
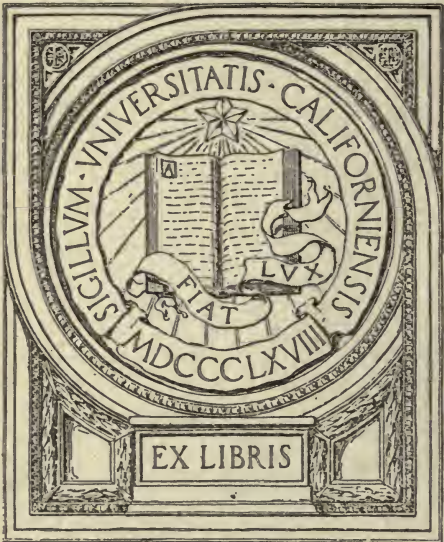


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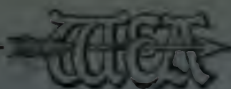
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By GEO. GUEST

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The Workers' Educational Association
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1920

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH RURAL HISTORY *By* GEO. GUEST

HEADMASTER, ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL, BOURNEMOUTH
VICE - PRESIDENT, BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH, W.E.A.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

The Workers' Educational Association desire to point out that the material used in Chapters XI. and XII. of this pamphlet is largely drawn from Mr. Ernest Selley's valuable book entitled "Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries" (George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1919 Second Edition, 3/- net). It is impossible in this small booklet to do justice to so important a subject, and those who are interested will find a wealth of information on it in Mr. Selley's work. Copies of "Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries" can be obtained from the Workers' Educational Association.

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16 Harpur Street, Theobald's Road, London, W.C. 1*

1920

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,
I have the pleasure to inform you that your letter of the 10th inst. has been received and the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.
I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
J. H. [Name]

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN the historian of the future comes to study the social and economic life of the people of this country during the period of the Great War, it is safe to say that he will regard as one of its most striking features the change which took place in the spirit and outlook of the workers. Amongst no section of the working class was the change more profound than amongst those who laboured on the land.

The awakening of the rural workers dates, of course, from before the war. After many vicissitudes, trade unionism had taken permanent root in spite of the special difficulties inherent in the organization of rural workers. The results of a generation of elementary education began to be apparent. Newspapers and books had found their way into the villages. The advent of the cheap bicycle widened the horizon of the farm workers.

But the outbreak of war created circumstances which produced far-reaching and rapid changes. Large numbers of agricultural workers joined the colours, and rubbed shoulders not only with men from the towns, but also with men of other lands. The world became an infinitely bigger place to them, and quite apart from the experiences they underwent on active service, the mere association of rural workers with men of other callings and other interests must have modified the whole outlook of the soldiers who came from the countryside.

The ferment created by the upheaval of the war penetrated the rural districts. The new standards of value, which gave a new importance to the workers on whom the nation depended for an ever-increasing supply of munitions

of war, applied also to the agricultural workers, to whom the whole community looked for the maintenance of the food supply, though no doubt many so-called farm "labourers" were not fully conscious of the national importance of their services. The introduction of military labour and of women workers into agriculture and the steadily increasing cost of living combined to produce discontent with the economic position of the rural workers. It is not surprising, therefore, that the countryside became a fruitful field for trade union organization.

The growth of trade union membership in every industry was a marked feature of war time, and the agricultural industry was no exception. Indeed, the development of trade unionism amongst rural workers proceeded with extraordinary rapidity. It was undoubtedly stimulated in a large measure by the establishment of the Agricultural Wages Board. Experience has shown that the introduction of Trade Boards in other industries has always been followed by a growth of trade union membership, and the Wages Board for agricultural workers certainly aided the efforts of trade union organizers in the country districts. It is difficult to exaggerate the effect of the establishment of the Wages Board and the District Committees. They have set new wages standards, but they have also secured the permanent recognition of trade union organizations representative of rural workers, and placed organized labour on a footing of equality with agricultural employers on statutory bodies.

But this is not all. Agriculture, although the largest and most fundamental industry in the country, has in the past been considered, when it was considered at all, as a problem to itself, and general trade union policy had little relation to it. But the enrolment of the farm workers in the Agricultural and Rural Workers' Union, the Scottish Farm Servants' Union, and the general labour unions, and the association of these bodies with the Trades Union Congress, brought the agriculturalists into line with the

general Labour Movement. The new currents of thought and feeling amongst the workers on the land, due to many causes (not the least of which was the political propaganda carried on during the General Election in December 1918), led agricultural labour to identify itself more closely with the activities of trade unionism as a whole.

Trade unionism has been in every industry where it has developed, not merely an economic weapon, but an educational influence. Trade union activities have been a means whereby the workers have gained experience in administration and the conduct of public affairs. Even more important than this has been the effect of active trade union membership upon the outlook of the workers. It has widened their horizon, and brought within the range of their interests problems affecting the working classes as a whole and touching the welfare of human society. Women's institutes in many places have done for the womenfolk of the countryside what the unions have done for the men. They have brought them into co-operation and closer contact and given them new interests.

Confronted with great economic and political issues, the organized workers and—it must also be remembered—their wives, who are now electors, are beginning to feel the need for supplementing their practical experience by study and reflection. The classes of the Workers' Educational Association in many country districts, and the activities of Women's Institutes are evidence that there is a desire for knowledge amongst the villagers of the countryside. Education is now recognized as essential if the workers of the country are effectively to shape its policy. Political and economic democracy alike rest upon the willingness of the rank and file of people to assume responsibilities and to equip themselves for bearing those responsibilities. Democracy implies education, and it is not an exaggeration to say that education is the greatest need of our time.

The rural population is now, through its trade union

organizations and other channels, enlarging its interests and widening its outlook, and it is important that country men and women should be helped to fortify themselves for their new activities with knowledge. The purpose of this little book is to introduce the people of the countryside to the history of rural life, and to create in the minds of the workers a desire to understand more fully the past and the present. A knowledge of rural history is indispensable to a grasp of the problems of to-day. The great problem, so far as the agricultural and rural workers are concerned, is the re-creation of rural society on a basis of political and economic democracy. To the solution of this problem the country dwellers must bend their energies. The first step, however, is through education, and Mr. Guest's little volume will have amply fulfilled its purpose if it sets its readers upon the pathway to knowledge, and generates an enthusiasm for a new and better Britain.

ARTHUR GREENWOOD.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY BRITAIN

A Comparison.

To-day we are accustomed to speak of rural England as being something quite different from the rest of the country. "Back to the land" is a trite saying, and implies that the bulk of the population is no longer engaged in agriculture. Such, indeed, is the case. It has been estimated that four out of every five persons in England and Wales are now living in towns. About sixty years ago the population was almost equally divided between town and country dwellers. But England was formerly an agricultural country. This continued to be the case for centuries. It is the purpose of this book to trace and account for the changes that have come over rural life in England.

Britain in 55 B.C.

Corn was grown in Britain, especially in the south of the island, before the time of Julius Cæsar's invasion (55 B.C.). Small quantities were even exported to Gaul and Ireland. The implements used were very crude, the surface of the ground being merely scratched with a rude plough or stirred with a hoe. When the corn was ripe, the ears were cut from the stalks and stored in underground chambers. Threshing and winnowing were done by the women. Each day, the quantity of corn required was taken from the granary. Fire was applied to the ears until the husk was quite burnt. The grain was then beaten off with a stick, pounded until it was bruised and broken, and then made into coarse bread. Flocks of sheep, pigs, goats, and oxen were also reared by the more civilized Britons.

Much of the interior of the country consisted of vast woods, swamps, and bogs. In such districts, the natives lived chiefly by hunting and fishing. They clothed themselves in skins, and painted their faces in order to frighten

their enemies. In the south, however, tunics of coarse cloth were worn; and ornaments such as rings, pins, beads, and brooches were common. Many of these were brought by foreign merchants, as were also copper, ivory goods, glass vessels, salt, earthenware, wine, and the finer kinds of cloth. In exchange for these articles the Britons offered tin, lead, furs, hunting-dogs, corn, and cattle. Chariots provided with iron scythe-blades of native make, as well as helmets, spears, swords, daggers, hide-covered shields, and heavy clubs were included in the armour of the Britons. It is thus evident that the early inhabitants of the island had acquired some skill in weaving, metal-working, and boat-building. Pieces of copper and iron were used for money, thus proving that the Britons had advanced beyond the stage of barter.

Roman Britain (43 to 410 A.D.)

The fertility of the soil and the mineral wealth of the island led the Romans to take possession of Britain in 43 A.D. During the Roman occupation, agriculture was encouraged. More and more land was brought under cultivation. Improved methods of farming were introduced—the Britons being taught the use of a more powerful plough, and the breaking up of the clods either with a harrow or a heavy wooden mallet. Greater quantities of corn were, therefore, produced. It is recorded that numerous vessels conveyed vast stores of grain from Britain to various Roman cities on the Continent. So great did the annual output of grain become that Britain was known as “The Granary of the North.” To the direct influence of Rome is also attributed the introduction of cherries, beautiful flowers, the grafting of fruit-trees, fowls, geese, and a special breed of hornless sheep. Under Roman guidance, too, hard straight roads were constructed. These were intended chiefly for the more speedy transit of troops, but they also led to a vast increase in the trade of the island. Walled cities were built, and law and order were established. Early in the fifth century the Romans withdrew from Britain in order to defend Rome herself from foreign invasion.

The Anglo-Saxon Invasion.

Towards the middle of the fifth century Teutonic tribes, composed chiefly of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, began to come across the North Sea from the coasts of Northern

Europe. It is probable that the first arrivals came on friendly missions. When, however, they found that the Britons had become unaccustomed to war, as a result of the Roman occupation, the invading tribes decided to make the fertile plains of Britain their home. They were the more ready to adopt such a course because their own territory was being overrun by Asiatic barbarians.

The newcomers differed widely from the native Britons. They were fair, yellow-haired people, bigger and stronger than the dark-haired Celtic Britons. Their language, which became the basis of modern English, was unintelligible to the natives of the island. Moreover, they are pictured in history as a race of fierce, heathen savages. On the other hand, they were brave. They had a great respect for women. They were fond of their homes, wives, and children. They knew nothing of town-life, and desired only to live by means of tillage.

There was plenty of fighting to be done before the invading tribes could settle in Britain. One band of warriors would overrun a tract of land, drive out the Britons, and then settle down to till the soil. Another band would deal similarly with another stretch of country. Thus, by degrees, the land was brought under the sway of the Northern tribes.

The Anglo-Saxon Village Community.

Each band of invaders settled in a district, and proceeded to form themselves into tiny villages. It is probable that not more than ten or fifteen families constituted a village. Their first concern was the construction of suitable dwellings. For the most part, these were mere huts of sticks and mud, thatched with straw. Through a hole in the roof passed the smoke which escaped from the fire placed in the middle of the room. Another hole in the wall served as a window; for glass was unknown to them. The earthen floors of these dwellings were sometimes strewn with rushes. There were no beds and no bedclothes. Skins served for blankets and the floor for a bed. As rushlight candles were scarce, it was customary to retire early and rise with the sun. Rye bread, butter, and cheese formed the chief articles of diet. Eggs were occasionally obtainable. Meat was scarce, and consisted mostly of salted pork. Beer, which was weak but pure, was the chief beverage, although milk and butter-milk were drunk at certain seasons. Instead of sugar, honey was used. Root

*

crops were then unknown: hence peas, beans, leeks, and kale were the chief vegetables. Because of the absence of root crops cattle could not be kept in large numbers during the winter. It was, therefore, customary to kill most of them and salt their flesh in readiness for winter food.

Co-operative Cultivation.

Agriculture was the most important business of the people. Crops of wheat, rye, oats, and barley were grown, though the proportion of wheat, compared with other grains, was small. But the methods of cultivation were very different from those now common. There were no "farms" and no "farmers" as we understand the terms. Each village community was, as a whole, responsible for the performance of agricultural operations. The land was not the property of any single individual. It belonged to the village or to the whole tribe, if it belonged to any one at all. No one thought of private ownership. Each villager occupied strips in various parts of the village. There was land in plenty for every one, and there were no labourers working for "wages." This simple co-operative system of cultivation, known as "strip-farming" or the "three field system," will be described in the next chapter.

Each village was almost self-sufficing. For the most part the clothes, the implements, and the food required were produced in the village. In or near the homes of the people the shoemaker, the carpenter, the iron or copper smith carried on his work. Rough skin shoes, harness, and leather drinking-vessels were shaped from hides. Plough-share and wheel would be repaired by some one in or near the village. Every home, too, contained its spinning-wheel. The sheep's wool would be washed, carded, and spun by the women. During the long winter afternoons, when work out of doors was impossible, the men would weave the rough yarn into the coarsest of cloth for tunic and hose. For centuries, the clatter of the loom and the whirr of the spinning-wheel were common sounds in rural England. Packman or pedlar or wandering minstrel would, from time to time, pass through the villages; but the inhabitants themselves seldom travelled far from home.

The Governing Class.

Whilst the people on the land were thus forming their little communities, the governing classes were gradually

organizing the kingdoms as a whole. Ere the ninth century had passed, England had been brought under the rule of one king. Clearly defined social grades had come into being, and a system of government, both central and local, had been established. By degrees, king, noble, and priest exercised increased control over the mass of the inhabitants. The bulk of the people, the real producers of the wealth of the country, were thereby degraded. This state of affairs will be the better understood as the story of rural England proceeds.

CHAPTER II

THE MANORIAL SYSTEM

Origin of the Manor.

Reference has already been made to the tiny villages of settlements created by the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain. At first, the dwellers in these "townships," as they were called, possessed considerable freedom. By degrees, however, they were degraded. With the increase in kingly power, certain individuals and religious bodies obtained control over the various "townships." A military class also grew up. To meet the needs of these governing classes, the peasants were called upon to bear increased taxation. The noble was thus no longer the protector of the freemen: he became the master, and they were regarded as his tenants.

With the advent of the Normans, the position of the real cultivator of the soil became still further debased. Even the name of the little settlement was changed. Henceforth it was known as a "manor," a Norman name meaning "dwelling-place." It is important to remember, however, that the kind of estate to which the name was given existed long before the Norman Conquest. The manorial system was already well established before 1066, and it only remained for the Normans to organize it still further.

The People of the Manor.

William the Conqueror claimed all the land as his own. Then he lent portions of it to his Norman nobles and bishops. Some received several estates in different parts of the country. Others obtained a single tract of land. Estates were also granted to certain Anglo-Saxon nobles who accepted Norman rule. Each one who received land in this way was known as the "lord of the manor." In return for this loan of territory, the lord of the manor was expected either to make some money payment to the king, or to provide him with bows and arrows, fish and game, or with a certain number of fighting-men.

The lord of the manor then proceeded to allot certain portions of the estate to the various residents. In return for these "grants" of land, specified services had to be rendered. So long, however, as the prescribed duties were performed, so long was the tenant secure in his "holding."

The requisite services varied with the social status of the tenant. Some of the tenants were freemen: others were unfree. The former class was not large in number, except in parts of the north-east of England. To them larger "grants" were made than to their unfree brethren. Their rent was paid in military service, or in produce, or in money. Moreover, they were at liberty to leave one manor and settle in another.

But the main body of the "farmers" were unfree. This does not mean that they were slaves. But they were bondsmen. They could not sell their land. They could not leave the manor without their lord's permission. They could not even sell an ox or give their daughters in marriage without consulting their masters. Thus they may be described as territorial serfs.

Of the bondsmen there were two main groups. The most numerous were known as villeins. Each villein not only had to cultivate his own land, but was compelled to devote one or two days each week on his lord's demesne (*demēn*). At busy seasons, such as harvest, haymaking, and ploughing, he was also expected to perform additional work for his lord. Work done at such special seasons was known as "boon-work."

Below the villein in the social scale were the bordars or cottars, whose "holdings" were smaller than those of the villeins. The bordars had to devote a greater part of their time to the lord's land, probably three or four days each week.

Lowest of all were the slaves who had no land at all, except perhaps a small plot near their hut. They were probably descended from the ancient Britons, and were compelled to give almost the whole of their time to the service of the lord of the manor.

The Three-field System.

The arable or ploughed land of the manor consisted of one big field, usually divided into three smaller ones by strips of grass. There were no hedges or walls of any kind to separate one field from another. Each field varied in

extent from two hundred to five hundred acres, or even more; hence they were much larger than those we are accustomed to see.

Every year, each of the fields was under different treatment. When the east field was growing wheat, oats would be seen in the west field, while that to the south would be lying fallow. During the next year the east field would produce oats, the west would be fallow, and the south would grow wheat. A similar change would occur in the third year. Thus each field would lie fallow, or have one year's rest, in every three years; for root crops, as winter food for cattle, were still unknown.

Each field under crop was divided into strips, an acre or half an acre in extent. Between each strip was a patch of weedy, grassy earth, about a foot wide. This was known as a "balk," and was intended to separate one strip from another.

The strips of land were divided amongst the inhabitants of the manor in proportion to their social status. As the land was not equally fertile, it was customary to allot to each man so many strips of each kind—more fertile or less fertile. It thus happened that the "holding" of a person was not usually all in one compact plot. The lord of the manor might thus "hold" strips adjoining those of the poorer tenants.

From seed-time to the end of harvest the fields were fenced against the village cattle. After harvest the temporary fences were removed and the cattle were allowed to feed on both the stubble and the grass strips. In order to prevent disputes, the foreman of the "field jury" decided when the harvest was over.

Spring and autumn ploughing had to be undertaken in one or other field. But the scattered strips were not ploughed separately by each holder. The number of heavy wooden ploughs, with their iron-tipped "shares," was limited. Moreover, each plough required about eight oxen to drag it. It was customary, therefore, for the villagers to club together to do their ploughing.

Such a system of agriculture was wasteful. Valuable land was wasted as "balks." Much time was consumed in passing from strip to strip in different parts of the field. Perhaps the adjoining strips were not kept clear of weeds by one's neighbour. Examples of open-field farming by the whole parish as co-partners may still be seen, however, at the village, of Laxton and Eakring in Nottinghamshire.

The Lot Meadows.

On most manors a certain portion of land was set aside for hay. This was divided permanently or annually into strips. Each freeman and villein usually enjoyed the right to the hay crop on one or more strips in the lot meadows, as they were called. This was settled by an annual ballot.

Uncultivated Land.

Apart from the cultivated land, there were large stretches of commons, woods, and wastes. The commons were much more extensive than those of to-day. They consisted partly of valuable pasturage and partly of rough land. On most manors the tenants enjoyed the right to feed cattle, oxen, horses, sheep, pigs, and fowls on the commons and in the woods. The timber produced by the forest or woodland was the property of the lord, but tenants had the right to "lop" and "top" certain trees, collect fallen branches for fuel, tools, and fences, and also turf, stone, sand, and other material for various purposes.

Manorial Buildings.

The area included in such manors varied considerably. Some exceeded 5,000 acres, although smaller ones were probably about one-tenth that size. Each manor of any importance would contain a manor house, a mill, a church, and a priest's house, in addition to the cottages of the humbler folk.

Standing in a small park, known as the lord's demesne (demen), would be the manor house, usually a fortified structure. In close proximity to the main edifice would be various farm buildings and additional rooms for servants and slaves. Unless the lord held sway over various manors, he would reside in the manor house himself. The more powerful, however, would visit each of their manors in turn. Along with them would come retinues of servants and retainers. After consuming a considerable share of the produce and enjoying the sport afforded by the estate, the lord and his attendants would then pass on to another manor. During the lord's absence, the manor house was occupied by his bailiff or seneschal.

The manorial mill was usually owned by the lord of the manor. To it all the corn to be ground for the little community had to be sent. It frequently happened, therefore, that undue prices were charged for the work done there.

Residing near the manor house, and usually appointed by the lord of the manor, was the parish priest, whose duty it was to conduct the services in the church and act as chaplain in the manor house. The rent or produce of Church-lands or "glebe" was frequently sufficient to maintain the priest. In addition he sometimes received burial and other dues as well as tithes. At first the payment of tithes was a voluntary contribution. In course of time, however, the payment of tithes became compulsory; and, although the lot of the parson was improved thereby, a heavy tax was thus imposed on the land. As the Church was originally not only a religious, but also a social centre, meetings, plays, and even markets were frequently held in the "sacred edifice."

Domesday Book.

At first the Norman barons who held land of the king paid no taxes of any kind. In 1083, however, the Conqueror resolved that all must contribute to the expenses of the government. A tax of six silver shillings per hide of land was, therefore, imposed throughout the kingdom. The Norman lords thereupon adopted numerous devices for evading payment. In order to make quite clear what each estate should contribute the king ordered a complete survey of the kingdom to be made in 1086: the size of each manor and the number of villeins, cottars, slaves, freemen, ploughs, and animals contained therein were thus made known. As a result of this survey, the royal coffers rapidly filled; and William I was reputed to be the richest prince in Christendom.

The Domesday Survey not only affected the lords of the manors. It exerted considerable influence over the lives of the humbler folk. When disputes arose about manors or the customs of manors the Domesday Book was referred to. It was difficult to evade what was written: hence the custom of the manor became more rigid. The Saxons felt that their lot had indeed become hard. They said it was a shame for the king to set down every yard of land, and every cow and pig they owned.

The Self-supporting Village.

For about two hundred years after the Domesday Survey (1086), the Manorial System continued to operate in England. Its outstanding features may be thus summar-

ized :—(1) Instead of there being, as is the custom to-day, landowners, tenant farmers, and paid labourers, there were then only landowners (the lords of the manor),¹ and the tenant labourers. (2) The village community was self-supporting. Implements, both for field and home use, were largely home made. Linen was made not only from flax but from nettles. As Mr. Prothero points out, “ words like spinster, webster, lyster, maltster, brewster, and baxter, show that women spun, wove, and dyed the cloth as well as malted the barley, brewed the ale, and baked the bread for the family.” The state of the roads was deplorable ; hence there was little communication between one manor and another. Agriculture was despised by the great landowners, though it received much attention at the hands of the heads of the monasteries and priories. But a great change was pending.

¹ Strictly speaking, they held their lands from the king.

CHAPTER III

THE DECAY OF THE MANORIAL SYSTEM

Increasing Use of Money.

Before the end of the thirteenth century, England had ceased to be the country of Norman lords and Saxon peasants. By degrees the two races had become almost one in language and customs, and the national life in consequence underwent a marked change. England engaged in foreign wars. An important development also occurred in foreign trade, notably in wool.

In order to meet the expenses of war, heavy taxation was imposed. Hitherto, money had been little used except by the king, the lords of the manors, and to some extent by the freemen. It was now in great demand. Consequently, a money-payment was accepted by the king and the barons instead of the services formerly rendered. Unsuccessful wars also led to dissatisfaction and disorder. Thus the discipline of the manors was gradually weakened, and the condition of the lower classes thereby improved. Money wages in return for labour began to be demanded.

The Black Death.

These changes, however, were not wrought suddenly. On many manors, the lords preferred the ancient methods of managing their estates—that is, land and not money continued to be the link between the worker and the employer. Ere the middle of the fourteenth century, however, an event occurred which hastened the break-up of the manorial system. In August 1348, a terrible plague, known as the Black Death, reached England. It had swept westward from Asia, across Europe, until it broke out in Dorsetshire. Although the dreadful sickness was particularly fatal to man, sub-human creatures were also included among its victims. The pestilence is said to have carried off nearly half the population of England in little more than a year.

Thousands of labourers having been swept away by the visitation, the few remaining ones were totally inadequate to cope with the work to be done. For a time, cultivation was rendered almost impossible. Crops were left rotting in the fields and cattle were lost through lack of care. "Landless men" became for the first time masters of the labour market. Increased wages were demanded; and, as employers were for the most part averse to paying more, there came about the first great struggle in English history between Capital and Labour.

Statutes of Labourers.

Some of the lords had already adopted the method of paying wages for labour rendered. Some even agreed to pay the higher wages demanded. But there were many who demanded the customary amount of service and produce. These last-named decided to appeal to the Government for assistance in forcing the labourers to work under former conditions.

As Parliament consisted of landowners, and as the king was the greatest landowner of all, laws were made in favour of the lords of the manors. The first of these Statutes of Labourers, as they were called, was passed in 1351. It was made a penal offence for any labourer to be unemployed. A scale of wages was fixed to which both employer and employed must adhere. Wages were specified as follows:—"Haymaking 2d. a day, mowing 5d. per acre or 5d. per day, reaping 2d. to 5d., without meat or drink or other courtesy to be demanded, given, or taken." It is important to bear in mind, however, that the purchasing power of money was then much higher than it is to-day. An adult might, even after the time of the Black Death, be boarded from 1d. a day to 1s. a week. Workers were to be publicly sworn to obey; and, in case of refusal, they were to be placed in the stocks for three days, or sent to the nearest gaol until willing to conform to the requirements of the Act.

In spite of the penalty imposed, the statute failed in its object. It was, therefore, re-enacted from time to time in more stringent form. Instead of fines, imprisonment was to be inflicted. Labourers were forbidden to leave their native parish in search of better-paid employment. Any such who deserted their employers were to be declared outlaws; if caught, they were branded on

the forehead with the letter "F," in token of their falsity. It was also a crime to receive, employ, harbour, or give alms to such "rebels."

The Peasants' Revolt.

For thirty years or more following the Black Death the struggle between employers and employed continued. A spirit of independence had been stirred up in the breasts of the labourers. This was fanned by the writings of William Langland and the preaching of Wycliffe and John Ball. In the poem entitled "The Vision of Piers the Plowman," Langland gives an excellent description of the condition of the poor at the time (fourteenth century). Wycliffe, who was himself a scholar and priest, vigorously attacked the extravagance of unworthy priests. His followers, known as Lollards, preached his doctrines far and wide. John Ball, a poor priest of Kent, exhorted the people to rebel against the tyranny of their oppressors. Of the lords he said:—"They have leisure and fine houses; we (the labourers) have pain and labour, and the wind and rain in the fields, and yet it is of us and our toil that these men hold their estate." His aim was to blot out the manorial lords, and the lawyers and other classes who depended upon them. No wonder the aristocracy called him a mad priest. Because of his utterances he was thrice imprisoned by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In the meantime the organizing of the workers had been proceeding. Little is known of their organization; but contemporary records contain references to a "Great Society." It would not be difficult for the labourers to be brought together for the purposes of defence, since they had co-operated in both work and pleasure from the earliest times. In most villages in the South and East of England there would be found some one possessed of organizing ability—a sort of trade union secretary.

The crisis was brought about in May 1381 by the action of the Government. As a result of the wars in which Edward III had gloried, money was urgently needed. A poll tax of a shilling a head on all persons over fifteen years of age was demanded. In order to avoid payment of this excessive demand, deception was practised. Commissioners were, therefore, sent to count the people and compel payment of the tax.

Under the leadership of Wat Tyler, the men of Kent

rose in June 1381. Armed with sticks, hatchets, scythes, bows, arrows, and any other weapons which came to hand, the army of the oppressed worked havoc upon those whom they regarded as enemies. They murdered the Archbishop of Canterbury and the King's Treasurer, and attacked the headquarters of the hated lawyers. London was practically in their hands.

At this stage the boy king, Richard II, addressed the "rebels" at Mile End. Tyler stated the grievances of the peasants. He demanded the abolition of serfdom, the substitution of money rent for labour services, a free market for the sale of goods, and pardon for all who had taken part in the revolt. All these demands the king conceded. Pardons were at once written and handed to the peasants, many of whom thereupon dispersed believing they had achieved their object. Such, however, was not the case. On the following day Wat Tyler interviewed the king at Smithfield, where he submitted fresh demands. A dispute ensued which led to the slaying of Tyler by the king's attendants.

Risings, which were to some extent successful, occurred in various parts of the country. Although a few leaders were imprisoned and executed, the Peasants' Revolt was a remarkable movement. "Never before or since has the English peasantry combined on so large a scale or been so well and successfully led."

Results of the Revolt.

The results of the Peasants' Revolt were comparatively slight. Promises of freedom and reform made by the king were speedily repudiated. Personal freedom came slowly. Many villeins deserted their lords, and by the middle of the fifteenth century, labour services had to a great extent disappeared. In many villages, however, villeins were still to be found in the time of Elizabeth. The failure of the Peasants' Revolt to secure the acceptance of a quit-rent instead of labour services paved the way for the enclosing of land during the succeeding centuries, and therefore made possible the creation of a mass of destitute and landless people.

CHAPTER IV

CHANGES IN RURAL LIFE (FIFTEENTH CENTURY)

“Stock-and-Land” Leases.

The Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt had proved to the great landowners that labour could no longer be obtained at the old rates. It is doubtful whether there was labour enough to go round, even if the higher rate of wages had been forthcoming. A few toilers continued to work for their lords without receiving wages at all. But it was evident that a difficult problem had arisen.

Some lords found a solution of the difficulty in the “Stock-and-Land” Lease system which was already in operation. By means of this method land, together with the stock on it, was leased to the tenant as “a going concern.” The tenant was required to pay either in money or kind at the expiration of the lease. It was his business to find the necessary labour for the working of the land. As the holding was usually small, the tenant and his family for the most part did the work. Sometimes hired labour was obtainable. Thus there came into existence the landlord who received rent, the farmer who paid rent and took the profit, and the labourer who received wages.

For the most part, the “Stock-and-Land” Lease system was profitable to the holder. He was “working for himself”: hence he took pains. Heavier crops, better stock, and increased yield resulted. It frequently happened that such a tenant became sufficiently rich to purchase his holding. Sometimes he and his heirs remained so long on the “farm” that they were regarded as the owners. In such cases their names would be inscribed on the manor roll, a copy of which became their title: that is, they became “copy holders.” These “small men,” actually working their own farms, were known as “yeoman farmers.”

It is important to bear in mind that the rent paid by the yeoman farmer differed from that paid to the lord of

the manor by the villein in lieu of the labour services formerly rendered. The latter, being a quit-rent, had nothing whatever to do with the *value* of the land. In course of time, the rent paid by the yeoman farmer varied with the fertility of the land itself.

Sheep-farming.

Fortunately for the landlords, a more profitable solution of the labour-problem became possible: hence the Stock-and-Land Lease system did not become general. There was at the time a great demand for wool for which a high price was paid. A few shepherds could tend quite a large number of sheep, whereas corn-growing required many labourers. Sheep-farming, therefore, spread with great rapidity; and many men were in consequence thrown out of employment.

Enclosures.

The rise of sheep-farming brought about further injustice to the unfortunate labourer. Under the open-field system of cultivation the peasants had been allotted strips of land, frequently mixed up with those of the landowner. There were no hedges to separate one man's portion from that of his neighbour. But sheep-farming on a large scale necessitated permanent enclosing of the land. It accordingly became the desire of owners to get rid of their dependants in order that the land might be enclosed. Sometimes the strips of the copyholder or freeholder were purchased. More often other holdings all in a piece were given in exchange for the scattered ones. Where the lord's demesne-land happened to be in one compact whole, it was quite easy to convert it from arable to pasture land.

Landowners speedily found that their presence was not absolutely necessary to the successful management of sheep-runs. Manor houses were accordingly vacated, and many fell into decay. In this way numerous dependants, other than workers on the land, lost employment.

As sheep-farming was so profitable, the lord was not satisfied to enclose only the arable land. Portions, or even the whole, of the open "waste" were frequently seized and enclosed. On such common lands the cattle of both landlord and tenant had been accustomed to feed. But the law did not recognize the *right* of the tenant to such pasture. As early as 1235, the Statute of Merton

empowered the lord to enclose certain of the common lands, provided enough pasture was left for the use of the tenants. But it was difficult to decide whether enough had been left. Moreover, the remedy at law was costly: hence many of the unfortunate peasants gave up the struggle and drifted to the towns.

Two points in connection with the enclosing of land *for sheep-farming* are worthy of special mention at this stage. In the first place, such enclosures were not confined to the fifteenth century. They began at least a century earlier. Secondly, it should be carefully noted that only a small part of the land was enclosed during this period. It has been estimated that, even as late as 1685, little more than half the total area of England was cultivated at all, and that more than half of this cultivated area was still farmed on the old open-field system. In other words, only about one-fourth of the surface of England was enclosed before the end of the seventeenth century.

Results of Enclosures.

The general results of the sheep-farming "boom" may be thus summarized:—(1) There had been created in England a great woollen industry, thereby increasing the royal revenue. (2) The establishment of the domestic system of manufacture, many families being engaged in spinning and weaving in their own homes. (3) The circulation of money had become more common. (4) Landowners, traders, and monasteries had become enormously rich. (5) Many villages had been destroyed and thousands of poor people rendered temporarily homeless.

Briefly, it may be stated that many landowners had been enriched, whilst thousands of peasants had become "landless" and had thereby been reduced to poverty.

CHAPTER V

CHANGES IN RURAL LIFE (SIXTEENTH CENTURY)

Rural Depopulation Continues.

As already noted, the sheep-farming "boom" continued during the first half of the sixteenth century. Some land-owners are said to have pulled down whole villages, with the exception of the church perhaps, in order to provide larger sheep-runs. Thus the army of homeless and landless wanderers continued to increase. Ere the middle of the century, hosts of "broken men" and "idle, loitering persons and valiant beggars" had become a menace to society. They wandered from place to place; and, driven by the fear of starvation, they often took, openly or secretly, whatever was denied them.

Dissolution of the Monasteries.

But the distress created by enclosures was aggravated by royal greed. The extravagant Henry VIII squandered the enormous wealth left by his thrifty father. He then invented excuses for seizing the lands and other wealth of the monasteries, hospitals, and guilds. About eight thousand monks, friars, and nuns were thus driven from their homes. Upon them had depended for employment at least ten times their number—many of the monks having continued the open-field method of cultivation.

Coinage Debased.

Henry VIII and his successor were also guilty of the enormity of debasing the coinage. By the addition of alloy, or base metal, the coins of the realm were reduced in real value. In course of time, a shilling was equivalent in purchasing power to what the groat had formerly been. The natural result was that all articles (apparently) rose in price; so that sellers required three of the new shillings for what one of the old ones would have bought. Wages certainly were increased, but not to the same extent as

prices. Labourers' wages only went up from 2s. 4d. per week to 3s. 6d. : hence the poor suffered acutely because of royal extravagance and greed.

Ket's Rising.

Parliament attempted, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to stop the increase of enclosures, but with little result. One statute enacted that no man should keep more than two thousand sheep; but the law was easily evaded by providing another thousand for each of the farmer's children. It was further enacted that where land was "depopulated," one-half was to be forfeit to the king. The "new aristocracy," created by grants of land resulting from the plunder of the monasteries, were required to keep as much land as formerly under the plough and to build good houses. These requirements, however, were not fulfilled.

The condition of the workers was indeed pitiable. No longer was the peasant at liberty to turn his pigs, his cow, and his poultry upon the common to feed; for the common had been enclosed. The yeoman was turned out of his farm; the farm servant was no longer required. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the peasants rose in revolt.

Risings took place in many parts of England; but the most remarkable was that which occurred in Norfolk in 1549. This was headed by Robert Ket, lord of the manor of Wymondham, a wealthy brewer. He and his brother William gathered 16,000 men into a camp near Norwich. Although the rebels captured and hanged a few landlords who had been guilty of unjust enclosure, the rising was, in general, well conducted. Definite reforms were aimed at, notably fixed rents, and a small fine only on transfer of land. Had these two reforms been accomplished, the English peasantry would have realized their fondest dream, namely, fixity of tenure.

Ket's power increased so much that troops were sent against him. All offers of pardon were scornfully rejected by Ket. The Earl of Warwick was then sent against Norwich with a large force which included 1,400 German mercenaries. After some severe fighting the peasants were put to flight. Both Robert and William Ket were captured and hanged in chains as felons, both proudly refusing the reprieve offered. "Just men need no pardon" was Ket's retort. It is computed that ten thousand brave

Englishmen were ruthlessly slaughtered in 1549 as the result of the risings against enclosures. This was the last occasion that the English peasantry made an effective demonstration against the forces of the Crown. In the meantime the new aristocracy continued to grow rich from sheep farms and rents.

Vagrancy Laws.

The rapid increase in the number of homeless wanderers led to the passing of harsh laws against vagrants. Only those who were really "lame, crippled, infirm, or suffering from some terrible disease such as leprosy," were to be allowed to seek alms. For the relief of such people collections were also made in the churches.

"Sturdy beggars," that is, those strong enough to earn a livelihood, were to be dealt with severely if found begging. For the first offence, whipping was the punishment; whilst for subsequent lapses, slitting of the ears and other forms of mutilation were inflicted. If any man or woman, able to work, should refuse to labour and live idly for three days, the same should be branded with a red-hot iron on the breast with the letter V, and be handed over as a slave for two years to the person informing against such idler. Any further breach of the law might be punishable by hanging. Licenses to beg were issued to those deemed worthy of the "privilege." The flogging of vagrants continued up to the nineteenth century.

Rise of the English Poor Law System.

When Queen Elizabeth, the last of the Tudors, succeeded to the throne in 1558, she found the national purse empty, and the country still swarming with beggars. It was evident that pauperism was a permanent evil with which it was the duty of the State to deal.

During the reign of Edward VI, a law had been passed providing for the appointment of two collectors in each parish. Their duty was to call upon every person of means to ascertain how much such persons would contribute weekly towards the poor. All promises were recorded. The collectors then employed the poor in useful labour, and paid them from the funds collected. Persons who did not keep their promises were denounced to the bishop.

Poor relief by voluntary means having failed, the celebrated Poor Law Act of Elizabeth was passed in 1601.

This Act provided for the levying of a compulsory poor-rate in every parish. Relief was to be administered to the needy, incapable of earning a living; and able-bodied persons were to be provided with work. The Act further provided for the punishment of idlers and for the careful training of poor children in some craft.

Employers found that by keeping wages as low as possible, labourers could be made to seek poor-relief: thus the whole parish would share with the employer what should have been done by him alone, namely, the payment of a "living-wage."

Improvements in Agriculture.

About the middle of the sixteenth century, a "slump" in sheep-farming came about. Other countries had begun to produce large quantities of good wool, and Flanders had ceased to be the only country famous for weaving. Many Flemings and Dutch had migrated to England, and from them the English had acquired textile skill. Moreover, the population of England had been steadily increasing: hence more food was required. It thus became almost as profitable to grow corn as to produce wool. Enclosing of land continued, therefore, chiefly with the object of securing more plough-land.

Owing to the advent of Flemish and Dutch refugees into England, agriculture improved. Crops hitherto unknown in this country began to be cultivated. Vegetables such as carrots, cabbages, and celery received the attention of English cottagers. The introduction of root crops was a great boon to the farmer. It then became possible to keep oxen in larger numbers throughout the winter. This was of great benefit to the health of the people who were no longer compelled to subsist almost entirely on salt meats. The "fallow" land was also utilized for the growth of roots, instead of leaving it bare each third year as had been the custom. Hops were also introduced by the Flemings; and, as a result, the brewing industry was so improved that beer became the national beverage.

Progress was made, too, in the *mode* of cultivation. More capital was expended on the land: hence the breed of horses and cattle was improved. These improvements caused a greater number of labourers to be required on the farms and so drew back some of the men who had been driven away on account of the sheep-farming boom.

CHAPTER VI

RURAL LIFE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Social Life.

With a few minor exceptions, there was no agitation among the peasantry of England during the seventeenth century. This was due not so much to the absence of grievances as to the want of leadership. There had grown up a class distinction between the tenant farmers and yeomen on the one hand and the agricultural labourers who worked for hire on the other. The economic position of the former had gradually improved: hence they were not desirous of taking the lead in any revolt on behalf of the peasant.

Although badly paid, the English agricultural labourer was, in many cases, well fed by his employer. There was meat in abundance of which the "resident" labourer was at liberty to partake. It was customary for the married labourer only to reside in a separate cottage.

As we have already seen, the enclosing of land had deprived many peasants of their former rights. But the enclosure system had not become general even as late as the seventeenth century. It was still possible for many of the labourers to pasture their cows, pigs, and poultry on the common land. Over moor and waste they might also engage in fowling and in the collecting of fuel.

Country women were largely employed in both agricultural and other forms of work. By such means the cottage income was augmented. At hay-time and harvest the whole population turned out. Unmarried women were also employed throughout the year at certain kinds of agricultural labour. Spinning and weaving, too, provided employment in many rural homes. This form of work was organized by the "clothiers" of the towns who, by means of pack-horse or wagon, collected the product. There can be no doubt that many women and children

were overworked and their health, in consequence, impaired even before the establishment of the factory system.

But amusements were not lacking. In the country, dancing, archery, leaping, wrestling, masques, wakes, the setting up of maypoles on May Day, and hockey were the chief forms of recreation. Young people danced on the village green, and on May Day the maypole was set up there, and the prettiest girl in the village was chosen as queen. An aggressive form of Puritanism sought to destroy the innocent mirth of the times during the first half of the century. Sunday amusements were forbidden by law; but the peasants continued to enjoy their usual recreations on week-days, especially at certain seasons. After the Restoration (1660), all forms of amusement again became common.

Rise of Indirect Taxation.

It is well to remind ourselves, however, that the lot of the peasant was not improved during the seventeenth century. Poverty was slowly but steadily on the increase. Hitherto, all taxation had been "direct," and had been levied by the king upon the holders of land. But at the Restoration, Charles II agreed to forego this royal right in return for a sum of £100,000 a year, such sum to be raised by a tax on land. Parliament, consisting as it did of landowners, naturally resented this proposal, and resolved that the sum should be raised by a general excise duty. By such a tax, the price of many commodities is increased. As these are mostly procured by working-people (because they are most numerous), the bulk of the tax falls upon the poor. Almost a century later the elder Pitt, when addressing the House of Lords, was reported thus:—"By the method of indirect taxation, you can tax the last rag off a man's back, the last mouthful of food from his mouth, and he won't know what is injuring him; he may grumble about hard times, but he will not know that the hard times have been produced by taxation."

Changes in the Poor Law.

The increasing poverty of the peasant class rendered the administration of the Poor Law difficult. It was the rule that each parish should be responsible for its own poor. But it was not easy to decide which parish was responsible. At one time, the pauper's place of birth was responsible.

A person, however, might have been born in one place and have lived for the most part in quite a different part of the country. Then it was laid down that the parish was responsible where the necessitous person had last settled for three years. Later, the three years were reduced to one. For these reasons, every effort was made to keep poor people on the move. No parish wished to become liable for their maintenance.

As the number of poor persons showed no signs of diminishing, Parliament passed the Act of Settlement in 1662. By this statute it was enacted that the period of residence needful to procure a settlement should be reduced to forty days. Unless, therefore, any newcomer to a parish either rented a tenement of £10 a year or gave other sufficient security he might be removed, on the order of any two justices, to the parish where he had lived forty days. This Act, with certain modifications, remained in force for over a century.

Under the Poor Law of Elizabeth, farm labourers had been allowed to wander from parish to parish in search of work, provided they were possessed of testimonials from their late employer and two other householders. But the Act of 1662 reduced the peasants to the condition of serfdom. They could no longer move about in search of better-paid employment, but were compelled to remain with their old masters and to accept the pittance doled out. The evil consequences of the Act of 1662 cannot be overrated easily.

Improvements in Agriculture.

Although the position of the agricultural labourer was not improved during the seventeenth century, agriculture itself did progress. During the latter part of the previous century, root crops had been mostly cultivated in gardens; but during the succeeding century they became a most important feature of agriculture in general. So important did farming become, that it formed the subject of many treatises.

The draining of land began to receive special attention. It was discovered that the wet, heavy ground, which was to be found in many parts of England, made it impossible for the roots of plants to obtain the requisite amount of air. Cattle and sheep also suffered from foot-rot, if turned out on such wet land. Thus farmers were suffering con-

siderable loss, both with regard to plants and animals. Experiments proved that when the land was drained it became lighter in weight, warmer, easier to work, and not so liable to the attacks of noxious insects which appeared to thrive in damp ground. Crops produced in the drier soil were also more nourishing for cattle, whose condition consequently improved rapidly.

Most of the flat Eastern counties, the Fens, were still marsh. Attempts had been made in the fifteenth century to improve this vast swamp, but with little success. In 1634, however, the Earl of Bedford set on foot a scheme for draining the Eastern tract. With the aid of Dutch engineers, no less an area than 95,000 acres had been drained and reclaimed by 1649. This immense tract proved ultimately to be of great service to farmers. To the Dutch we are also indebted for the introduction of grasses and clover.

Large sums were also expended in improving the soil by the process known as "marling." This consists in the addition of a mixture of chalk and clay to sandy soils, and of sand to the heavier soils. These improvements led to increased crops of various kinds, especially corn, of which sufficient was produced for the entire population of the country. The price of corn, however, varied considerably from year to year, though on the whole it was steadily rising. It has been estimated that the average price of corn during the seventeenth century was 41s. per quarter.

The great Civil War, which broke out in 1642, was not without its effect upon farming. To some extent the progress of agriculture was arrested by the war. It is said, however, that the struggle resulted in spreading a knowledge of the agricultural processes adopted in various parts of the country.

CHAPTER VII

SOME PIONEERS OF PROGRESS IN AGRICULTURE

Jethro Tull (1674 to 1741).

Between 1700 and 1800 agriculture made remarkable progress. Many writers of the seventeenth century had issued much information and advice to farmers, and their efforts met with success in the succeeding century.

Distinguished leaders of "the new agriculture" were not lacking. One of these, Jethro Tull, was a lawyer by training. He, however, forsook his profession when still a young man, and settled down on his father's farm in Oxfordshire. Within two years he had invented, and was using, an improved type of clover drill. This he adapted for both corn and turnips. The better method of sowing in lines thus introduced resulted, ultimately, in a reduction not only in the seed required but also in labour. Tull also advocated the more frequent use of the hoe. By these methods the thick sowing and insufficient hoeing of turnips which had hitherto prevailed were banished, and improved crops resulted. It is a matter for regret, however, that although Tull's proposals were much discussed they were rarely adopted in his lifetime: hence this great reformer died ruined.

Lord Townshend (1674 to 1738).

The efforts of Lord Townshend, a contemporary of Tull, met with more immediate success. Lord Townshend was a leading figure in the political life of the first thirty years of the century. After his retirement as Secretary of State in 1730, however, he devoted himself to farming on his estate at Rainham in Norfolk. Much of his property consisted of stretches of marsh, waste, and woodland. In his efforts to reclaim this territory he was extremely successful. By persistent "marling," sandy wastes were transformed into fertile tracts. The cultivation of turnips,

clover, and other grasses also received untiring attention at Townshend's hands. It was discovered that the deep roots of clover, lucerne, and other valuable grasses, which had already been cultivated in the previous century, were capable of breaking up and cleansing the soil. This led to the custom of sowing clover instead of leaving the land fallow each third year as had been the practice hitherto. Instead, therefore, of corn, corn, fallow (under the three years' "open" system), the rotation became corn, roots, corn, grasses; e.g. wheat, turnips, barley, clover. The four-year rotation, first tried on the Norfolk estates, is in consequence known as the Norfolk Course. It is uncertain whether the honour of introducing this course belongs to Townshend or to Coke of Norfolk, of whom we shall treat subsequently. There is no doubt, however, that Townshend was nicknamed "Turnip Townshend" because of his interest in the change of crop-rotation.

Bakewell (1725 to 1794).

Another pioneer of the period was Bakewell of Leicestershire. At his farm near Loughborough, where he lived in simple style, all kinds of interested people were entertained. What Townshend and Tull had done for field cultivation, Bakewell did for sheep. His "Leicester breed" became famous. Bakewell was interested, too, in irrigation, and in the breed of cattle and horses. Cleanliness and kindness in the treatment of animals received his closest attention.

English sheep and cattle had, hitherto, been notoriously poor in quality, having been bred mainly for their wool and hides. But Bakewell's example led to an improved condition of stock. Sheep with large, loose frame, heavy bones, and long thick legs, gave place to the short-legged creatures well covered with flesh. Cattle, too, shared in the general improvement. A comparison of the weights of cattle and sheep sold at Smithfield between 1710 and 1795 shows what great progress had been made. Cattle increased in average weight from 370 pounds to 800 pounds, whilst the average weight of sheep changed from 28 pounds to 80 pounds. It was said of Bakewell that he gave England two pounds of mutton where one pound had been produced formerly.

Thomas Wm. Coke (1752 to 1842).

Coke of Norfolk was a man of property. At the age of twenty-four he succeeded to the great estate of Holkham

in Norfolk. On account of his wealth, he was able to take advantage of all the knowledge and experience of the pioneers. It is said that he spent half a million pounds on the reclaiming of land. This led to a vastly increased rent-roll. When he began farming, Norfolk imported all the wheat consumed in the county. Owing to the lack of fodder, the sheep were of poor breed, and no milch cows were kept on any of the farms. Forty years later, Norfolk was exporting more wheat than any other part of England. Flocks and herds had improved to a similar extent. Contributing towards this transformation were the increase in the stock placed on the farms, the use of more manure, the sowing only of the best kinds of grass, the reduction of weeds, the instruction of the children of his tenants, the use of the most improved machinery, the most recent methods of sowing, and the award of prizes for the best results obtained.

While still a young man of twenty-four Coke entered Parliament as a member for Norfolk. He remained in the House of Commons, with two intervals, until 1832. Because of his services to agriculture, which made him famous throughout the world, he was created the first Earl of Leicester in 1837. At his funeral, in 1842, a line of carriages two and a half miles long followed his body to the grave, and thousands of persons on foot lined the route of the procession. A lofty column to his memory was erected in Holkham Park, the cost of which was contributed to by people in all parts of the country, desirous of honouring the "farmers' friend" as he was deservedly described.

Arthur Young (1741 to 1820).

One other pioneer of agricultural progress of this period is worthy of notice. Arthur Young, the son of a Suffolk clergyman, was apprenticed to a merchant. This work he gave up and took a farm. Because of his enthusiasm for experiment, coupled with his lack of means, farming proved a failure from the commercial standpoint. He then set to work as an investigator and writer. Much of his time was spent in travel; and his accounts of tours made in England, Ireland, and France made him famous. Wherever he went he noted carefully the character of the soil, the methods of farming, the kind of crops raised, the condition of the cattle and farm buildings, the state of the roads, the wages of labour, and prices of meat, bread,

and dairy produce. These observations were recorded and published in a number of books. Landowners were thus incited to try new methods. From all parts of England and the Continent the opinion of Arthur Young was sought. King George III, "Farmer George" as he was called, took great interest in the cultivation of his estates and contributed to the historic "Annals" of Arthur Young.

The lives of the men here mentioned unfold the story of the "new agriculture." A great service was rendered by such pioneers to all future generations. To them we owe the introduction of labour-saving machinery, the increased use of clover and turnips, the development of the four-course rotation, the noteworthy improvement in the quality of stock, and the habit of research without which little progress is possible.

But great as were the services of such leaders, there were other important factors contributing to the revolutionary changes here outlined. Under the old "open-field" system of agriculture, these improvements would have been impossible. In the next chapter a brief outline will be given of the movement which rendered possible the improvements herein noted, but which inflicted at the same time gross injustice upon the mass of the labourers of those days.

CHAPTER VIII

WHOLESALE ENCLOSURES

Land Tenure (1700).

It will be profitable at this stage to refresh our memories as to the conditions of land tenure at the opening of the eighteenth century. Much information may be gleaned about the subject from the works of the period, notably the writings of Gregory King.

Land was then described as freehold, leasehold, or copyhold. It was freehold if owned outright, leasehold if held for a specified number of years only, and copyhold when the right to its use depended upon the possession of a copy of the document by means of which the land was originally granted by a lord of the manor to a certain person and his heirs. Leaseholders were in a worse position than freeholders; for, at the expiration of the specified period, the land reverted to the lord of the manor. Still worse was the position of the copyholder. He was in many instances required to render special services to the lord (e.g. "boon days"), and was also subject to fees and fines. It is probable that the majority of landholders at the beginning of the eighteenth century were copyholders.

Whatever the character of the holdings, they varied considerably in extent. Many of the freeholders were "gentry-folk" whose estates were large. More numerous still were the yeomen freeholders who were often wealthy but who were not regarded as "gentry." There were also many small freeholders.

A considerable number of the landholders were known as cottagers whose estates were small, probably only a few acres in extent. For the most part, the cottagers were employed for wages on the larger estates. Other cottagers eked out a living by spinning wool, an occupation in which they were assisted by their wives and children.

Another class worthy of notice were the squatters. These men neither owned nor held land legally. They had simply settled on portions of the commonable waste, some of

which they had cleared and fenced. There they built for themselves a hut or cottage, and probably kept a few fowls, pigs, goats, or even a cow. They took no part in the open-field work, for they really "held" no land at all.

Enclosures.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, as already noted, enclosures and open fields were still found side by side. It has been estimated that three-fifths of the cultivated land was still "open-field" in 1700. But a great change was pending.

Much of the land hitherto enclosed had been fenced in contrary to the law of the land. It is true that some of it had been enclosed by some sort of agreement with the original holders. For the most part, however, the small-holder had been deprived of his estate on account of the greed of a powerful lord and had thus been reduced to the "landless" condition. Briefly, it may be stated that the greater part of the enclosures which had been effected prior to 1710 had taken place contrary to the law of the land.

The millions of acres still unenclosed afforded a livelihood for a multitude of small yeomen farmers. But the "fencing-in" of land was about to receive the sanction of Parliament. In the first Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture it is recorded that over seven and a half million acres were enclosed between 1710 and 1867. This was made possible by the numerous Enclosure Acts passed during the period.

Between 1727 and 1845 no less than 1,385 separate Acts of Parliament were passed authorizing enclosures. Before 1801, however, such Acts were only sanctioned in response to petitions presented by a certain number of village landholders who had agreed among themselves that enclosure was desirable.

Only the better educated people understood the advantages to agriculture thereby derived. If, however, the lord of the manor and four-fifths of the commoners agreed to seek a private Act of Parliament, it became possible to carry it through. This was the more easy because the commissioners sent down to supervise the carrying-out of the scheme were usually wealthy landowners. The rights of poor men were therefore frequently overlooked

in the desire of the commissioners to gratify the demands of the richer farmers.

But the system of Private Acts of Parliament was expensive. Accordingly, a General Enclosure Act was passed in 1801 which lessened the trouble of the landowners in getting the desired Acts of Parliament. After 1801 enclosures increased at such a rate that the system of "common cultivation" soon became well-nigh extinct.

Causes of Enclosures.

The question naturally arises, "Why did the enclosing of land take place at such a rate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?" Several causes may be assigned for this. In the first place, the advantages derived from the "new agriculture" were gradually manifesting themselves. So long as it was necessary to turn well-bred animals upon the commonable waste where roamed infected animals, so long was there the danger of scab and other diseases. The new method of farming led to both an improved condition of stock and to increased crops, as already indicated in the previous chapter.

Secondly, between 1760 and 1840, a great industrial revolution had been taking place. The wonderful mechanical inventions, the improved methods of coal-mining, and the development of the means of communication were gradually but surely affecting a complete change in the industrial life of the country. Thousands of peasants, deprived of their holdings on the land, had drifted into the towns in search of other means of earning a livelihood.

Thirdly, there was a vast increase in population during the latter half of the eighteenth century. This produced an enormously increased demand for foodstuffs. Corn and meat were wanted principally. But England was a "protected" country, that is, duties were placed upon foreign goods in order to discourage their entry into competition with home products. Further, Britain being an insular country, the importation of meat and other perishable things was not easy, as there was no cold storage in those days.

Under these circumstances, English farmers began to cast about in search of improved agricultural methods. They realized that under the "open-field" system noticeable progress would be impossible. It was felt that the enclosure system must be extended. The passing of the

numerous Enclosure Acts already referred to was made easy because Parliament was composed of landowners. In 1710 a statute had decreed that only landowners could sit in Parliament. It would have been impossible, however, for a poor man to enter upon a Parliamentary career in those days, owing to the enormous expenses connected therewith. Thus the wealthy landowners were in a position to enrich themselves still further by passing measures favourable to their class.

Effect on the People.

By means of these statutory enclosures, the conditions under which agriculture was carried on were ultimately improved. The value of the produce was naturally enhanced, thereby enabling the farmers to make unusually big profits. But the landowners benefited to a still greater extent by exacting higher rents from their tenants.

To the small farmer the new methods were not an advantage. It was necessary for him to fence-in his allotment, and this was an expensive undertaking. He no longer had the advantage of pasturing his cattle upon the village common, of cutting turf, and of gathering wood for fuel. Then came the improved machinery which dealt a death-blow to the domestic spinning and weaving, by means of which he had been able to eke out, especially during the long winter evenings, his small profits derived from farming. Under these circumstances, he was unable to pay the higher rent demanded, and therefore was compelled to give up his small holding. These yeomen farmers, as they were called, who had formed for generations the backbone of the nation, were thus gradually driven out.

Holdings thus vacated were soon seized by the richer class of farmer then rapidly coming into existence. Many of these, who had amassed fortunes by means of commerce, found that the possession of big estates would give them the social status they were seeking. Hence agriculture came to be regarded as a fashionable undertaking, and rich men eagerly bought up land in large quantities. Thus arose the capitalist farmer who was able to apply the latest scientific apparatus to farming operations such as draining and hedging, and the use of expensive manures and newly invented machinery.

Increased agricultural prosperity was the result, but the decrease in the rural population was appalling. Thus

the wholesale enclosure movement had produced a number of large landowners possessing huge estates, a larger number of gentlemen-farmers with large farms, and a vast army of *landless* men, who either sought employment as labourers on the farms or went off to the towns with their families in search of new employment.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST LABOURERS' REVOLT

Views of some Authorities.

As a result of the wholesale enclosing of land, there existed during the latter part of the eighteenth and the earlier years of the nineteenth centuries a mass of poverty-stricken labourers. It will be an advantage at this stage to consider the opinions of some of the great writers upon the position thus created.

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, the authors of "The Village Labourer," thus sum up the effect of enclosures upon the position of the peasant: "It was not one generation alone that was struck down by the blow. For the commons were the patrimony of the poor. The commoner's child, however needy, was born with a spoon in his mouth. He came into a world in which he had a share and a place. The civilization which was now submerged had spelt a sort of independence for the obscure lineage of the village. It had represented, too, the importance of the interest of the community in its soil, and in this aspect also the robbery of the present was less important than the robbery of the future. For one act of confiscation blotted out a principle of permanent value to the State. . . . The enclosures created a new organization of classes. The peasant with rights and a status, with a share in the fortunes and government of his village, standing in rags, but standing on his feet, makes way for the labourer with no corporate rights to defend, no corporate power to invoke, no property to cherish, no ambition to pursue, bent beneath the fear of his masters and the weight of a future without hope. No class in the world has so beaten and crouching a history."

Mr. Prothero writes: "Rural society was convulsed, and its general conditions revolutionized. The divorce of a peasantry from the soil, and the extinction of commoners, open-field farmers, and eventually of small freeholders were the heavy price which the nation ultimately paid for the supply of bread and meat to its manufacturing

population. . . . Some of the practical evils of open-fields and their attendant pasture commons might have been, with skill, time, and patience, mitigated."

Even Arthur Young, who was himself an advocate of enclosures, was thus constrained to write: "By nineteen out of twenty Enclosure Bills—there were four thousand of them—the poor are injured, and some greatly injured."

Taxation Increases.

The position of the labourer was still further debased by the increase in taxation. Great Britain engaged in long and costly wars. That with France (1793 to 1815) cost no less than 831 millions—a gigantic sum in those days. This raised the National Debt in 1816 to 846 millions and entailed 32 millions a year in interest. Tax after tax was placed upon all kinds of articles. Prices increased enormously. It is true that wages also increased, but not nearly to the same extent as prices. Few people appeared to realize that the poor were being taxed at all, but in reality they were bearing much more than their fair share of the burden. Because of the tax upon tiles, the poor were obliged to thatch their cottages with straw. Small windows were used because of the tax upon larger ones. Even the bricks with which the peasant repaired his ruined walls were taxed; and it is recorded that two-thirds of the price of clothing was swallowed by taxation. But the full force of the blow was felt in the increased price of foodstuffs.

Proposed Remedies.

It was evident to all that definite steps would have to be taken to relieve the distress of the labourer. Either his wages must be increased or drastic changes must be made in his diet and manner of life. By way of pious example the rich exercised certain restrictions in matters of luxuries. The poor were asked to adapt their appetites to bread composed of a mixture of barley, rye, and wheat. But the fact that the diet of the peasant consisted almost entirely of bread was overlooked. It was impossible for him to subsist on the substitute proposed: hence he rejected it, much to the surprise of the governing classes.

As it appeared impossible to reduce the expenditure of the labourer, attempts were next made to increase his income. These attempts included the fixing of a legal

minimum wage in relation to the price of food, the granting of allotments, and the reconstruction of the Poor Law.

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond thus sum up the result of these efforts: "A minimum wage was not fixed, allotments were only sprinkled with a sparing hand on an estate here and there, there was no revolution in diet, the problems of local supply and distribution were left untouched, the reconstruction of the Poor Law was abandoned."

"Laissez-faire."

The State, therefore, took no share in regulating the conditions of labour at this period. As early as 1776, Adam Smith, a Glasgow professor, had published his "Wealth of Nations," in which he pleaded for the removal of all trade restrictions. Complete freedom for the individual was demanded, it being thought that if men were left to make their own bargains, each would do the best possible for himself, and that the result would be beneficial to all. State interference, it was thought, would only result in muddle. There arose, therefore, the *laissez-faire* or "go-as-you-please" policy.

But under such a system, it was impossible for the hungry worker to make the best terms for himself; and children had no part whatever in the bargaining. The system, however, was extremely profitable to most English manufacturers who, by the employment of keen business methods, soon amassed fortunes. The friendly relationship which had in many cases existed between employers and employed now yielded to an entirely new set of conditions; for it was no longer possible for the employer, or company of employers, to take a personal interest in individual labourers, who became known as "hands." These toilers, instead of enjoying the pure country air, the green fields, and brown ploughlands, as workers had formerly done, were now resident in the neighbourhood of the mills and factories where was their daily labour. In narrow streets there sprang up rows and rows of little cottages, made grimy by the volumes of thick black smoke belched forth from the chimneys and furnaces. Manufacturers, on the contrary, journeyed to their trim suburban villas where, having secured financial and industrial power, they commenced that agitation for political power which was largely instrumental in bringing about the Great Reform Act of 1832.

“ Speenhamland ” System.

Meantime, the position of the rural worker was deplorable. With the uprising of the factory towns came the decay of the rural iron trade, the cloth trade, and other village industries. The “setting of the poor to work” became a popular subject for both speakers and writers. Numerous books and pamphlets were printed in which various causes were attributed for the poverty of the labourer. Some charged the poor with drunkenness and idleness. Few appeared to realize that the root cause of the trouble was the monopolisation of the land by the aristocracy.

In 1795, food riots occurred in many parts of the country. Women took a leading part in these disturbances. Corn, and other produce, was seized and sold at prices which the rioters considered fair, such price being handed over to the owners. The “settlement” laws, which made the parish of birth or settlement responsible for paupers, were still in operation. For this reason the ratepayers of every parish did their utmost to prevent poor people settling down within their boundaries. Landlords pulled down cottages and prevented new ones being built. An Act of 1795 limited the removal of persons from one parish to another unless they were in actual want. In spite of this, however, many parishes spent large sums in carting poor people back to their own parishes.

It was evident that legislation was not to bring speedy relief to the pauper. But a plan was adopted in 1795 which ultimately did further harm to the unfortunate poor. On May 6th of that year, the Justices of the Peace for Berkshire and some other discreet persons met at the Pelican Inn at Speenhamland. Their object was to devise some means of raising the wages of the labourer and so make him independent of parish relief. A number of resolutions, which have become famous, were agreed to. These may be summarized as follows: (1) “That the present state of the poor does require further assistance than has been generally given them.” (2) “That it is not expedient to fix a scale of wages, but that employers be urged ‘to increase the pay of their labourers in proportion to the present price of provisions.’” (3) “That for the present the magistrates will grant relief from the rates to ‘all poor and industrious men and their families’ who are working for low wages: every man who does not receive weekly

wages equal to 3s. for himself and 1s. 6d. for the support of his wife and every other member of his family shall have the difference made up out of the rates, so long as the gallon loaf of 8 lb. 11 oz. shall cost one shilling." These allowances varied with the cost of bread.

The Spencenhamland policy was not entirely original. Similar attempts had been previously made in other parts of the country. But the standard adopted at the Pelican Inn in May 1795 was speedily accepted in most counties; and, even as late as 1834, only two counties—Northumberland and Durham—were free from it.

Effects of the System.

It is not surprising that the adoption of such a system resulted in a considerable rise in the rates, which are said to have doubled between 1800 and 1815. It checked a rise in wages, and thus benefited the farmers. But most serious of all was its effect upon the character of the labourer. Unless a man were willing to become a pauper he could not obtain work, for he could not demand full wages. As the allowance varied with the size of the family, there was no inducement to thrift or restraint: hence, by means of "improvident marriages," the pauper class rapidly increased. Poaching and stealing also became prevalent in spite of the harsh laws.

Concerning the position of the landless labourer just before Waterloo, Mr. Prothero writes: "Contemporary writers who comment on the increasing degradation of the labouring classes too often treat as its causes changes which were really its consequences. They note the increase of drunkenness, but forget that the occupation of the labourers' idle moments was gone; they attack the mischievous practice of giving children tea, but forget that milk was no longer procurable; they condemn the rising generation as incapable for farm labour, but forget that the parents no longer occupied land on which their children could learn to work; they deplore the helplessness of the modern wives of cottagers who had become dependent on the village baker, but forget that they were now obliged to buy flour, and had lost their free fuel; they denounce their improvident marriages, but forget that the motive of thrift was removed."

In one parish, three-quarters of the inhabitants were receiving relief. "The meshes of the Poor Law," write

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, "were spread over the entire labour system. The labourers, stripped of their ancient rights and their ancient possessions, refused a minimum wage and allotments, were given instead a universal system of pauperism. This was the basis on which the governing class rebuilt the English village."

Labourers' Last Revolt.

The condition of the peasantry at the opening of the nineteenth century was far more deplorable than it had been five hundred years earlier at the time of the Peasants' Revolt. In the earlier struggle the peasants had been well organized and had not lacked sympathizers. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century they had few well-wishers. Only one man of any distinction supported the peasants in their struggle against overwhelming odds. This was William Cobbett, soldier, farmer, and journalist. The son of a farmer and grandson of a labourer, Cobbett began life on the land as a bird-scarer. When still a young man he went to America where he led an adventurous life. Returning when about forty years of age, he engaged in journalism. The wretched condition of the peasantry roused his sympathy, and he devoted much energy and capacity in voicing their claims. After the manner of Arthur Young, Cobbett made numerous expeditions on horseback to various parts of England. His account of these wanderings, told in his "Rural Rides," throws much light upon the condition of the rural dwellers of his day.

In 1812, the scale of allowances from the rates began to be reduced: hence, in spite of the assistance of Cobbett, the cause of the labourer declined. Poverty became more intense. There was, however, still some spirit remaining in the breasts of the oppressed; for, in 1830, the peasants broke out in open revolt. Risings occurred in many counties. Many threshing-machines were destroyed, and there was much rick-burning. The introduction of threshing-machines had been a great blow to the rural workers; for, hitherto, threshing in the barns had provided work during the winter.

At one stage, it appeared that the revolt might lead to an improvement in wages and conditions of life in general. But the drastic action of the Government towards the end of the year speedily dispelled the promise. Hundreds

of prisoners were taken, and two special commissions were appointed to try them. It is recorded that "three hundred prisoners lay in the gaol at Winchester, and when the Court met they were brought in batches of twenty at a time, and every one had sentence of death recorded against him." Some of the leaders were actually hanged, and several hundred men and boys, in all, were transported. The heartlessness of this treatment is still remembered in many corners of rural England. Thus was the Last Labourers' Revolt crushed with heartless rigour, and the toilers on the soil were driven back into a silent poverty.

CHAPTER X

THE CORN LAWS

Bounties on Corn.

As early as the fifteenth century, laws were passed with the object of keeping the price of corn uniform. Wheat might be exported when its price did not exceed 6s. 8d. per quarter. Similarly, it might not be imported unless its price exceeded that amount. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, wheat might not be imported except when at famine prices, as it happened to be in 1662, when it was 62s. 9½d. a quarter—the ordinary price at that period being 41s.

In 1688, the Government added a bounty of 5s. a quarter upon all corn exported from England. By thus encouraging its export, it was hoped that corn would be rendered scarcer and dearer in England and hence its price would be high. This law, passed by a "landlord Government," was calculated to increase the profits of the landed proprietors at the expense of the poor labourer. Fortunately for the latter class, the bounty failed in its object. Desirous of increasing their gains to the greatest extent, landlords produced more wheat than the market required: hence prices fell.

Famine Prices and Wages.

It has already been shown that after the long war with France, which terminated in 1815, taxation increased enormously. The Industrial Revolution had led to increased output of manufactured articles. Other nations were in urgent need of these goods and were willing to give abundance of cheap corn in exchange. But the landed aristocracy, eager to maintain their rents at "war level," were averse to the importation of cheap corn. It was known that the exclusion of foreign corn would add to the cost of living and thus injure the labourer. This fact, however, had little weight with a landlord Government. Consequently, in 1815, a Corn Law was passed by which

all foreign corn was excluded, except when English wheat was at the famine price of 80s. a quarter. The effect of this law was to increase the price of corn still further. In 1812 it was actually 155s. a quarter.

Agricultural wages were extremely low at the time, although they varied in different parts of the country. In Lancashire, for example, they had sunk to 4s. 6d., whilst even near London they were only 10s. 9d. It is clear that no labourer could maintain himself and his family on 4s. 6d. a week, even with the addition of the sum earned by spinning and weaving. Thus the number of paupers was increased.

Sliding-Scale Import Duties.

Instead of a fixed rate of import duty, as had hitherto prevailed, new regulations on a sliding-scale basis were adopted in 1828 and 1842. Foreign corn was permitted to be imported on payment of a tax which varied with the price of home-grown corn. But these changes did not pacify the people, for the price of wheat was still kept high by means of these duties. Nothing short of "free-trade in corn" would give satisfaction to the poorer members of the community in particular.

Anti-Corn Law League.

The general effect of the corn duties was to bring the farmer and the landlord into closer alliance in their opposition to the interests of the labourers. Higher prices for corn meant increased profit for the farmer, whilst the landlord benefited from enhanced rents.

There was growing up, however, a spirit of opposition against the duties on corn, especially from the town politicians. The House of Commons was being urged to consider the poverty which was being caused by the taxes on food. Bad harvests, in 1836 and following years, aggravated the distress. Both manufacturers and farmers were affected adversely. Factories "ran short time," thousands of workmen were discharged, and many manufacturers failed.

With the view of bringing about the repeal of the Corn Laws, the Anti-Corn Law League was formed in 1838. John Bright, a Lancashire cotton-spinner, and Richard Cobden, a cotton merchant, became the prominent speakers on behalf of the objects of the League. Both were members

of the House of Commons. Meetings were held over the country and much Anti-Corn Law literature was distributed far and wide. Cobden and Bright showed that the bulk of the taxes was being paid by the working classes. Able men on the opposite side foretold the ruin of farmers, merchants, and manufacturers; the downfall of the State, the Church, and even of the Throne itself, if the Corn Laws were abolished.

In 1845, help of a most unexpected kind came to the supporters of the Anti-Corn Law League. The Irish potato crop failed. Fever and famine followed. Thousands of people died. Then Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, was compelled to take action. Hitherto, he had been opposed to the repeal of the Corn Laws. But he changed his mind, in 1845, after he had seen the dreadful results of the Irish famine.

Abolition of the Corn Laws.

When Parliament met in January 1846, Peel introduced a Bill for the abolition of the Corn Laws. In less than six months the Bill had "passed" both Houses; and after receiving the royal assent it became law. But the corn tax was not to disappear suddenly. Such a course, it was thought, would be unfair to the farmers and landowners. It was accordingly arranged that for three years from the passing of the Bill, corn was to be subject to a duty of 10s. when the price was under 48s., such duty to fall to 4s. when the price was 53s. From the 1st February 1849, the duty was to disappear, with the exception of a nominal duty of one shilling. Twenty years later (1869), even the nominal duty of one shilling per quarter was cancelled, and "free trade in corn" became an accomplished fact.

Although many landowners and farmers were made poorer by the abolition of the Corn Laws, an improvement in the methods of farming resulted. It became necessary for farmers and landowners to obtain an increased yield from their land.

CHAPTER XI

VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS (NINETEENTH CENTURY)

Laws against Combinations.

The policy of "laissez faire" was gradually driven out by the Factory System, and the State began to interfere more and more in industry. But the workman still had difficulty in bargaining with his employer. It was evident that the hungry man could not alone drive an equitable bargain with the rich employer. Hence some combination of labour became desirable.

Early attempts at joint action were forbidden by the State. In 1799, all "combinations of workmen to raise wages" were declared illegal. Many employers, however, appreciated the advantage of dealing with unions of their workers. It was impossible to suppress combinations of workmen, for many such continued to meet in secret. Strikes continued to be organized, and workers continued to be persecuted.

Every effort to secure the repeal of the law against combinations was made. In connection with this effort, Francis Place, a London tailor, became conspicuous. As a result of his extraordinary ability and tact, Parliament did actually repeal the Combination Laws in 1824. The Repeal Act, however, was considered too revolutionary: hence it was cancelled and another substituted in the following year. By the Act of 1825 "the right of collective bargaining, involving the power to withhold labour from the market by concerted action, was for the first time expressly established. And although many struggles remained to be fought before the legal freedom of Trade Unionism was fully secured, no overt attempt has since been made to render illegal the first condition of Trade Union action." Thus write Mr. and Mrs. Webb in "The History of Trade Unionism." To mark their appreciation of the services rendered by Francis Place to the cause of

Trade Unionism, workmen in various parts of the country forwarded gifts of cutlery, silver, and other articles.

The First Village Union.

Farmers and landowners were determined to prevent the country labourers from combining for the purpose of securing higher wages. But in 1833 the first English Agricultural Labourers' Union was formed at Tolpuddle in Dorsetshire. It was, in reality, merely a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. It existed only a few months. It was a complete failure. It became famous, not through any achievements of its own, but because of the brutality with which it was suppressed at the instigation of an alarmed Government.

Wages in the Dorset area were then seven shillings a week. In 1831, the discontent of the labourers in the Tolpuddle district first began to be voiced. There was, however, no attempt at violence or intimidation. A few labourers simply met the farmers of the area in the presence of the parson and asked that they be paid at the same rate as that in operation in neighbouring districts, namely 10s. a week. It was mutually agreed that the rate of wages should be 9s. a week. But the farmers did not adhere to their promise. Shortly afterwards wages were reduced, first to 8s. and then to 7s.; and an announcement was made that 6s. would, ere long, be the weekly rate. This led to the formation of the Union in October 1833.

Four months later, on February 21, 1834, labourers were warned by means of placards that membership of the Union rendered them liable to seven years' transportation. The laws against combination had been repealed in 1824, as we have already seen. But, although the Union had neither uttered threat nor issued manifesto, it had, in accordance with Trade Union customs of the time, administered an oath of secrecy. By an obsolete statute of George III the administering of such an oath was unlawful. Therefore, within three days of the publication of the warning, six members of the Union were arrested and cast into gaol.

"The trial of these unfortunate labourers," write Mr. and Mrs. Webb, "was a scandalous perversion of the law." They were found guilty, sentenced to seven years' transportation, and hurried out of the country, in order to forestall the public sympathy so severe a sentence was calculated to arouse.

But public protest was forthcoming from all parts of the country. Within seven days of the trial, William Cobbett presented at the bar of the House of Commons a petition signed by 12,000 persons in London. A monster petition, signed by over 250,000 persons, was organized by the whole of the Trade Union movement. Orderly processions of countless thousands swept the streets of the metropolis, and a gigantic demonstration was held in Copenhagen Fields, London. But the condemned men were sent to Botany Bay.

For more than two years, unceasing agitation for the release of the transported men was kept up. A body of workmen, known as the "London Dorchester Committee," collected £1,300 on behalf of the victims. At last their efforts were rewarded. The Government was induced to issue a free pardon, and the men were brought back in 1837. By means of the funds collected, five of the victims and their families were placed on small farms in Essex, whilst the sixth returned to his native place.

Poor Law Amendment Act.

It is not surprising that the first attempt to establish a village Trade Union was unsuccessful. There were at the time thousands of unemployed labourers on the verge of starvation. These were willing to work for even less than seven shillings a week, and their condition was not improved by the Tolpuddle failure.

In 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed. By this measure the whole of England was grouped into "Unions." Each Union was to have its own workhouse, and was to be controlled by "Guardians of the Poor" elected from the parishes included in the Union. The allowance system was abolished. In its stead the "Workhouse Test" was set up, by which all able-bodied paupers were required to become inmates of the workhouse in order to secure relief. "Outdoor relief" was to be granted only to widows, the aged, and others who were not regarded as able-bodied.

As each parish continued to be responsible for all paupers who settled within its boundaries, every effort was made to prevent "undesirables" from becoming resident. In 1865, however, the Union as a whole, instead of the parish, was made responsible for the pauper residents.

Agricultural Gangs.

The abolition of the allowance system was intended to increase the independence of the labourer. Its effect, however, was to depress still further the poverty of the rural worker. Between 1837 and 1850 the *real* wages of the labourer actually fell in every part of the country. Distress became more acute. Flaring ricks and smouldering barns became more common. In order to increase the family income it became necessary for the women and children to work long hours in the fields. Large gangs of men, women, and children in charge of a gang-master tramped from place to place to perform field-work on the various farms. It frequently happened that they were lodged in barns and outhouses: hence moral degradation was the result. This led, in 1867, to the passing of the Gangs Act which provided for the separation of the sexes, and forbade the employment of children under eight years of age. In the meantime, farmers and landlords were making huge profits, whilst the parents of sons who had fought and died in Britain's wars were driven by poverty into rural workhouses.

The National Agricultural Labourers' Union.

At the time of the passing of the Gangs Act the condition of the labourer in the North of England compared favourably with that of the worker in the South. This state of affairs was attended with important results. In 1863, Canon Girdlestone left Lancashire and took up duty in a village of North Devon. The wretched condition of the South-country labourer made a forcible impression upon his mind; and, in 1866, he openly denounced the farmers both from the pulpit and in the press. As a result of this publicity, offers were received from farmers in various parts of England and Ireland who were eager to secure the services of additional labourers at higher rates of wages. The migration of labour thus commenced in Devon rapidly spread to neighbouring counties.

With the object of improving the condition of the labourers, associations were formed in various parts of the country. An impetus was provided for this movement by the exceptionally hard winter of 1871-2. In February 1872, a meeting was held at Wellesbourne in Warwickshire. Over a thousand labourers assembled there on the village green. Mounted on a pig-killing board, under an old

chestnut-tree, Joseph Arch, a farm labourer and lay preacher, addressed the gathering for more than an hour. The outcome of this meeting was the spread of Trade Unionism throughout rural England. It soon became evident that the movement was to become a national one.

On May 29, 1872, a congress met at Leamington for the purpose of organizing the numerous smaller Unions into a great National Union. Eighty representatives, all of whom were *bona-fide* farm labourers; attended from twenty-six counties. It was resolved to form a National Agricultural Labourers' Union consisting of representatives elected by the various district Unions. The Executive Committee was to consist of twelve farm labourers, a chairman, and a secretary, elected annually by congress. Joseph Arch was elected chairman, and Henry Taylor secretary. It was also decided to form an Advisory Committee of "gentlemen favourable to the principles of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union."

The objects of the National Union may be thus summarized: (1) "To improve the general condition of agricultural labourers in the United Kingdom." (2) "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work," viz. 9½ hours a day exclusive of meal-times for 16s. a week. (3) "To encourage the formation of Branch and District Unions." (4) "To promote co-operation and communication between the Unions already in existence."

Collapse of the National Union.

By means of the National Union a widespread agitation was conducted throughout England. At the second Annual Conference held at Leamington in May 1873, the total membership of the Union was reported to be 71,835. A year later, it had risen to 86,214. This success was achieved in spite of the determined hostility of a large section of the landowners, clergy, and farmers. Thousands of labourers were emigrated to the colonies by the Union, whilst many others were transferred from certain parts of the country to other areas where conditions were less severe.

With the object of "breaking" the Union, the farmers formed counter-organizations. Hundreds of labourers were ejected from their cottages at a week's notice, simply because they refused to sever their connection with the Union. Early in 1874, the farmers adopted the "lock-out" method; and, within a few months, it was estimated

that 10,000 labourers had been driven into enforced idleness. This produced a great strain upon the funds of the Union. Appeals were issued to other Trade Unions as well as to the general public. But in spite of the assistance rendered by sympathetic bodies the collapse of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was effected in July 1874. Its funds were almost exhausted, and its members were advised to obtain work upon the best terms available.

Agricultural Depression.

In 1875, the great agricultural depression commenced. "For three years in succession," writes Mr. Prothero, "bleak springs and rainy summers produced short cereal crops of inferior quality, mildew in wheat, mould in hops, blight in other crops, disease in cattle, rot in sheep, throwing heavy lands into foul conditions, deteriorating the finer grasses of pastures. In 1875-6 the increasing volume of imports (corn) prevented prices from rising to compensate deficiencies in the yield of corn."

Improved transit arrangements made the importation of the surplus crops from the United States cheap and easy. Child labour was scarce, owing to the Education Act of 1876, which prevented the employment of children under twelve, unless provided with a special certificate. It was also difficult to obtain women's labour in the fields, for the country girl preferred domestic service or employment in the shops of the towns. Many farmers were, consequently, ruined. Sir James Caird estimated the loss to the agricultural classes of all ranks as almost £43,000,000 *per annum* for the ten years ending 1886.

In consequence of the depression many farmers quitted the land and migrated either to the towns or to the colonies. Some land went out of cultivation, and much of the corn-land became pasture. This conversion continued until 1914, by which time over two and a half million acres had been converted to pasture since 1880. In some cases, the cultivation of fruits and vegetables replaced that of corn. Improved machinery also rendered the situation less strained. The fall in rents, too, brought some relief to the farmer, until the rise in prices, which occurred early in the present century, improved the position of the farmer-class.

Results of the National Union.

Although the National Agricultural Labourers' Union came to a premature end, its effects were far-reaching. After its collapse as a purely Trade Union effort, in 1874, its more active members directed their energies towards political action with the view of raising the status of the agricultural labourer. Their efforts were rewarded in 1884, when the franchise was bestowed upon the county householder.

But the Trade Union spirit had not entirely departed from the breast of the agricultural labourer. District Unions were still in being; and, about 1890, the old National revived somewhat. Delegates from the Dockers' Union sought to keep alive the Trade Union spirit in certain rural areas. In many districts the Land Restoration League aimed at educating the agricultural labourers by means of lectures, leaflets, and other methods. New Union branches were, accordingly, formed. In 1898, the Workers' Union came into existence, its purpose being the organizing of unskilled labour of all kinds. A year later, it made definite attempts to organize farm labourers in certain counties.

It may, therefore, be fairly claimed that the Unions produced for the rural worker a new "outlook." Village social life was roused: The village feast-day was revived. Great importance was attached by Union leaders to the need for education. The Poaching Prevention Act of 1862 empowered the police to stop suspected poachers on the highways and in other public places, and to search them. This indignity was most properly resented by the labourers; and the agitation in favour of a change in the law was another outcome of the Union. By the Act of 1880, tenants of land were empowered to kill ground game, whilst the Acts of 1906 and 1908 extended similar rights to tenants. Among other fruits of the Union's efforts may be mentioned the passing of the Allotments Acts of 1882 and 1887, the Small Holdings Acts of 1892 and 1894, and the Parish Councils Act and the Local Government Act of 1894.

Joseph Arch.

No summary of the activities of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union would be complete without some reference to its great leader, Joseph Arch. This remarkable

man was born in 1826 at Barford, a village in Warwickshire. His father was a shepherd, his paternal grandfather a famous hedger and ditcher, and his mother had been a domestic servant. Before he was nine years of age, Joseph Arch had left school and was employed on the land in bird-scaring. At ten he was a plough-boy, at sixteen a mower earning 1s. 6d. a day, being thus employed from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. With his mother's help he had acquired what was then regarded as a good education for one of his class. Quite early in life Arch won a gold medal for hedging and ditching. Then he became a contractor for agricultural work. He had already joined the Methodists, and rapidly became known as a lay preacher of considerable ability.

His active public work began in 1872, when he was elected first chairman of the National Union; and his efforts on behalf of the rural worker did not cease until the end of the century, when he was in his seventy-fifth year. Within this period he accomplished much. He was thrice returned as Member of Parliament for North-West Norfolk, namely, from 1883 to 1900. From 1900 until his death in 1919, Arch lived in retirement. His example proves "that workmen can better their condition only by joint and united action."

CHAPTER XII

VILLAGE TRADE UNIONS (TWENTIETH CENTURY)

George Edwards.

The collapse of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union did not drive out the spirit of Trade Unionism from the breast of the rural worker. It thus happened that when Arch retired from public life in 1900, his mantle fell upon worthy shoulders.

George Edwards had been a co-worker with Arch during the struggles of the 'seventies and 'eighties. He had rendered yeoman service in the fight for the county franchise, Parish and District Councils, Education, Allotments and Small Holdings. His aim was to secure for the farm labourer not only shorter hours and higher wages, but freedom from tyranny. It was his conviction that this could only be achieved by united action: hence he was in favour of a strong Union.

Like Arch, George Edwards was a farm labourer. He was born at Marsham, ten miles from Norwich, in 1850; and was one of a family of seven. His father, also a farm labourer, was earning 8s. a week. This extremely meagre income was eked out by the earnings of George's mother by means of handloom weaving.

At the age of twenty-two, George Edwards became a local preacher in connection with the Primitive Methodist Church. As he had never been to school, he was unable to read or write. His wife, however, assisted him to acquire some education. In spite of all disadvantages, he became a member of his District Council, and in 1914 was made a Justice of the Peace for the county of Norfolk. At the General Election of 1918, he unsuccessfully contested South Norfolk, but in 1920 he was successful, entering Parliament as Member for South Norfolk.

Obstacles to Progress.

Many obstacles lay in the path of progress. Allotments were scarce in many areas. Small holdings were few in

number; moreover, they were usually acquired by tradesmen because the labourer was not possessed of the small amount of capital necessary for their proper working. There was a lamentable shortage of houses, and the "tied cottage" made independence impossible. Although the number of rural workers was steadily declining, wages did not rise in any appreciable degree, owing to the action of the farmers who preferred to see the land deteriorate rather than break the "custom" of the district respecting wages.

The Wages of Labourers.

A brief survey of the wages paid to agricultural labourers during the early years of the twentieth century will prove helpful. It is difficult to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, because the official figures deal with county averages, whereas the wages for particular parishes were often below such averages. Moreover, the rural worker did not receive all his earnings in the form of money. In addition to the "cash" wage there were allowances for the free cottage, milk, potatoes, beer, cider, etc. Extra payments were also made at harvest and haytime. Referring to official figures concerning wages, Mr. Rowntree writes: "It should also be noted that the figures refer solely to able-bodied male adult labourers in regular employment; bailiffs, foremen, and stewards are not included, nor are old and infirm men and casual labourers, or women and young persons."

In 1907, the average *cash* wage for ordinary farm workers was 14s. 9d. Seven years later, it was 16s. 9d., an increase of 2s. a week. But these figures only represent *nominal* wages, that is, the amount of money received. What would be the *real* wages, that is, the purchasing power of the money? The average cost of *food* for an agricultural labourer's family of six persons is officially given as 13s. 5½d. in 1902, whereas in 1912 it was 15s. 10½d.—an increase of 2s. 5½d. per week. Thus the 2s. rise in wages which occurred between 1907 and 1914 would be more than absorbed by the increased cost of *food alone*.

The New Unions.

It is evident that poverty is the lot of the agricultural labourer. In 1906 a new Union was formed, with George Edwards as General Secretary. This Union made imme-

diate progress in the Eastern counties, attaining by 1910, a membership of 4,000. Organizers were sent out to other counties; and, in 1912, the Union became known as "The National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union." Membership was not confined to farm labourers. Rural workers of all kinds, including women, were eligible for inclusion in its ranks. An important step taken by the Union was its affiliation to the Trade Union Congress, thereby entitling it to send representatives to the annual congress.

The passing of the National Insurance Act in 1911 led to a sudden expansion of Trade Union membership. By the terms of the Act, every wage-earner was required to join an "Approved Society." During 1913, the Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union gained about 8,000 new members; and, in the same year, the Trade Union Congress voted £500 to the Union for organizing purposes. A year later, the Union had 360 branches in England and Wales, with a total membership of 15,000.

But the work of organizing rural workers was not confined to the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union. In 1898 there had come into existence the "Workers' Union," established for the purpose of organizing unskilled and semi-skilled workers of all descriptions not already catered for by the craft Unions.

The Workers' Union met with some success in the organizing of farm workers in 1889-90; but its efforts relaxed with the decline in Trade Unionism during the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1910, however, the Union renewed its efforts in the rural areas. Its membership in 1910 was only 5,000, divided among its 111 branches. Between 1911 and 1913 its membership increased to 91,000 and the number of its branches to 567. "By the end of 1919," writes Mr. Webb, "its membership had risen to about 500,000 in nearly 2,000 branches, comprising almost every kind and grade of worker, of any age and either sex, from clay-workers and tin miners to corporation employes and sanitary inspectors, from domestic servants and waiters to farm labourers and carmen."

Other Unions of general workers shared in the responsibility of organizing rural labourers. By means of the combination of unskilled workers in towns with farm labourers, "the use of farm workers during industrial disputes and the use of unskilled labour in agricultural disputes" was checked.

Supply of Labour during the War.

Agriculture, perhaps more than any other industry, was adversely affected by the Great War. The supply of skilled labour on farms was not reduced by enlistment alone. Hundreds of rural workers were attracted by the higher wages available in the towns.

Instead of offering increased wages, the farmers applied to the Government, through their Unions, for the release of school-children at an earlier age. As the result of considerable agitation, the appeal of the farmers was conceded. The modest demands of the labourers for increased remuneration met with refusal at a time when the farmers themselves were obtaining higher prices for their produce. But a change was pending. Skilled farm workers were "starred" by the Army Authorities with the view of rendering less acute the dearth of labourers on the land. This course, however, did not lead to any material improvement in the situation. The Government, therefore, determined that soldiers should be employed on the land.

The employment of soldiers on the land was not regarded favourably by the farmers. Many of the men were not "skilled," from the agriculturist's point of view. But a still greater objection was to follow. It became necessary to define clearly both wages and hours of labour. This was a new principle in agriculture: hence its introduction was resented by the farmer.

In spite of all opposition, however, the labour of the soldier on the land was made possible and valuable. With the added assistance of prisoners of war, the Women's National Land Service Corps, and any part-time labour that was forthcoming, the rural workers extended the area of cultivation during the latter part of 1917.

The Corn Production Act (1917).

Early in 1917, the effects of the enemy submarine campaign became apparent. It was essential that the "home" production of foodstuffs should be increased to the utmost. But the farmers were not prepared to risk their capital: hence the Government was compelled to guarantee minimum prices for wheat and oats. This guarantee was effected by means of the Corn Production Act. It was decided that the average price of wheat or oats was to be reckoned as "the average price for the seven months from the first day of September." The difference between

this average market price and the minimum price stated in the Act was to be paid to the farmer each year out of taxes. As a matter of fact the average prices for corn maintained a higher level than the minima stated in the Act: hence it has not been necessary for farmers to apply for the bounty.

Another feature of the Act is that Agricultural Rents must "not exceed such rent as could have been obtained" if the condition outlined above had not been in force. But as farmers have not been compelled to apply for the bounty, landowners have not been restricted in the raising of agricultural rents.

The Act also empowers the Board of Agriculture to enforce proper cultivation. In case of a tenant's refusal to comply with the directions of the Board, the tenant may be displaced and representatives of the Board "may enter on and take possession of the land."

Agricultural Wages Board.

But there is one section of the Corn Production Act which may be regarded as the farm-workers' charter. Part II, Section 5 of the Act provides for the establishment of an Agricultural Wages Board. The Act provides for a *minimum* wage of 25s. a week for all farm-workers. Owing, however, to the increased cost of living, this minimum did not constitute a living wage. Unfortunately, the majority of the farmers regarded the minimum as the maximum. Accordingly, they paid the same rate of wages to all men, in spite of the fact that their own profits had increased enormously.

Fortunately the Act did not fix maximum rates of wages. Special powers were conferred upon the Wages Board to vary the rates of wages in accordance with the nature of the work, the season, the day or week or month or other period, the number of working hours, and any other factor affecting the worker. It was even within the jurisdiction of the Wages Board to fix a rate below the minimum wage in the case of a worker suffering from some mental or bodily affliction.

Constitution of the Wages Board.

The Agricultural Wages Board consists of thirty-nine persons. Of these, thirty-two are representatives, the farmers and farm-workers each being entitled to send

sixteen. Eight of these are official representatives of the farmers' organizations, and eight of the farm-workers' Unions. The remaining eight in each case are selected by the Board of Agriculture from nominations submitted by the farmers and farm-workers. In addition to the thirty-two representatives thus selected, seven of the members of the Wages Board are appointed directly by the Board of Agriculture. One at least of these seven must be a woman. From the thirty-nine members thus assembled, the Board of Agriculture appoint both the Chairman and Deputy-Chairman of the Wages Board.

Results of the Wages Board.

In co-operation with the Board of Agriculture the Wages Board proceeded to establish District Wages Committees in every county in England and Wales. These committees consist of an equal number of representatives of employers and workmen together with a number (not exceeding a quarter of the whole number of representatives) of impartial persons appointed by the Board of Agriculture. The District Wages Committees recommend to the Central Wages Board suitable minimum rates for their own districts. These rates are graded according to the age and the sex of the workers. Farmers are unable to evade these rates with impunity, any breach of the law rendering the offenders liable to a fine not exceeding £20.

Substantial increases in wages have been obtained by farm-workers as a result of the efforts of the Wages Board. In May 1919, a minimum wage of 36s. 6d. per week for a six-day week of fifty-four hours, to be reduced to fifty hours in October, was conferred upon all classes of able-bodied male workers over twenty-one years of age.

But the most important result of the establishment of a Wages Board is the freedom of action acquired by the labourer. He is no longer afraid to join a Union: he is no longer afraid to exercise the right conferred by the Franchise Act of 1884. His whole outlook is changed. He realizes that he is an important member of the community; and, in proportion as he avails himself of the means of education within his reach, so will he attain to that position in the State his labour entitles him to hold.

The Outlook.

At a National Conference of the Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union held in April 1919 it was resolved that "no adequate solution of the rural problem is possible so long as the land is privately owned." The new idea is rapidly permeating the ranks of the Trade Unions that the worker is entitled to take at least some part in the control and direction of the industry in which he gains his livelihood. To the rural worker this means reform in the Land Laws. To this end it behoves him to labour and hope, for therein lies his real emancipation.

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