therefore, correspond pretty closely, and the inference would be that the system returns nearly three times the profits which are ordinarily assigned to agriculture. For instance, it is commonly supposed that a farmer ought to make three rents. The rent of the farm in question is £200, so that the gross receipts ought to amount to £600. But if twenty-one members receive £25 apiece, they divide no less a sum than £525, and the gross receipts ought to be £1,575, or nearly eight rents instead of three. Nor does the absence of carriages and hunters explain this difference; for

these cannot affect the actual produce of the soil. Nor would farmers, generally speaking, who had only 130 acres, ever indulge in such luxuries if they had not private property besides. Now, by all we could learn, the land, though well enough cultivated, was not cultivated above the average standard, so as to yield a higher profit than ordinary ; while, of course, many of the farmers would say it was rather below it than above it. On the whole, therefore, we should be disposed to think that the profits of the concern have been rather magnified than diminished by the admiring peasantry of the neighbourhood, and to doubt whether, after all, the benefits of the system do more than counteract its disadvantages. Its pecuniary benefits are not, perhaps, greatly in excess of what a judicious development of the allotment system is calculated to confer. It promotes integrity by the rule already mentioned, according to which conviction before a magistrate entails forfeiture of the share. But the allotment system is capable of being worked in this way too. It keeps down the rates. But then, under the present system, that is only a modified boon to the rate-



payers, who are assessed not by parishes, but districts. And were it generally carried out so as to equalise the rates, it would tend to the extinction of a class of men who, with all their faults, fill a place in our rural economy which we should find it very difficult to fill up — namely, the tenant-farmers. The peasantry, of course, are enraptured with the system. But it was commenced at a time when probably the allotment system was unknown in this part of England; and they contend that the dislike of it entertained by the farmer proceeds wholly from the greater independence with which it imbues the labourer. Those who participate in its benefits “won’t stand being swore at, like those “who don’t,” said one of our informants, an intelligent young fellow, who doubtless had grounds for what he said. But it is probable that the main cause of their hostility lies much deeper than this — in the instinct, namely, of self-preservation, which tells them that any general adoption of the principle would be fatal to their own class. Our own conclusion, accordingly, is much the same as Mr. Fraser’s. Within moderate limits, on a scale which shall not interfere with the general system

of the country, it may safely be commended. If it lacks some of the advantages of the allotment or the garden which the labourer tills with his own hands,\* it may be true that it gives him a more permanent interest in the soil; while, if this be desirable, "it no doubt promotes the reappearance of small farms without the reappearance of small farmers."

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

\* *Vide supra*, p. 71.



there is no objection to these stores founded on any inherent evil tendency belonging to them; and if they can provide either better or cheaper, or better and cheaper, goods for the poor, than the ordinary village shop, the latter must be allowed to die out. Besides, there is one great evil connected with these shops, and that is the facilities which they offer for running into debt, to the great injury of both buyer and seller. One of the Commissioners, Mr. Fraser, has noticed this point, and one only; but it is an evil which lies at the root of much domestic misery, even when it leads to nothing worse. The peasant's wife runs in debt without the knowledge of her husband, as if she was a fashionable lady; and the scenes which ensue upon discovery may easily be imagined. Now, by these co-operative stores, which of course are not peculiar to Assington, non-members are not trusted at all, and members are only trusted to the value of their shares; so that it is placed beyond their power to mortgage their weekly wages. On the other hand, as the village shopkeeper is exactly in the same position as the West-end tradesman, obliged to make his good debts

pay for his bad ones, the prices which he is obliged to charge are exorbitant, and the consequence is that the poor man's wages do not go half so far as they might easily be made to go under a better system. Besides the actual profit on the business, the money dividend is no inconsiderable addition to the poor man's income. On the whole, therefore, we believe that the extension of co-operative stores throughout the rural districts cannot be too highly recommended.

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

"In May, 1866, the Kent Agricultural Labourers' Protection Association was formed in order 'to  
"organise the agricultural labourers with the view  
"to the amelioration of their social condition and  
"moral elevation, and to endeavour to mitigate



“ ‘the evils of their serfdom.’ At that time labour  
“ was scarce, and the first effort of the association  
“ was directed to obtaining an increase of wages ;  
“ and, in fact, it was mainly by means of this  
“ organisation that a general rise was shortly after-  
“ wards effected. As labour again became more  
“ abundant, the employers obtained more control  
“ over their men, and the result has been that the  
“ association has ceased to have any influence  
“ whatever. It is difficult to ascertain what were  
“ regarded by it as the principal steps in the  
“ amelioration of their condition. But, curiously  
“ enough, the one thing especially desired for them  
“ by every one who takes an interest in them—that  
“ is, the improvement of their cottages—was not  
“ an object of this association, because they all felt  
“ that improved cottages enabled the employer to  
“ obtain more control over his men.”

To these instances may be added one that took place in Leicestershire some five or six years ago, when the men on strike got seven shillings a week from their club for a considerable time, and used to be seen hanging about the fields with their hands in their pockets, or sitting upon gates smoking, in


the enjoyment of a delicious idleness. How it ended we have forgotten; but the materials for such combinations do not as yet exist in the rural districts, where labour by itself cannot cope successfully with capital.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### LARGE AND SMALL FARMS, AND PEASANT PROPRIETORS.

"Naturam expellas furcâ; tamen usque recurret."—HOR.

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

The chief points to be borne in mind, while considering this subject, are, first, that small proprietors and small tenants are two different things; secondly, that what is thought a large farm in one place may be thought a small farm in another; thirdly, that the value of what is called garden husbandry rises and falls in proportion to the demand for those crops which are the most advantageously produced by it; fourthly, that, after we have drawn our conclusions on purely economic grounds, we have not exhausted the subject, which is intersected by other social questions of at least equal importance; and fifthly, that we must be on our guard, above all things, against assuming too readily that what answers in one country will necessarily answer in another, as there are many people who, though they might be the first to acknowledge this truth when put as a general proposition, are in the constant habit of ignoring it when dealing with particular questions.

It is gratifying to reflect that on this point at least there need be no political differences. The advocates of small farms and small proprietors are chiefly, it is true, to be found among the Liberal



party; but if they are condemned by Conservatives it is not because either of them is hostile to the landed interest. On the contrary, the influence of the country gentlemen would be largely increased by the restoration of a system which was originally called into existence for the service of their ancestors.\* The opposition which landlords now encounter on their own estates from the rich and independent holder of six or seven hundred acres they would never experience from the class of petty cultivators who are now under consideration. A gentleman with an estate of three or four thousand acres, on which no one farm exceeded two hundred, while a majority of the freeholders in his villages were peasant proprietors, would be monarch of all he surveyed. Let nobody, therefore, suppose that opposition to the views in question proceeding from Conservatives is necessarily founded on what are called Conservative principles. We don't mean to say it is wholly a disinterested opposition; but such as it is, it rests on a commercial, not a political basis. Country gentlemen, who have excellent means of judging, think, rightly or wrongly, that a

\* Report.

system of large farms pays better ; that the rent is safer, and some would say higher ; that the soil is much better cultivated ; and that all the trouble and distress of getting rid of poverty-stricken tenants, who are ruining the soil without benefiting themselves, is avoided by it. But if it came to the question of political and social influence, there cannot be a doubt to which side they would incline.

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

"The whole class of statesmen has been gra-



“dually declining in prosperity during the last  
“hundred years, but the poorer members of the  
“class—those, namely, with from twenty to fifty  
“acres—can keep above water no longer.

“Many causes have contributed to bring about  
“their gradual decline. Railways and free trade  
“introduced new ideas and new principles into this  
“district, for which these primitive holders of the  
“soil were unprepared, but the process of ex-  
“tinction had commenced at a much earlier period.  
“Pringle, in his ‘General View of the Agriculture  
“‘of Westmoreland,’ published in 1805, attributes  
“their steady decrease to the turnpike roads, which,  
“he says, had brought the manners of the capital  
“to the extremity of the kingdom, destroyed the  
“simplicity of ancient times, and caused finer  
“clothes, better dwellings, and more expensive  
“viands to be sought after by all. The small  
“estates, he adds, were being everywhere sold,  
“and many a statesman had been reduced to the  
“necessity of working as a labourer on those fields  
“which he and his ancestors had for many gene-  
“rations cultivated as their own. The diminution  
“in the number of small estates has certainly been

“continuous for more than a century, and those  
“which remain are generally heavily burthened  
“with debts. Children have to be maintained out  
“of the estate after the owner’s death, and the  
“land is frequently charged with portions larger  
“than its value can bear, and after struggling in  
“vain with accumulated difficulties, the inheritor  
“of a small estate is at last obliged to sell; or if  
“he succeeds in retaining the patrimonial pro-  
“perty, and in transmitting it to his heir, he leaves  
“him only to continue the same unceasing conflict  
“between industry and want in which his pre-  
“decessor, and a long line of predecessors before  
“him, lived and died.

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

“Excepting on the land of some of the larger  
“proprietors, the farming of the statesman is gene-  
“rally bad. There is little spirit of improvement  
“in the class. If they possess a little money, they  
“prefer hoarding in their oaken chests to laying

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

“The effect of these small properties on the

“children of their owners is not favourable, for  
“they are often kept away from school for months  
“to assist in the work of the farm. On inquiring  
“of one at what age his children began to assist  
“him in farm work, ‘As soon as they can crawl,’  
“was the reply. And I believe I am correct in  
“stating that, as a rule, the children of the smaller  
“proprietors feel the disadvantage of a neglected  
“education through life, and do not prosper in  
“the world so well as those of the agricultural  
“labourers.

“If it is important that the soil should be culti-  
“vated with the maximum effect, the small states-  
“men of these counties certainly do not satisfy  
“that desideratum: half shepherds, half husband-  
“men, they are deficient in the spirit and enter-  
“prise which agriculture requires, and they are  
“without either capital or skill. In the districts  
“where tillage prevails they are singularly out of  
“place. In small sheep and dairy farms they have  
“a more legitimate occupation; and they will pro-  
“bably linger long in the secluded mountain dales,  
“a remnant of that community of small proprietors  
“whose simple manners and sturdy independence



“have long given to this part of England one of its most marked characteristics.”

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

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

“The Isle of Axholme, with the Carr district around it, in the north-eastern corner of the county, is composed of very rich land, especially suited for garden cultivation. It is mainly owned by small freeholders, cultivating their own land with the help of their families, and employing but little hired labour. Where the amount of

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

Now here we have the real conditions of peasant proprietorship: an exceptionally fertile soil,\* which repays garden cultivation, and estates within the

\* Cf. *infra*, pp. 198, 215.



power of one man and his family to cultivate. Yet what is the verdict here? They "appear to be "prosperous." But what sort of prosperity is that which causes them to be worse fed, worse housed, worse educated, and harder worked than the hired labourer?

If we now turn to the pages of Mr. Mill, and to the essays upon Land Tenure lately published by the Cobden Club, we still find nothing that conclusively establishes the superiority of the *petite culture*. In France and Belgium it seems to depend upon circumstances. Where there is a large demand for vegetables, fruit, eggs, poultry, &c., the peasant proprietor is in clover; where the soil is rich and deep, spade husbandry is employed to great advantage; and where it is thin and stony, only the "magic of property" will cause it to be cultivated at all. Under any of these conditions the system is doubtless a success. It answers for the market gardener, it answers on the barren rock, and it answers on the fat loam; but for regular farming on intermediate soils, such as the great bulk of all countries must be supposed to consist of, it is almost admitted by Mr. Cliffe Leslie that

a system of cultivation is required which nothing but capital can supply. He says, indeed, that the peasant proprietors are gradually amassing capital, and that, by means of the co-operative principle, they are slowly acquiring possession of machinery. But we must remember that his whole argument is coloured by a negation of what he calls the "machinery-doctrine of most produce at least labour," and by the affirmation of a quite distinct one—namely, that "machinery was made for man, and not man for machinery." We have no objection to the doctrine. But the intrusion of social or moral considerations into a purely economic argument has a tendency to mystify the reader. The two ought to be kept distinct. And we can only conjecture Mr. C. Leslie to mean this, that even if peasant proprietorship is inferior in productiveness, it has other advantages which more than make up for the defect. We shall consider presently whether, if the English system be in any respects inferior to the continental, it may not also be defended on analogous grounds.

But it is another of these writers, M. Laveleye, who goes nearest to the point on which English-



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

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

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

The same writer, in his "Rural Economy of Great Britain," speaks still more strongly to the same effect, and has anticipated many of the re-



marks of M. Laveleye. He states that the conditions of property in England are more favourable to agriculture than those of France; that it is a matter of regret that large aristocratic estates no longer exist in that country, but that Frenchmen must make the best they can of a bad bargain; that farming in France is not, as it is in England, a profession by which men seek to make money, but merely a condition of life in which they are content to exist; that this is due in great part to the want of markets, which causes the small proprietor to live on the produce of his soil, without much thought beyond it; that in spite of all these causes *la petite culture* is not upon the increase in France; that for many years past the increase in the number of large properties has been greater than in that of small; and he ventures to predict that the small French proprietors will go the way of English yeomen, and gradually subside into tenants. Both very large farms and very small farms, he thinks, are on the decrease in both France and England; while farms of three or four hundred acres are likely to become the general rule. Exceptions

will prevail in certain districts—in large sheep-feeding districts, for instance—such as the Wiltshire Down country; but on the whole it is beginning to be understood that one man cannot possibly do justice to more than a given number of acres of arable land.

In the last number of the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society* may be seen the testimony of another "intelligent foreigner," Dr. Voelcker, to the merits of petty culture in Flanders, which may be summed up as follows:—In Flanders farms of twenty acres yield more than farms of ten, and farms of fifty more than farms of twenty; the first prize for cultivation was awarded, at the last meeting of the Flemish Agricultural Society, to a farm of a hundred and five acres; high rents and low wages are the characteristics of *la petite culture*, and high wages and low rents of *la grande*; the large farm system is more conducive to national prosperity, because it sets free labour for other industries; when a railway is opened in the Walloon country, the agricultural labourers, who can travel a hundred miles for half-a-crown, flocking to the manufacturing districts, and in three months



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

Neither Mr. Leslie's last work upon the subject, nor Mr. Mill's recent review of it,\* seems to prove much more than is proved by the Cobden Essays

\* *Fortnightly Review* (June).

as to the intrinsic merits of the two systems. But they prove this—how grievously the enemies of *la petite culture* have erred by allowing themselves to overstate their case. By contending that the system is a failure where it can be shown to answer, they strengthen the belief that it would answer where it is almost certain it would fail. Their use of the terms of political economy has been likewise injudicious, Mr. Mill and Mr. Leslie very naturally refusing to be bound by them. Political economy may be understood in two senses. There is the sense in which the ancients would probably have used it, meaning the whole science of national well-being, of which what we call political economy is only a part; and there *is* that part, the modern sense, namely, in which it relates only to a particular department of well-being. The first of these two should, of course, always be supreme. But the second must take its place alongside of other considerations to which it will occasionally have to yield. What can be more important than health? The laws of health are certain and indisputable. Yet society can only push them to a certain point. The only result of pushing them to



their logical extremes would be a relapse into chaos. So with the political economist—he properly objects to being required to bind himself by certain formulæ; to apply doctrines to one set of circumstances which are applicable only to another; or to set up the laws of his own science as paramount to all other considerations. If they are occasionally incompatible with the highest moral results, he would give the preference to these. Even if small farms and small properties do produce a little less materially, still if they produced a great deal more morally, than large ones, he would be bound to prefer the former. It is of the highest importance to bear this argument in mind, because it cuts both ways, and may be used in favour of our own system as well as in favour of the continental.

We have hitherto quoted the opinions of the Commissioners solely as to small proprietors. What they say of these applies *à fortiori* to small farmers. And we find throughout the Reports a singular unanimity on this head. They regret the disappearance of small farms, which held out a prospect of independence to the labouring class. But they look forward hopefully to a substitute for

them more accordant with the spirit of the age, in the higher wages and increased comforts which the demand for skilled labour created by the spread of machinery\* is certain to produce. The Commissioners, however, have not placed the subject of land tenure in the front of their Report, and it is only one of them—Mr. H. Tremmenheere—who has gone at any length into the question. His experience is derived in great part from the Netherby estate, to which the late Sir J. Graham succeeded in 1819. And from the present steward he received the following account:—

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

\* Cf. *infra*, p. 29. See also Enclosure Committee Report, pp. 1328—1338, which entirely confirms this view.



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

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

“By these means, under able and skilful direc-  
“tion, and with the cordial co-operation and sup-  
“port of a most industrious and persevering body  
“of tenantry, the estate has been brought into its

“present high state of cultivation, whilst hardly an acre capable of improvement remains unbroken up.”

In 1835 there were on this estate 315 tenants. The number is now reduced to 115, with an increase of thirty per cent. to the rental. It was the opinion of the steward that eighty acres was the smallest amount of land which any man could cultivate to advantage, and that “only on inferior soils, where labour and industry constitute the greatest part of the capital employed.” He further considers that a man occupying from twenty to fifty acres of poor land is much worse off than an agricultural labourer on a good farm. But how if the land is *not* poor? We suppose the steward means that good land would not be entrusted to him in such small parcels. Mr. Tremenheere goes on to observe: “*It is obvious by what very small error in judgment a small capital may be impaired, rendered unproductive, or totally lost; and certainly nothing can be more wretched than the average farming of a man who, from a labourer, with the aid of his own and a little borrowed capital, has become a farmer on his own account.*”

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*“He buys a plough, a team of horses, and a few implements; he reaps his first crop of stunted oats; and when its straw has been converted, by a few calves and half-starved yearlings, into what can scarcely be called manure, he carts it out into his fields, after it has been drenched by winter rains, and is disheartened at the miserable results. To enable him to pay his rent he is generally obliged to part with his grain, whatever may be its price, and his stock before it has attained its maximum value; and before the first two years of his tenancy have expired he has too often cause to regret the day on which he was tempted to exchange the safe position of a comfortable farm-servant for the anxieties and hardships of a tenant-farmer.”* He also quotes the opinion of the Rev. Mr. Patterson, a gentleman thoroughly acquainted with the social state of Cumberland, to the effect that “the condition of a day labourer is far better than that of a small farmer with little capital. The day of small farms is over. They will die a lingering death. But their day is over.”

Mr. Culley is another of the Commissioners who has enlarged a little upon this point, and his

experience in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire led him to just the same conclusion. The consolidation of small farms into large ones was complained of in his district as throwing labourers out of work; but on examination he found this was not the case, and that one farm of six hundred acres employed as many men as three farms of two hundred. And so, in turn, I am assured by a practical farmer in the midland counties that one farm of two hundred acres will employ many more men than the same amount of land broken up into farms of forty or fifty acres.\* If the readers of this little book, should there be any, will not believe these statements, there is no more to be said. The evidence of practical professional men is always open to the suspicion of partiality. But the ignorance of the outsider is

\* Cf. evidence taken before Select Committee on Enclosure Act, 1328. "If you have, we will say, any given area covered with small occupiers, of course agricultural improvements will doubtless tend to displace a number of those small occupiers. If that given area is all cultivated as one holding, supposing it to be badly cultivated, there will be a smaller proportion of labourers than before; but if it is highly cultivated you will have a larger proportion on that land, and therefore the higher the cultivation, the greater the relative number of persons employed."



just as bad; and if we want to be quite sure of not being misled, we must simply shut our ears and eyes, and abandon every species of investigation. As to the other objections against large farms, Mr. Culley says:—"For one man who is induced to be provident by the hope of reaching the grade of a farmer through the agency of a small farm, *ten, I feel sure, will be benefited by the increase in wages which the use of machinery offers to intelligent men,*"\* and the whole class "encouraged to make more use of their brains."

The present writer has made inquiries on his own account in various other counties, and has received letters from Cheshire, Suffolk, Leicestershire, Hampshire, and Wiltshire, and all more or less confirming the above views, but still allowing that the exceptionally industrious man (Mr. Culley's one in ten), with the adequate capital, on a little farm of just the right size, may prosper and make money. There seems little difference of opinion as to the amount of capital that is required. Small farms require more capital per acre than large ones, and in three out of the four counties mentioned £10 an

\* This, however, is perhaps an open question.

acre is held to be the proper sum ; in Cheshire £7 was named. But in all four cases the writers were agreed on this point—that the men who took small farms seldom or never *had* the requisite amount ; and, as one of them says, “he *may* succeed, but it “will be out of his own bones, and for some years “he will work harder and fare worse than any “day labourer.” As to the proper size of such farms, this will differ according to the nature of the soil, the situation of the land, and the proportion of arable to pasture ; and we must remember, too, that in speaking of “small farms” we are speaking of a distinct kind of farm, not merely of one that is below the average extent in any given neighbourhood, or which is small in comparison with the holdings in other parts of England. Three hundred acres is a very small farm on some estates, while one hundred is scarcely thought so on another. The “small farm,” however, which we are now thinking of, is something quite different from these. These all imply the existence of the “regular” farmer, with whom we are familiar. At present we are considering the prospects of a class who belong essentially to the



peasantry, and inquiring what sized farms they can occupy to most advantage. Now, whatever the exact acreage, everybody seems agreed that it should not exceed what a man can cultivate properly by himself, and that is generally from seven to twelve acres. When it is larger than this, the result is that "the occupiers try to do all the work themselves ; consequently part of it is not done at the time when it would be most effective, and some of it does not get done at all." Farms of from twenty to thirty acres seem generally condemned. It is just the size "where the necessary horse eats up all the profits." In dairy countries farms of forty and fifty acres answer very well, for the holder of such a farm can keep his ten or twelve cows ; but in the corn-growing districts they are among the worst of all.\*

We quite agree with Mr. Culley that the consolidation of farms can be carried too far. We should think that farms varying from two to six hundred acres would be quite large enough under any circumstances. And why should not the larger landowners—the smaller ones we could

\* *Vide supra*, p. 76.

hardly expect to do so—set aside bits of their estates for small holdings such as we have described, from five to fifteen acres, to be the reward exclusively of intelligent and frugal labourers\* who have saved the required amount of capital—and the whole argument for such farms presupposes that they *can* save it—in which case we should get rid of half the evil and retain all the good of *la petite culture*?

On the whole, then, the weight of evidence seems decidedly against the policy of resuscitating the system of small farming, though it is not unfavourable to a larger admixture of small farmers. But a wider question still remains to be answered: Is the revival of them as a class *possible*? The presumption of differing from such men as Mr. Mill and Mr. Leslie cannot well be overrated. But is there no reason for supposing that the gradual disappearance of small farmers, small proprietors, and small gentry is due to the operation of a natural law which no legislation could reverse? No man of taste or imagination can think of England as she was, without a sigh for those

\* *Vide* evidence of Mr. Bolam.



social changes which have robbed rural life of much of its picturesqueness, and, it may be, of some of its happiness. But can these changes be undone? We regret these extinct classes, as we regret the beautiful woods and wild heaths which have disappeared with them. But would they now, if artificially restored, bear any resemblance to the original? Would they not rather be exotics, and no longer racy of the soil? England once produced wine; but nobody dreams now of reconverting Kent into a vineyard.

The practical genius of the English people would seem to have discovered for itself the best way of utilising the resources of the country, and the method which most readily encourages the dedication of capital to the soil. Our system, no doubt, has its own abuses. Both estates and farms are occasionally too large. But that is no reason for rushing into the opposite extreme, unless better testimonies to its superiority than have yet been forthcoming are produced; except, indeed, on the supposition that a political object is to be gained by it, and that the object of our land reformers is not so much the creation of a peasant

proprietary as the extinction of a territorial aristocracy. But that is an hypothesis which we have no right to entertain, nor any inclination to discuss. Remotely connected with it, however, is what we may call our rural system, in which the gap created by the substitution of *la petite culture* for *la grande* would be most severely felt, if we may not go so far as to say that under present circumstances it would be intolerable.

In a previous chapter we have glanced at this difficulty, and it is one that requires to be approached with a serious frankness not always to be relied upon in disputations of this nature. The average tenant-farmer has his faults. So has the average country clergyman; so has the average City alderman. But he is neither above nor below the average level of the middle class, by whom so much of the administration of this country is conducted, and who constitute an element of stability the want of which has been severely felt elsewhere, though here, where we have always had it, we seem scarcely conscious of its value. At all events, this much may be said without fear of contradiction—that if we have no tenant-



farmers to fill parochial offices, the want of them must be supplied by Government officials, since peasant proprietors would certainly be unequal to such duties, and that thus our whole system of local self-government would be destroyed at a blow. In the second place, the position of the clergyman in parishes where there was no rank of population between the peasantry and the gentry would be extremely difficult. The farmers and their families can help him in a thousand ways, and they form a link between himself and the cottagers of inestimable practical utility. Thirdly, consider the effect of withdrawing from every village in England the presence of its six or eight men of capital and intelligence, who now rent the land. We ought to be very sure of our ground before we advocate changes which involve such contingencies as this. Of course, if it could be shown that *la petite culture* was so immeasurably superior to the other in its material results as to make it worth while, for the sake of them, to abandon the ancient rural system of England, we could say no more. But so far from that, it seems to be a moot point whether it is not even inferior.

If we turn our eyes to the political and moral results of the two systems, we certainly see nothing in the condition of the Continent to reassure us. The peasant proprietors of France set us no such example of political knowledge and independence as should make us crave to import them into England. Our tenant-farmers are becoming every day more independent, and our landlords more alive to the duty of leaving every man to think for himself. We feel justified, therefore, in saying to the advocates of small farming, that their case, up to the present time, is "not proven," and that they have failed to show us an equivalent for what we should be called on to surrender. The moral effects of the English system are excellent. It cannot be pretended that its political effects are worse than those of its rival. And in a comparison of their material results, if we allow that they are equal to each other, it is the very most which, in the teeth of such evidence as we have adduced, the champions of petty culture can expect of us.


A vast manufacturing and commercial industry continually draining off the population of the country into the large towns, and at the same



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

## CHAPTER IX.

### SUMMARY.

N a general retrospect of the ground we have now travelled over, the conclusion seems to be that the condition of the agricultural labourer is slowly but surely on the rise. If we look first to the conditions under which his labour is performed, we see that during the last few years the public gang system has received its death-blow, that women have been gradually emancipating themselves from the more injurious and debasing kinds of work, and that an Act of Parliament has been passed which will have the effect, in the long run, of restoring the homes of the peasantry to the villages in which they are employed. We see, too, that the nation has been awakened to a sense of its duties towards the children of the country as well as towards the children of the town, and that



protective legislation will not long be wanted where the necessity for it can be shown to exist, though it is gratifying to learn that the children stand in much less need of it than it has recently been the fashion to suppose. The greatest limitations upon juvenile labour which any of the Commissioners recommend are comparatively slight; one of the ablest of them recommends the least of all; and the general impression seems to be, that were it not for the sake of education, the labour of young boys might safely be left to itself. The labour of girls is different. On this subject the preponderance of opinion seems to be, that they should be kept from work till sixteen years of age. For reasons already given I consider this age a mistake. On the score of morality it is too young. On the score of health and education it is unnecessarily old.

On the subject of wages it is more difficult to ascertain the exact truth than in any other branch of the inquiry. The practice of payment in kind, with all its perplexing ramifications, opposes an obstacle to the inquirer which it is impossible to overcome without a patient and minute investi-

gation of the system in all its phases—a task, it is needless to add, which the constant work of several years would be no more than sufficient to execute. But one or two facts which it seems impossible to dispute evolve themselves out of all this entanglement. There is a large class of labourers who, including the earnings of their families, are receiving, in cash and kind, upwards of £100 a year. There is a very large class who are receiving from £70 to £80. Secondly, in all parts of England the peasantry have money in the savings-banks. Thirdly, their personal appearance is not that of half-starved, down-trodden men. One is told this is all on the surface, and that though a life in the open air gives them a healthy look, they succumb to the first serious illness. But is this so? I greatly doubt it. I have seen numerous cases of ordinary day labourers recovering from very serious illness. Fourthly, there is a better test than all—their longevity. But if we have some reason for suspecting that the present remuneration of the agricultural labourer has been underrated, we have likewise ground to hope that his future remuneration is likely to be much



higher. The large majority of competent witnesses appear to be of opinion that as the extension of scientific agriculture, combined with the use of machinery, extorts a larger produce from the soil, the labourer will, by a natural law, get his share of it in the form of increased wages. I would here call particular attention to the evidence given by Mr. Tremenheere before the Enclosure Committee last year, and to Mr. Denton's Letters on Agricultural Labour which appeared originally in the *Daily News*. The first thinks that under a higher state of cultivation the land will support a great many more labourers.\* The second contends that nothing is required to insure them higher wages but to make them better workmen; and to this end he recommends that after a course of that more practical instruction in the schoolroom which has been already referred to (p. 102), each boy, on going to farm work, should be placed under some special instructor, such as the shepherd, the carter, or the thatcher, and serve a term of apprenticeship to some particular department of labour. A system of examination and

\* Cf. p. 211.

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

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

The education of the agricultural labourer is a

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question which has not yet run itself entirely clear of all perplexities, as it still seems a moot point among persons interested in the subject whether we are to look to higher wages as a condition of better education, or to better education as a condition of higher wages. According to the one view we have no right to expect the agricultural labourer to be an exception to general rules. Our physical necessities have a primary claim upon us, and it is not until these are satisfied that higher wants begin even to be felt. The next stage is the desire of decency and comfort; and after this comes the craving for mental cultivation. According to others it is only education which can produce the desire for education, and it must be forced upon the agricultural labourer, whether he wishes it or not. The common-sense view of the question lies, probably, between the two. The peasant appreciates education for his children as a means of bettering their condition even now. And if it can be brought home to him, as it might be by Mr. Denton's plan, that a different education would better their condition still more, he would not shrink from the cost of it. By taking advantage of

this feeling the next generation might be brought to value it for its own sake. But there is little necessity to dwell upon this branch of the subject in the present chapter; for whatever else may be said of the condition of the English labourer, it cannot at all events be denied that his educational prospects are brightening, and that, if he has anything to fear on this head, it is rather from excess of zeal than from defect. The preponderating opinion at present is, that his children should be sent to school regularly up to ten years of age, and intermittently up to twelve or thirteen.

The existing systems of hiring seem productive of great dissatisfaction, but hitherto all attempts at substitutes have been failures. The statute fair seems to be on the decline. But there is no reason to suppose that as yet it is moribund; and it is worth consideration whether it is not susceptible of being brought under humanising influences, and converted into a harmless festival, seeing that the labouring classes do not certainly have too many holidays in their lives. The Register Office\* for

\* "The schoolmaster" system (*vide* p. 127) might, perhaps, be worth a further trial.



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

Of all the evils with which the agricultural labourer is called on to contend, the public-house

is not only the worst, but infinitely the most difficult to deal with; a powerful trading interest is enlisted in support of it; a powerful political party is jealous of the local influences by which alone it can be moderated; while a third would be sure to use all its influence against that substitute, without which reform would be impossible. The country brewers, in the first place; the enemies of local self-government, and especially of aristocratic or clerical self-government, in the second; and those who wage a general war against all alcoholic drink, in the third place, would probably join together against the only feasible plan for the removal of this nuisance. Free beer-sellers, to be licensed by the local magistrates, and effectually prevented from allowing it to be drunk on the premises, would interpose between the cottager and the temptations of the public-house; while unrestricted competition would relieve from the necessity of dosing himself with poisoned beer. But they would be doing for one indulgence very much what the Contagious Diseases Act has done for another. They would be undermining a lucrative monopoly. And they would bring addi-



tional influence into the hands of a class whose power it is thought desirable in some quarters rather to curtail than to augment.

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

“And then there are the shades of black which come from conviviality,—which we may call table blackness,—as to which there is an opinion constantly disseminated by the moral newspapers of the day, that there has come to be altogether an end of any such blackness among sheep who are gentlemen. To make up for this, indeed, there has been expressed by the piquant newspapers of the day an opinion that ladies are taking up the game

“which gentlemen no longer care to play. It may  
“be doubted whether either expression has in it  
“much of truth. We do not see ladies drunk, cer-  
“tainly, and we do not see gentlemen tumbling  
“about as they used to do, because their fashion of  
“drinking is not that of their grandfathers. But the  
“love of wine has not gone out from among men ;  
“and men now are as prone as ever to indulge their  
“loves. Our black sheep was very fond of wine,—  
“and also of brandy, though he was wolf enough to  
“hide his taste when occasion required it.”—(Mr.  
A. Trollope, *Macmillan's Magazine* for June.)

There is no doubt that, although habitual intemperance is now a vice rather for derision than imitation, and that to get drunk before women would be visited with social ostracism, yet that among men an occasional transgression is still regarded as a joke, and that as we descend in the scale of society we shall find it less occasional. The influence of this fact upon the working class is seen far and wide ; and the example in a country neighbourhood of a single farmer or gentleman, who is occasionally seen in what Baron Bradwardine calls the “predicament of intoxication,” to



say nothing of the many others who show, by their jests upon the failing, that they regard it with a lenient eye, will neutralise all the efforts of those who exert themselves to reclaim the labourer to sobriety. In fact, the whole tone of society at large must change on this subject before any very great improvement can be looked for. At present there is a sort of tacit understanding, an ingenuous hypocrisy, as it were, among men of the world, in relation to this particular infirmity which permeates the whole community, opposing that kind of yielding resistance to the rebukes of the moralist which is the most difficult of all to be overcome.

Among the peculiar sources of demoralisation to which the English peasant is exposed, the preservation of game is often cited as the worst. This is a very great mistake. Nobody knows better than the poacher the real character of game. If his apologists like to shelter him behind a wholly mistaken conception of it, of course he will avail himself of their kindness. But as for supposing that the poacher himself is led away by the delusion that pheasants are wild animals in which nobody has any right of property, it is one of those

fond inventions which only personal acquaintance with a single member of the profession is required to dispel. Game is no more a temptation to dishonesty than other luxuries; and whatever is to be said against the Game Laws is to be said against them rather as a farmer's grievance than a labourer's.

The chief evils which vitiate a certain class of Benefit Societies are, first, the unrestricted power which they enjoy of squandering the club funds at public-houses; secondly, the facilities which the younger members possess for repudiating their obligations to the elder; and thirdly, the absence of any machinery by which the benefit of a man's savings may be secured to his widow and children, should he die without having had any occasion to draw upon the club funds. We are told, however, that the class of societies which are chiefly affected by these evils are gradually on the wane; that the peasantry themselves are fully alive to the disadvantages of them; and that leading men in various counties are exerting themselves either to extend or to introduce a better system. In regard to this subject, we are sometimes encountered by the



assertion that the agricultural labourer will never derive all the advantages which he might derive from such institutions as long as he has the parish to fall back upon. That this prospect may weaken his motive for self-denial is not to be disputed ; but it seems impossible to banish it. The receipt even of out-door relief is not, upon the whole, a boon to which the poor look forward with complacency. Seclusion in the "Bastile" itself they contemplate with horror. In the next generation these feelings, we may hope, will be still stronger than they are now ; and to these we must trust for counteracting the bad effects of a system which, wholly to dispense with, would be almost to abolish the Poor Law.

A novelty which some people recommend with great confidence as a mode of mending the condition of the labourer is the plan which has been described in operation on Mr. Gurdon's estate in Suffolk—the plan of co-operative farming. The system has much to recommend it. It betters the condition of the labourer, and gives him an interest in the land. And as it is capable of being conducted on a large scale, it is free from some of the objections which attach to small farms. But though

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

The question of small farms *versus* large seems to turn on three considerations; namely, which is the better for the labourer, which is the better for the land, and which is the better for the interests of the nation at large. And these three questions do not necessarily run into each other, as it is conceivable that some sacrifice of material produce



might be worth making for the sake of ulterior advantages. As regards the individual, it is clear that what he cannot do as a small proprietor he will not be able to do as a small farmer. Now, as to the prosperity of even small proprietors, the evidence is far from being one-sided; and we might, therefore, be justified in reasoning *à fortiori* against that of small farmers. But, independently of this argument, there is abundance of evidence to show that the advantages of small farming and large are at least evenly balanced; that much depends upon the character of the population, the construction of society, the existence of rival industries, and finally, on the nature of the soil, by which also must be determined their comparative effects upon the land. If, with these conditions before us, we ask ourselves which of the two is, *on the whole*, the better suited to England, we shall find the balance incline perceptibly, if not heavily, in favour of our present system. We say on the whole, because we readily admit that it is desirable to keep in hand a certain proportion of small farms to serve particular purposes. But all things considered—the future as well as the present of agri-

cultural labour, the soil and climate\* of England, the existence of our immense commercial industry—the conclusion seems to stand out quite clearly that a general exchange of large farms for small would not, in the long run, either improve the condition of the peasantry or increase the produce of our agriculture. Is there any other reason, then, which should weigh with us in favour of a general redistribution of farms and properties? On the contrary, the evidence on non-material grounds is all against it. We might sacrifice our rural system for the sake of small farming, were this proved to be of a paramount importance. But to introduce small farming for the sake of destroying our rural system would seem to be simple infatuation, except on political grounds. The conclusion is, then, that other considerations being assumed to be equal, social considerations turn the scale in favour of our own method as a general national principle.

Having thus briefly recapitulated the several topics on which I have tried to throw some light in the foregoing chapters, I have only to repeat

\* Medium character of the one, variable character of the other.



that I lay no claim to any merit beyond that of bringing within a narrow compass the chief questions which arise out of the condition of the agricultural labourer, and of calling attention to the salient points in each. I have stated a certain number of conclusions to which a great mass of evidence appears to tend; but I have always done my best to give their full weight to all modifying considerations. As I have hitherto said very little "out of my own head," I may perhaps be allowed to say now that I know of no question, if we except religious ones, which requires to be approached with a mind so attuned to impartiality as this one of the agricultural labourer. On the one hand is his life of silent, secluded, uncomplaining toil, always suggestive of the *qui laborat*; his undeniable privations, his honesty, his simplicity, his helplessness, so unlike the loud self-assertion and menacing pugnacity of the city artisan; all prepossessing us in his favour, all imbuing us with the idea that a system which does not do more for him must be radically indefensible. On the other hand we see in him but one link in a great social chain which has endured

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

THE END.

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