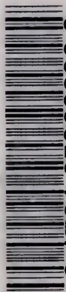

3 1761 05969396 0

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/peasantlifeinwes00heatuoft

PEASANT LIFE

IN THE

WEST OF ENGLAND.

Demy 8vo. Cloth. 7s. 6d.

THE ENGLISH PEASANTRY.

THE QUARTERLY REVIEW, October, 1874.

(Extract from the Article "East Anglia: its Strikes and Lock-Outs.")

"We have placed at the head of this article the names of three books, all of which contain information on the subject of this labour movement. Of these far he most valuable is a book by Mr. Heath, entitled 'The English Peasantry.'"

THE WESTMINSTER REVIEW, July, 1874.

"Mr. Heath is quite right in his belief that such a book as he now publishes was much needed. . . He is most fair in his endeavour to point out to what degree the farmers are accountable, and to what degree blameless, in regard to the condition of their labourers. . . The whole work is singularly free from dry statistics and will be welcomed by all classes of readers anxious to be easily informed on the subject of which it treats.'

ATHENÆUM.

"Mr. Heath's book is interesting and well written, and the author is entitled to much praise for it."

SPECTATOR.

"Very interesting and very important."

GUARDIAN.

"Mr. Heath is always outspoken, candid, and thoroughly honest. He invariably endeavours to state his case fairly and truly, and never perverts his facts even in the apparent interest of the cause for which he is so pleasantly enthusiastic."

EXAMINER.

"Mr. Heath's work is a well-written and trustworthy book on a most important subject. . . He approaches all questions relating to the movement, of which he has become the historian, in an eminently fair and impartial spirit. . . . The author has penetrated the problem to some depth, and is fearless in his facts and eloquent in his description of them. . . Mr. Heath is just such a writer as the subject requires—calm, sensible, fully informed; an interesting writer, and at the same time above the temptation to deaden the force of startling facts by padding the statements of them with cheap declamation. . . A book more deeply interesting to every one with a moderate share of sympathy for the less fortunate of their fellow-creatures has not been issued from the press for many a day."

PALL MALL GAZETTE.

"Mr. Heath has accumulated a large amount of serviceable information, so that his book, which is readable throughout, will be found also useful for reference. . . The statements are made after long and careful observation."

SCOTSMAN.

"Mr. Heath's book altogether is a valuable contribution to the literature of the great question with which it deals. . . It presents a graphic, and we believe, on the whole, a very truthful picture of the condition of agricultural labourers."

NOTTINGHAM DAILY GUARDIAN.

"Its literary merits are decidedly high. Mr. Heath's style of writing is graceful and scholarlike, whilst his descriptions are unusually vivid and picturesque."

SHEFFIELD DAILY TELEGRAPH.

"Armed with this volume and the file of a daily paper, any politician may set up as an authority on the agricultural labour question. . . A book which is sure to attract much attention all over the country."

YORK HERALD.

"Mr. Heath's writings on agricultural questions have already won for him repute as a shrewd, kindly, and temperate observer. The present work will materially enhance his reputation."

WESTERN DAILY MERCURY.

"An admirable and elaborate description of the peasantry of England. . . Since, in his previous work, the author has shown great ability in dealing with this most important subject, his latest production is sure to have a host of attentive readers."

376p

PEASANT LIFE

IN THE

WEST OF ENGLAND.

BY

FRANCIS GEORGE HEATH,

EDITOR OF THE NEW EDITION OF GILPIN'S "FOREST SCENERY,"

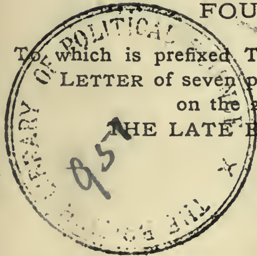
AUTHOR OF

"THE ENGLISH PEASANTRY," "SYLVAN SPRING,"
"OUR WOODLAND TREES," "THE FERN WORLD," "THE FERN PARADISE,"
"BURNHAM BEECHES," "TREES AND FERNS,"
ETC., ETC.

1872

347837
3. 38.
11.

FOURTH EDITION.

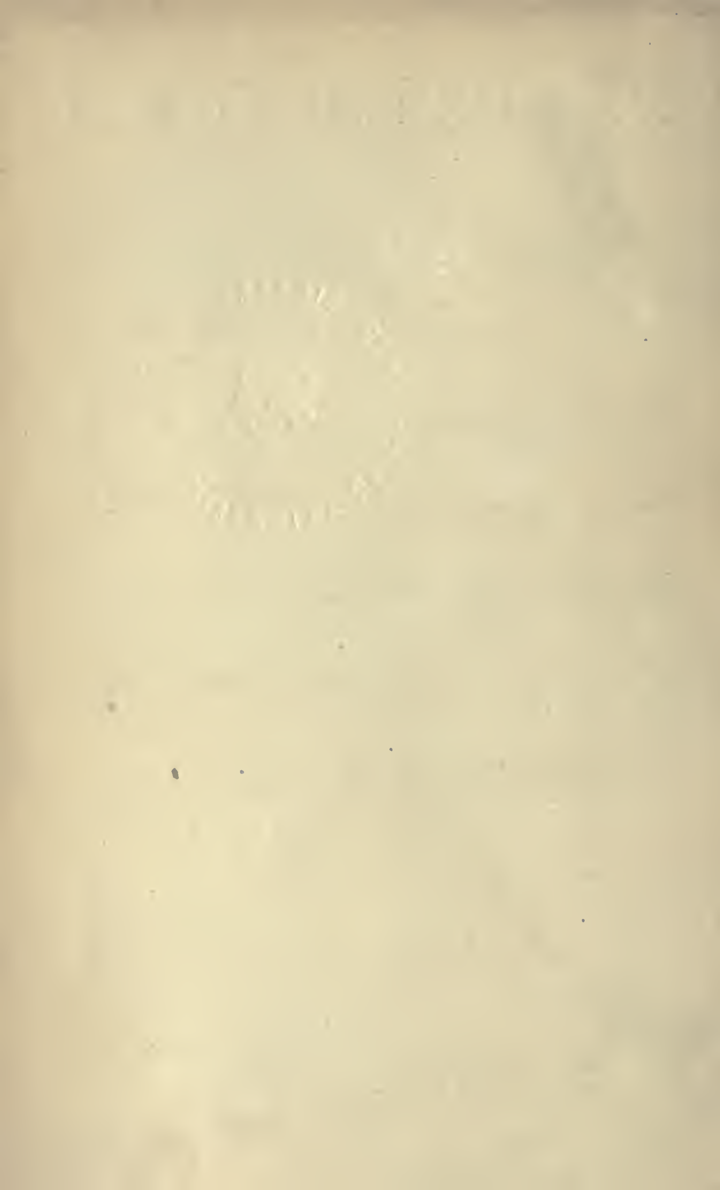


To which is prefixed THE FAC-SIMILE of an AUTOGRAPH LETTER of seven pages, addressed to THE AUTHOR, on the 28th December 1880, by THE LATE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD.

B.L.P.S.
WITHDRAWN

LONDON:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.
1881.

[*All rights reserved.*]



Dec 28 Hughenden Manor. 80

Dear Sir,

I thank you for your new volume. Your life is occupied with two subjects, which always deeply interest me: the condition of our Peasantry, & Trees.

Having had some knowledge

F. G. Heath
Esqre

knowledge of the West
of England 5 & 20 yrs
ago, I am persuaded
of the general accuracy
of your reports, both of
their previous, & their
present, condition.

You must remember,
however, that the condition
of the British Peasant
has, at all times, much
varied

varied in different parts
of the country. Those of
this district are well to do.
Their wages have risen
forty per ct. in my time,
& their habitations are
wonderfully improved.

Again, the agricultural
population of the North
of England, the hinds
of Northumberland &
the

the contiguous counties,
were always in great
advance of the southern
Peasantry, & with all our
improvements, continue
so.

With regard to your
being informed, that in
many parts of the West
of England, the peasantry
are now starving, I
should

Hughenden Manor.

I should recommend you to be very strict in your investigations before you adopt that statement. Where is this? And how, with our present law, could this occur?

With regard to Trees, I passed part

of

passed part of my
youth in the shade
of Burnham Beeches,
& have now the
happiness of living amid
my own "green retreats".
I am not surprised,
that the ancients
worshipped Trees -
Lakes & Mountains,
however

however glorious the time, in time weary—sylvan scenery never palls.

Yrs faithly

Beaconsfield

NOTE TO THE FOURTH EDITION.

THE facsimile of an Autograph Letter, addressed by the late LORD BEACONSFIELD to the Author so recently as the 28th December, 1880, will, it is believed, lend an especial interest to the present Edition. This genial communication was received in reply to a letter from the Author, forwarded to his Lordship with a copy of 'PEASANT LIFE IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND,' on the 24th of the same month of December. The letter of the distinguished statesman and *littèrateur* will perhaps surprise some persons who may have failed to recognise, under the guise of the astute politician, the quiet lover of Trees and of sylvan scenery: and there are probably others who were unaware of Lord Beaconsfield's especial interest in the welfare of the English Peasantry. Amongst these the author does not include himself—for he believes that, had the life of this eminent man and accomplished politician been spared for a short time longer, he would have accorded his warm support to the proposition to confer the political franchise upon the English agricultural labourer.

LONDON, *May*, 1881.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

THIS volume, in its present form, is substantially a New Book: and, inasmuch as a New Book is ordinarily entitled to more attention than a New Edition, the Author feels that he sacrifices something in putting forth the following pages under the apparent guise of a mere re-issue.

That it is much more than a re-issue of the First Edition will be allowed, when it is stated that the hundred pages, of which it first consisted, have been extended, in the present publication, to four hundred pages, by carrying back and bringing forward its narrative. The original chapters—which have been entirely re-written —thus form but the nucleus of the present work; and, even in their re-written form, those

chapters only extend a few pages beyond the space they originally occupied.

Three-fourths, therefore, of this volume are new; and one-half of it—relating to the Peasant Life of to-day—is written from the freshest of materials,—gathered, put into literary form, and published, without the loss of a single day.

In dealing with his Subject the Author has confined himself solely to its social and economical aspect. He would be uncandid, however, were he to attempt to conceal his knowledge of the fact, that, underlying this social question, is a 'burning' political question that is certain, in the immediate future, to be fought out on the arena of parliamentary conflicts. But, into that question, he has not deemed it necessary to enter—contenting himself with the record of facts which will be found in the succeeding pages, and leaving political writers to draw from those facts what deductions they please.

The conditions of peasant life throughout England are very much alike, in so far as the *system* is concerned under which the tillers of our fields live and toil. But our

peasantry, whilst equal in the excellent qualities of the heart, are unequal in their mental and physical qualities, for the reason that they have lived under widely different circumstances, in so far as those circumstances have been affected by a greater or a less amount of wages.

Whilst, therefore, this volume may be said to represent the *system* of peasant life throughout England, it gives the worst phase of that system as found in the western counties: and, if there the hand of progress is so marked, what may we not hope has been the result, elsewhere, of the social uprising of our peasant population? There has, indeed, been proportionate progress everywhere throughout the rural districts of England: but the actual record of the advance is here confined to the western districts.

The saying that 'He gives twice who gives quickly,' may, perhaps, have some application to the case of an author who is desirous to present to the public interesting facts at an opportune moment. There is a time for everything; and an author must be allowed the privilege, when

he has anything to say, of selecting his time for saying it.

Especially opportune, at this moment, must be any statements regarding our English peasantry. Yet, had the Author attempted to do more than he has done, in this volume, he could never have published his facts in time to be useful to the public; for when he had got to the end of his investigation, the ground first traversed would require traversing anew, because the materials first gathered would be, to a large extent, out of date. A Royal Commission was appointed, in 1879, to inquire into the causes of agricultural 'depression' in this country. The object of the Commission is to apply some remedy for this particular kind of depression, and doubtless the Commissioners are accumulating a considerable mass of facts. But there is, apparently, little prospect of any early Report; and there is, we think, good reason for anticipating, that, when this weighty document does appear, the agricultural 'depression' will have passed away! Meanwhile, it is hoped that some light may be thrown upon this

subject by one of the chapters in this volume.

It will always be to the Author a pleasant reflection, that some good was secured for the peasant population of the West of England by the publication of the facts contained in the First Edition of this work. The small and unpretending little volume secured so much notice from every section of the Press, that, in a few weeks from its issue, it had passed into a Second Edition, and had elicited from the leaders of opinion in the western counties the admission that its statements had, to quote the language of one journal, 'proved dangerous to more abuses than one.' Thanks—for much of this effect—were unquestionably due to the west country Press itself, which admirably supported the Author's attacks upon the miserable system of semi-feudalism which had survived in most perfect form in the rural districts of western England.

One instance, the Author may perhaps be allowed to give, in proof of how much good may result from the exposure of abuses which have long lain unregarded. A noble Duke, the

owner of large estates in the West of England, admitted, to a mutual friend, that his first knowledge of the dilapidated condition of some of his own cottages, which he had not seen for many years, was derived from the perusal of the present writer's description of them. It must be added, that the nobleman in question took the first opportunity of visiting his property, and lost no time in remedying the deplorable state of affairs which absenteeism had caused.

To the correspondents who have furnished him with much valuable information and assistance, the Author desires to tender his grateful acknowledgments. Amongst these his especial thanks are due to Mr. Henry Mordle of Norton Fitzwarren; to Mr. and Miss Royce, of Marlborough; to the Rev. William Brown Keer, Curate-in-charge of Heywood, Wilts; to Mr. W. Vincent Moore, Jun., of Wilton; to Mr. Charles T. Hitchings, of Malmesbury; to the Rev. W. J. Pope, of Godmanstone Rectory, Dorchester; to Dr. John Thompson, J.P., of Bideford; to Mr. J Whittingham, of Teignmouth; to Dr. Linnington Ash, of Holsworthy;

to Mr. A. Hingston, of Kingsbridge; to Mr. Charles Parkhouse, of Halberton; to Mr. R. A. Kinglake, J.P., of Taunton; to the Rev. Montague C. Goodford, Rector of Wootton Courtney; to the Rev. William B. de Moleyns, Vicar of Burrington; and to Mr. George N. Shore of Stoke-sub-Hamdon.

LONDON, *October* 1880.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

I PLACE this, my First Book, in the hands of the Public in the hope that it may prove both interesting and instructive. Amidst the vast multitude of literary productions which exist in the present writing and reading age, I send forth my small volume to fight its way for a place in the popular estimation: a tiny bark launched upon a wide sea. Of one thing I am certain, namely, that my book treats of a thoroughly popular subject. Whether or not I have handled that subject in a manner which will please the Public it is for themselves to judge. All that I can myself say is, that my book is an earnest one.

FRANCIS GEORGE HEATH.

LONDON, *August* 1872.

CONTENTS.

PAGE
INTRODUCTORY 3

PART I.

A GLANCE AT THE PAST.

1. The Western Country 15
2. The West Country Peasant 24
3. His Dwelling 26
4. His Wife and Children 38
5. Work, Earnings, Food, Drink, and Dress 45
6. Education and Morals 62

PART II.

PEASANT LIFE IN 1872.

1. A Sunday with Canon Girdlestone 73
2. From the Plough to Prosperity 98
3. The Vale of Wrington 105
4. An Incentive to Education 115
5. Cider Truck 122
6. Poverty and Riches 127
7. Wages and Benevolence 142
8. Allotments 147
9. The Vale of Taunton 152
10. Modern Cowherds 159
11. A Family of Twelve. 166
12. The 'Privileges' of the Peasant 169
13. A Short Story of Peasant Life 181
14. The West of England Sanatorium 184

PART III.

AMONG THE PEASANTRY IN 1873.

PAGE

1. 'Cottage Homes' 191
2. Pigland 200
3. Women Labourers 204
4. Exmoor 207

PART IV.

ENGLISH PEASANTS OF TO-DAY.

1. Lights and Shadows 219
2. Two Life Histories 227
3. Present Money Earnings 234
4. Privileges 255
5. Cottages and Sanitation 259
6. A Model Village 283
7. 'Potato Ground' 289
8. Dress of the Period 294
9. Living and 'Credit' 303
10. Halberton in 1880 318
11. A Pig Insurance Society 324
12. Superstition and Folk-lore 330
13. Amusements 340
14. Poor Farming and 'Depression' 346
15. Depopulation 360
16. Moral and Intellectual Progress 366

INDEX 391

INTRODUCTORY.

'Black sin may nestle below a crest
And crime below a crown;
As good hearts beat 'neath a fustian vest
As under a silken gown.
Shall tales be told of the chiefs who sold
Their sinews to crush and kill,
And never a word be sung or heard
Of the men who reap and till?'

The Kings of the Soil.

PEASANT LIFE
IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND.

INTRODUCTORY.

A FEELING of intense sympathy for the English peasant labourer was the motive cause which impelled the Author of this volume to make his first serious literary effort. This feeling of sympathy was in no degree 'sentimental,' but was aroused by actual acquaintance with its subject and object. It is a trite saying that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives: but it was especially true of the poor agricultural labourer before the date of the movement which commenced in Warwickshire, in the early part of the year 1872, for the improvement of his condition. It was too generally supposed, previous to that time, that wretchedness and squalor were chiefly confined to our great cities:

and wealthy citizens, accustomed, in their daily walks through the streets, to meet the bent forms, the hollow and pallid faces and the tattered garments which bespoke Want in some of its most terrible aspects, could not easily imagine that distress and privation might be found elsewhere than in association with the narrow alleys, the festering courts and the close atmosphere, which were, as they still, unhappily, are, the ordinary accompaniments of our great centres of industrial life. It was naturally difficult, for those whose acquaintance with the country was limited to occasional visits to it during holiday seasons, to believe that the labourer who worked in the fields under the blue canopy of heaven—the ideal colour of the country sky—could be anything but a happy being: for, by the power of association, when wandering by gurgling brooks and through sylvan glades, listening to the sweet songs of birds, and looking upon the joyous sights of 'the country'—sights of rich and beautiful things which abound nowhere in such perfection as they are to be found,

'Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,'

it was not easy to imagine that aught but

happiness and contentment could be the lot of the rustic.

Townspeople had been deceived by the poets, nearly all of whom had thrown a halo of romance around their pictures of peasant life—a rose-coloured tinge of unreality, the fruit of imagination to which the rein had been too freely given, whilst the plain truth was sacrificed to the desire for mere effect. But, however faithful may have been the descriptions of pastoral life, given by the older poets as applicable to the times of which they wrote, those descriptions do not convey a truthful idea of the condition of English peasants of the nineteenth century. Yet it is pleasant to revel in the sweet delusions of poetry, and fancy them real. But though Goldsmith's

> 'Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,
> Where health and plenty cheer'd the labouring swain,'

may possibly have its counterpart in some corner of 'sunny England,' it has not been the good fortune of the present writer to find it. Goldsmith's contemporary the author of the beautiful 'Elegy written in a country churchyard,' gives us a much more faithful picture of the typical 'hamlet' of his time—the 'simple

annals' of whose 'rude forefathers' are recounted in the eloquent and touching lines which depict the grave of social ambitions and intellectual possibilities :—

> 'But knowledge to their eyes her ample page
> Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll ;
> Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul.'

Rudely indeed were dwellers in English cities disillusioned when the first burning light of general and wide-reaching publicity was brought to bear, in 1872, upon English peasant life as it existed in one of the most beautiful of the English midland counties.

There had, it is true, been previous inquiry, under Government direction ; and a very large amount of information bearing on the social, physical, and intellectual condition of the field labourers of England had been obtained and published. But the facts were hidden away—and thus practically concealed from the general public—in unread blue books, which contained, nevertheless, details of deep and thrilling interest, though the date at which the latest of these details had been gathered was anterior by only two or three years to the revelations of 1872.

The Author's own knowledge of west country

life, derived from a residence of many years in the West of England, led him to believe that, unfortunate as was the condition of the rural labourers in Warwickshire—as shown, at the time of the, now historically, famous 'strike' in that county, by the newspaper correspondents who went down to make their investigations in the pretty Warwickshire village of Wellesbourne, where, on the 11th of March 1872, the 'strike' took place—the peasantry of the western counties were in a much more deplorable condition. But absence for some time from the western districts prevented him from knowing whether any change for the better had occurred since the period to which his recollections referred.

It was under these circumstances that the Author determined to undertake a special tour of inquiry amongst the peasant population of the West of England. This inquiry, commenced in 1872, was resumed and continued in 1873. The result of the first inquiry was the publication of the first edition of this work under the title of *The 'Romance' of Peasant Life in the West of England.* An account of the tour of 1873 was embodied in the Author's larger work, *The English Peasantry.* But as the results of both these investigations relate to

the peasantry of the western counties, and come fully within the scope of this volume, they are included—forming Parts II. and III.—in the present edition.

Considerable interest will, however, it is hoped, be added to the work by the new chapters which precede and follow the story of peasant life in the West of England in 1872–3. For the materials from which the chapters included in Part I.—'A Glance at the Past,'—were written, the Author is indebted to three important sources; namely,—1, to the 'Reports of Special Assistant Poor-Law Commissioners on the employment of women and children in Agriculture,' published in 1843; 2, to the able and valuable work of Mr. James Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850–51*; and 3, to the Reports, published in 1869, of the 'Commission on the employment of children, young persons and women, in Agriculture.' In none of the discussions which have taken place on the subject of the condition of our agricultural labourers during the last eight years has there been any reference made to the Poor Law Reports of 1843; for the volume containing them has, doubtless, so far as the general public are concerned, passed into oblivion. Mr. Caird's book, too, has been long out of print. It

consisted mainly of letters contributed to *The Times*, re-written before republication; and was designed to exhibit the state of agriculture throughout England, of which it was, the author stated, 'the only general account' which had appeared since Arthur Young's tours, undertaken eighty years previously. From these interesting and valuable letters, however, there is one curious omission. The writer did not visit Somersetshire, and he gave no reason for the omission of that important agricultural county from the area of his investigations.

It will be interesting to notice that a somewhat similar condition of things to that which has necessitated an inquiry at the present time in this country into the causes of agricultural 'depression,' had suggested Mr. Caird's mission thirty years ago; for, in the preface to his work, he said: 'In the beginning of 1850, the low prices of agricultural produce and the serious complaints of farmers and landlords, indicated the necessity of some inquiry into the actual state of agriculture in the principal counties of England.' He stated that his facts were obtained by 'personal inquiry and inspection, principally by walking or riding carefully over individual farms in different districts of each county, accompanied

by the farmers—by traversing estates with the landlord or his agent—and by seeking access to the best and most trustworthy sources of local information.'

The elaborate and voluminous Reports of the Agricultural Commission of 1867, whose inquiries were conducted from 1868 to 1870, have been occasionally referred to during recent years; but not even a summary of the contents of these Reports, except that contained in *The English Peasantry*, has been republished in any work issued since the date of the inquiry. These important Reports may be said to cover the whole field of agriculture in this country, and they include a great mass of facts, many of which are of startling interest. Necessarily there occurs in these voluminous books a considerable amount of repetition—not in the individual reports of the commissioners, but in the appendices of evidence—repetition necessitated by the desirability of comparing the testimony of different persons. Of the detailed and abundant data contained in the important and interesting works of the authorities which have just been referred to, little more than a summary can be given in the following pages. Yet the Author hopes that the picture which he will endeavour

to paint with the materials at his disposal may not be wanting in completeness and truthfulness, though it be only a rapid sketch.

The succeeding and concluding chapters of this volume will contain descriptions of the peasant life of to-day in the districts—Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Devonshire, and Somersetshire—to which its pages relate. The Author, therefore, trusts that, so far at least as representative facts are concerned, this volume may be considered to furnish something like a record of the life history of the peasant labourer of the western districts of England during the last half century.

PART I.

A GLANCE AT THE PAST.

A GLANCE AT THE PAST.

1.

THE WESTERN COUNTRY.

No part of fair England presents a finer stretch of meadow, pasture, and corn land than that comprised within the area covered by the counties of Wilts, Dorset, Somerset, and Devon; and few parts can equal this 'western country' in the richness—as a whole—of its soil and the abundance of its produce. Yet the good gifts of nature are not spread with equal munificence over every portion of this extensive tract of agricultural country; for the orchards and rich pasture lands—which nestle amidst its leafy valleys—are alternated, here and there, by chalky hill and rolling down, by rugged moorland, and level treeless plain. The lines of cultivation follow

the geological formation of the district, but are assisted, more or less, throughout its whole extent, by the welcome moisture—the life of all vegetation—induced by an exceptionally abundant rainfall, which, in its turn, is largely promoted by the neighbourhood of the sea, along the extensive coast lines of the north and of the south of this part of the western peninsula.

Wiltshire alone of the four counties we are discussing has no seaboard. Its area of thirteen hundred and sixty-seven square miles is divided naturally into two parts by the range of hills which traverse the county about midway, taking a direction from the north-east to the south-west. The northern, or, more strictly speaking, the north-western division, consists of the rich and fertile valleys which are watered by the Avon, the Kennet, and their tributaries, and it includes corn and pasture land parted by the dividing lines of hedgerow and tree so familiar in the pastoral scenery of England. Passengers by the Great Western Railway must often have noticed this particular tract of country; for that line passes nearly midway through the district, taking the towns of Swindon and Chippenham on its route. This country is covered by numerous farms, varying in size and importance, but

famous for the abundant produce of milk, butter, and cheese, for the quality of the stock bred and grazed upon their stream-side pastures, and for the wheat, barley, potatoes, and 'green crops' which are grown upon their arable lands.

The lowlying richness of the northern side of Wiltshire gives place, in the middle lands and towards the south, to the undulating, calcareous expanse of Salisbury plain; and the 'chalky waves,' as the rolling downs have been aptly named, extend thence towards the northern boundary of Dorset and the north-western side of Hampshire. Here and there, over this part of the county, the uplands break into leafy and cultivated valleys where rich meadows meet the eye; but the general character of the district may be best described by designating it a region of extensive sheep-farming and of corn-growing on a large scale; and what richness the soil obtains on the bleak upper land is derived rather from cultivation than from nature.

Calcareousness peeping out here and there over many parts of Wiltshire's southern neighbour, not only along upland roads but from the thin surface soil of arable and pasture land, indicates that Dorset—with its area of somewhat over a thousand square miles—possesses to a

large extent the geological character of the first-named county; and, where the chalky soil predominates, as it does chiefly over the hills which run across the centre of the county, fertility is induced by cultivation. Though in parts denuded of trees, the greenness of the extensive pasture lands is refreshing; and the grazing of sheep on the uplands, and the corn growing and dairy feeding in the little valleys below, give evidence of the agricultural importance of the district.

> 'Go look through merrie England,'

says an old ballad;

> 'Of all the shires you there may see,
> Oh, the fairest is green Somerset,
> The flower of all the west countree!'

To this panegyric every true son of Devon will object, though he will not deny that the sister county has attractions of its own and a character of its own. Its character is eminently pastoral, its soil is singularly rich, and its greenness is pervading and luxuriant. Yet its greenness owes its distinguishing feature to cultivation. But instead of the monotonousness which is apparent in some of our purely agricultural counties where wide areas of corn and of other crops extend,

without apparent lines of division, mile after mile in level uniformity, meadow and corn land in Somersetshire are prettily diversified. Quiet pastures extend upon the slopes of gentle hills. Parting hedges, topped by leafy elms, portion out the country, not in regular squares, but in fields of varying size; and these, in turn, present aspects which do not tire by ceaseless repetition of the same crop. In spring the pasture lands are golden with the bloom of buttercups; and the wealthy hue is indicative—so experts say, though opinions differ—of the richness of the soil. But interspersed amongst the crowfoot meadows are potato and bean fields and spaces of corn land, bright in the spring by the vigorous greenness of sprouting wheat and barley. Then there are squares of blood-red trefoil, and the alternation of green crops—vetch and turnip, 'mangel' and 'swede'—give pleasant variety to the agricultural features of the country. Towards the north stretch the bold crests of the Mendip hills, whilst between them and the great cities of Bath and Bristol lies an undulating and fertile district. To the west are the Quantocks, which are the outposts of the hilly country which terminates in the rugged expanse of the beacon-crowned forest of Exmoor. But between

the Mendips and the Quantock hills lies the beautiful vale of Taunton Deane, rich in leafiness, and green and beautiful by the presence of orchard, and cornfield, and meadow. Cattle are largely bred upon the Somersetshire pastures, and as sale stock form an important feature of the agricultural industry of the district, whose area exceeds sixteen hundred and forty square miles. Dairies, too, are everywhere, and the cream, butter, and cheese manufactured from the abounding milk are famous throughout the west country, and find their way into the London market, and to many another distant city and town. The fame of its Cheddar cheese has reached even to the opposite shores of the Atlantic, and has so stimulated the cheese-producing ambition of our American cousins as to induce them to imitate the quality of this favourite and well-known product of the green western shire of the mother country, and, regardless of the belief that there is nothing 'in a name,' to export to our shores large quantities of their own manufacture under the ingenious designation of 'American Cheddar.' Nor must the orchards of Somerset be forgotten, for they produce what forms a very large contribution to the 'raw material' which furnishes the far-famed

west-country cider. From its bordering port of Bristol the produce of Somersetshire finds its way to a wider market than that which is furnished by its own substantial towns, or provided even by the important line of railway that passes through it on its way from London to the Land's End.

Famed, far beyond the limits of its two thousand five hundred and eighty-five square miles, for its romantic and beautiful scenery, sunny Devon holds no unimportant place amongst the agricultural districts of Great Britain. From the heights of the granite torrs which rise above the wild tract of Dartmoor, and of the cliffs, which, on its northern sea-border, hurl back the waters of the Atlantic, there is soft descent into smiling valleys, delightful in climate and rich in soil and productions. Levelness and uniformity of surface can rarely be found in this smiling county. When its hills by their boldness, and its valleys by their softness, do not offer those strong and sudden contrasts which charm all beholders, there is ever-varying undulation in the surface of the country—undulation which gives force and character to the leaping, sparkling streams which abound throughout its length and breadth. As if to suit the character of the county, which in every detail of its landscape is

marked by the absence of all sameness, its farms are numerous and very various in size, existing, too, in positions which vary with the differing phases of the district. On the high grounds of Exmoor and Dartmoor vast numbers of sheep are fed. There, too, is bred a far-famed hardy race of ponies. In the vale of Exeter, in the South Hams—as the fertile and beautiful region is called, which, lying southward of Dartmoor, extends from Torbay on the east to Plymouth Sound on the west—and also along the delightful valleys which are watered by the Taw and the Torridge, the Exe, the Teign, the Sid, the Axe, and the Otter, and by the sparkling tributaries of these streams, pastures, cornfields, and orchards contribute largely to the abundant produce of the district. Wheat, barley, oats, and pulse, potatoes, beans, clover, and other green crops, flourish in the cultivated hollows, whilst the numerous orchards furnish large quantities of cider, which is one of the staple products of this western garden of England. Cattle are largely bred, and the dairy produce of the county, including the famous and inimitable 'cream,' has raised this delightful district to a high position in the estimation of the agricultural world.

Such, as we have briefly described them, are these western counties of England; and it may fairly be said that, regarded as a whole, it would be difficult to find anywhere a more richly-favoured agricultural province.

2.

THE WEST COUNTRY PEASANT.

VERY much as we have described them in the preceding chapter have the western counties been during the last half century. The necessities of agriculture may have changed, from time to time, during that period, the face of particular districts by the cutting down of trees or the levelling of hedges; by the maintenance or the discontinuance of particular fields as arable or pasture; by changes in the rotation of crops, or by alterations in the spirit of enterprise in certain localities —alterations due to various causes, and leading to the increase or diminution of the amount of capital expended on agricultural improvements. But the general features of cultivation or pasturage have remained unchanged: for the reason that it is the geological character of a country, as well as its position its climate and its rainfall, which determine the nature of its agriculture.

In a district so richly endowed by circumstances of soil and position, where fruitfulness and plenty are ready to follow in the path of industry, it is not easy to picture the peasant as other than a happy being; and until townspeople were better informed, the life of the rural labourer was believed to be one of almost unalloyed happiness. Something of his condition has doubtless been learnt during the last few years: but we believe that many of the facts which this volume will relate, will, by throwing light upon the past, bring into prominence a state of things which, though painful in itself, should have deep and abiding interest for all who are concerned for the social welfare of one of the most important of the industrial classes in this country. How the peasant labourer lived and toiled in one of the most beautiful districts of 'happy England,' at a time which preceded by many years the period when public attention was first prominently called to his condition and mode of life, it will be the object of the immediately succeeding chapters to record; and from the period thus indicated the narrative will proceed until the history is brought down to the present day.

3.

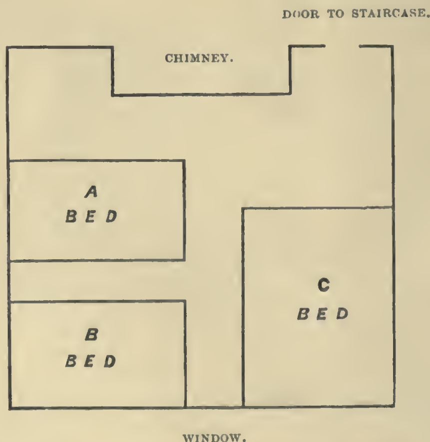
HIS DWELLING.

'HOME' is, doubtless, 'home,' 'be it never so humble:' but in spite of its sentimental aspect, there can be no question that the condition of the dwelling must always primarily determine the comfort of home. Let us look at the state of the cottages of the west country peasants at three different periods during the last forty years. Speaking on this subject in 1843 the Poor Law Commissioner reports: 'The want of sufficient accommodation seems universal. Cottages generally have only two bedrooms (with very rare exceptions); a great many have only one. The consequence is, that it is often extremely difficult, if not impossible, to divide a family so that grown-up persons of different sexes, brothers and sisters, fathers and daughters, do not sleep in the same room. Three or four persons not

infrequently sleep in the same bed. In a few instances I found that two families, neighbours, arranged so that the females of both families slept together in one cottage and the males in the other: but such an arrangement is very rare, and in the generality of cottages I believe that the only attempt that is, or that can be, made to separate beds, with occupants of different sexes, and necessarily placed close together from the smallness of the rooms, is an old shawl or some article of dress suspended as a curtain between them.'

Here is one instance in proof of these statements. At Stourpain, a village near Blandford, the Commissioner measured a bedroom in a cottage consisting of only two rooms, one above the other. The ground-floor room was used by the family as a general 'sitting-room,' and for meals and every other domestic purpose. The 'family circle' consisted of eleven persons whose combined aggregate money earnings, by the way, were sixteen shillings and sixpence per week! with no advantages worth mentioning beyond the father's title to one bushel of 'grist' corn during each week at one shilling below the market price. The one bedroom of this family was ten feet square—not reckoning two small

recesses by the sides of the chimney, abou
eighteen inches deep. The thatch formed th
roof, and the height of the latter from the floo
was, in the highest part—namely, the middl
of the room—about seven feet! There was bu
one small window in the apartment, opposite th
fireplace, and this was about fifteen inches squar
This spacious and roomy chamber containe
three beds, the position of which in relation t
each other will be seen by the accompanyin
diagram :—



Premising that there was no curtain or an
kind of separation between the beds, let u

look at the disposition of the inmates of this sleeping apartment. In bed A slept the father and mother, a little boy, Jeremiah, aged a year and a half, and an infant of four months. In bed B slept the three daughters—two of whom, Sarah and Elizabeth, were twins, twenty years of age, and the third, named Mary, was four. Bed C was occupied by the four sons of the family—Silas, aged seventeen, John, aged fifteen, and James and Elias respectively aged fourteen and ten! In alluding to this case the Commissioner remarked that it was not an extraordinary one, but that, more or less, every bedroom in the village was crowded with inmates of both sexes and of various ages. The reason for such a state of things was, of course, the want of cottages. In one instance mentioned to the Commissioner, by an agent of the Marquis of Lansdowne, twenty-nine persons were found occupying one cottage when he, the agent, was engaged in taking the preceding census in the parish of Bremhill. 'Amongst them,' the agent said, 'were married men and women, and young people of nearly all ages.' In another parish, Studley, he further said, 'It is not at all uncommon for a whole family to sleep in the same room.' He added—and the

unwholesome truth must be told—that the number of illegitimate children in the same place was very great, a result which he attributed wholly to the want of proper accommodation in the cottages.

Cottages everywhere at this period in the western counties of Dorset, Somerset, Wilts and Devon, are described as being 'old, and frequently in a state of decay.' As to their condition, however, and their surroundings, let the Commissioner speak for himself: 'The floor of the room in which the family live during the day is always of stone in these counties and wet or damp through the winter months being frequently lower than the soil outside. The situation of the cottage is often extremely bad, no attention having been paid at the time of its building to facilities for draining. Cottages are frequently erected on a dead level, so that water cannot escape; and sometimes on spots lower than the surrounding ground. In the village of Stourpain, in Dorsetshire there is a row of several labourers' cottages mostly joining each other, and fronting the street, in the middle of which is an open gutter. There are two or three narrow passages leading from the street between the houses to the back

of them. Behind the cottages the ground rises rather abruptly, and about three yards up the elevation are placed the pigsties and places of convenience of the cottages. There are also shallow excavations, the receptacles, apparently, of all the dirt of the families. The matter constantly escaping from the pigsties &c., is allowed to find its way through the passages between the cottages into the gutter in the street, so that the cottages are nearly surrounded by streams of filth. It was in these cottages that a malignant typhus broke out about two years ago, which afterwards spread through the village. The bedroom, of which we have given a diagram, was in one of these cottages! The Commissioner remarked: 'This is perhaps an extreme case; but I hardly visited a cottage where there were any attempts at draining. The dirt of the family is thrown down before or behind the cottage; if there is any natural inclination in the ground from the cottage, it escapes; if not, it remains till evaporated! Most cottages have pigsties joining them; and these add to the external uncleanliness of the labourer's dwelling.'

It would be too easy, unfortunately, to multiply instances showing the really terrible state

of overcrowding at this period in the cottages of the peasantry in the west of England. A surgeon of considerable experience, writing to the Commissioner, confirmed the evidence of the latter, that cottages were everywhere, in that district, 'too small' for the families living in them: and he gave one example. 'Two years ago,' he said, 'typhus fever occurred in a neighbouring parish which I attend. There was one cottage I attended which consisted of one room on the ground floor and two small bedrooms up stairs. In this cottage lived an old man, with his wife, his two daughters—middle-aged women—and his son and wife, with three children—in all, ten individuals. The whole family had the fever, some of them very severely. The son's wife, with two of her children, were on a bed in an out-house; in the out-house was a well and a large tub containing pigs' victuals, and the general receptacle for everything. The floor was earthen, with no ceiling but the thatch of the roof. In the same village there were more than forty cases of typhus, and the spread of the disease must be attributed to the people living so densely packed together!

Writing to the Commissioner at the same time, the Honourable and Rev. S. Godolphin Osborne,

rector of Bryanston, near Blandford, said:—'Within the last year, I saw, in a room about thirteen feet square, three beds: on the first lay the mother, a widow, dying of consumption: on the second two unmarried daughters, one eighteen years of age, the other twelve: on the third, a young married couple, whom I myself had married two days before.' Here is another statement by the same clergyman: 'A married woman of thoroughly good character told me a few weeks ago, that, on her confinement, so crowded with children is her one room, they are obliged to put her on the floor in the middle of the room, that they may pay her the requisite attention. She spoke of this as, to her, the most painful part of that, her hour of trial.' He added, that he 'could not put on paper' all the scenes he had known to occur from this promiscuous crowding of the sexes together.

Passing over a period of more than a quarter of a century, let us look at the cottages in the western counties in 1868-9. In a long, able, and interesting letter to the Commissioners who collected evidence at that time, as to the state of the English peasantry, Lord Sidney Godolphin Osborne, speaking for Dorsetshire, said, that since the time when he gave his previous

testimony there had been 'the greatest improvement'—much of which was doubtless due to himself: and the Commissioner, Mr. Stanhope, stated that the great majority of landowners had effected 'great changes on their estates' in the matter of cottages. Yet the latter added: 'In spite of these changes the cottages of this county are more ruinous and contain worse accommodation than those in any other county I have visited except Shropshire,' these other counties being Kent, Chester, Stafford, and Rutland. He speaks especially of one estate as being notorious for its bad cottages, adding that 'Such villages as Bere Regis, Fordington, Winfrith, Cranbourne, or Charminster, (in which there is an average of seven persons in a house,) together with others described in the evidence, are a disgrace to the owners of the land, and contain many cottages unfit for human habitation.'

In his evidence as to Wiltshire, the Commissioner, Mr. Norman, describes three kinds of cottages. Those built by landlords he mentioned as the best. Those erected by speculators as being greatly inferior; whilst the cottages built by labourers themselves—generally constructed of wattle and dab, and thatched, and containing only one bedroom and one sitting-

room—he referred to as being the worst. These were generally, he stated, totally destitute of drainage, and often, owing to the poverty of the owners, in very bad repair. Mr. Norman mentioned that the medical men whom he consulted were unanimous in condemning the cottage accommodation as totally inadequate to secure the health of the inmates; stating, however, that the evils arising from this cause would be far greater if it were not for the large proportion of time that the labourers passed in the open air.

The peasant dwellings of Devonshire were found by the Commissioner in 1868-9 to vary in condition, and in the number available for the population in different districts. In one or two localities, more especially on particular estates, the cottages were described as being 'very good.' But these were unhappily the exception to the general rule. In almost every important rural district of the county the verdict of the Commissioner was, that the labourers' dwellings were in a greater or less degree unsatisfactory. Here and there he noticed signs of improvement. But there was a very large proportion of bad and overcrowded dwellings, a great number of them containing only two rooms—a sitting and living room and a bedroom, the 'sitting-room' in many

cases having for its floor nothing but the earth. One clergyman, writing to the Commissioner at this time, referred to the great want of comfort in the labourers' dwellings, which in Devonshire were largely built of 'cob,' and contained ordinarily two rooms, that were badly lighted and very draughty, owing to badly-hung doors and imperfect casements. Speaking of the cottages in his parish (Halberton) Canon Girdlestone said, in a letter to the Commissioner, that sleeping and cottage accommodation were bad. 'Many so-called cottages,' he said, 'are mere ruinous hovels. In visiting the sick I am often obliged to take great care that my legs do not go through the holes in the floor of the sleeping-room to the room below. Some of the cottages are conveniently situated with respect to the work, and some are not. Few have more than two bedrooms; many have only one. They are overcrowded with the family; the rooms are small, low, and badly ventilated; the drainage is bad; the water supply is usually good; the gardens good; the outhouses bad, and generally without doors. No progress is being made towards increasing cottage accommodation.'

From Somersetshire came the same verdict as that recorded of the other counties which have

been named. The Commissioner, Mr. Boyle, remarked in his report: 'A special complaint that I found urged by all classes alike, was the deficiency of cottage accommodation throughout the whole of the west of England.' Instances far too numerous for the limits of this chapter, could be given, from the evidence printed with the report, of the truthfulness of this estimate as regarded Somersetshire. 'In this county,' said Mr. Boyle, 'it is not an uncommon thing to find large families, brought up in a cottage of two rooms, sometimes even in a cottage of only one room. At Butcombe,' he added, 'a cottage was shown to me in which a man and wife and family of little children live, a mere lean-to against the wall of another house, with open thatch, and the sky visible through the thatch in many places. In Chillington were some nearly as bad.' Here and there the Commissioner noticed 'model cottages,' but the instances were very rare.

4.

HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN.

It is sad to know that the pretty pictures, conjured up in the mind's eye by the rich poetry of peasant life, must vanish before the stern reality of hard facts. The work of disenchantment is not pleasant; but the truth must be told. Here is a rosy-tinted picture :—

> 'Even now methinks
> Each little cottage of my native vale
> Swells out its earthen sides, upheaves its roof,
> Like to a hillock moved by labouring mole,
> And with green trail-weeds clambering up its walls,
> Roses and every gay and fragrant plant
> Before my fancy stands, a fairy bower.
> Ay, and within it, too, do fairies dwell;
> Peep through its wreathèd window, if indeed
> The flowers grow not too close; and there within
> Thou'lt see some half a dozen rosy brats
> Eating from wooden bowls their dainty milk.'

The lines go on to describe a state of happiness, contentment, and plenty. But from the plain

facts which form the basis of our descriptions we cannot, unfortunately, as we have already intimated, find materials which will make any likeness to the original of this picture.

Let us return once more to the earlier period of our history, and learn what is to be told of the peasant's wife and children, too seldom stayers at home in rose-bound cottages, but equal toilers for the family needs, with the principal *bread*-winner strictly so called—for 'dainty milk' was not the accustomed dietary, but the rare delicacy of the peasant's family. The Commissioner who reported the facts which he gathered during the inquiry of 1842-3 stated that the practice of employing women in farm work prevailed throughout the counties of Wilts, Dorset, Somerset and Devon—but that it prevailed to the greatest extent in Devonshire, in so far as their regular and constant employment was concerned : for, whilst in the other three of these counties women's work ceased to a considerable extent in winter, it was continued in Devon. Young girls were also employed in farm work sometimes as early as, or earlier than, twelve ; but ordinarily, owing to the insufficiency of their strength to support much bodily fatigue, not before the age of fourteen or fifteen. Boys, on the

other hand, began to be regularly employed on farms as early sometimes as seven years of age, but generally at nine or ten and sometimes as late as eleven or twelve. The earliness or lateness of the age at which the sons of the peasantry began work depended, indeed, upon the supply of boy labour in any particular village. Where boys were numerous, or where the existence of good schools acted as an inducement to parents to secure some education for their boys, the age for commencing work would be greater ; and less where a small supply of boy labour existed and schools were absent. But the system of employing women and children in agricultural labour was bad, in every way, in its effects. The absence of the mother from home all day necessitated the entire neglect of the children. Sometimes it might happen that some responsible relative, as a grandmother or aunt, living with the family, would be available for taking charge of the children. But such an opportunity rarely happened ; and then it was absolutely necessary to leave them in the charge of another child, the eldest boy or girl, seven or eight years of age, perhaps, or even younger ; for older children must, perforce, work on the farm to eke out the family earnings. Sometimes children had to be

left in the charge of a child of only seven or eight years old perhaps, hired for the occasion, and paid possibly at the rate of ninepence per week for such assistance—a sum which, though small in itself, was a serious deduction from the earnings —nearly a fifth of the whole — of a peasant woman. Too frequently, however, there was no chance of guardianship even by the use of children of the mature age of seven or eight; and the little ones, often mere infants, were locked up in the cottage. The most distressing accidents have been known to happen in such circumstances—such as the children setting themselves on fire. Babies left in charge of tiny children, themselves little more than babies, have been found dead by the distressed mothers when the latter have returned at night! Apart from the actual dangers of this kind to which peasant children were subjected, there could be, of course, little or no control exercised by young guardians—left in charge of tiny brothers or sisters—over those entrusted to their care. No training or education of any kind could be given to them. What a sight for a mother returning at night to her cheerless home, tired, wet perhaps, and hungry, to find her little ones dirty—from having, uncontrolled, run riot through the house—with

their clothes torn,—the poor clothes which had been neatly mended perhaps by the hard-working mother in weary moments stolen from her exhausting toil; and food—so scanty and poor at the best of times—wasted or destroyed, by thoughtless little ones. The west country Commissioner writing on this subject in his 1842-3 report said, that where the wife is out at work all day the husband suffers to a certain extent: 'There is not,' he remarked 'the same order in the cottage, nor the same attention paid to his comfort, as when his wife remains at home all day. On returning from her labour she has to look after her children, and her husband may have to wait for his supper. He may come home tired and wet; he finds his wife has arrived just before him; she must give her attention to the children; there is no fire, no supper, no comfort, and he goes to the beer-shop.'

These enumerated evils attendant on the employment of women and young children in farm labour are only some of those which arise. Worse remains to be told: but this must be reserved for our chapter on education and morals.

When we come to the period of 1868-9 we can find from the reports of the Agricultural

Commission no indication of any improvement in this system. Mr. Stanhope, speaking of Dorsetshire, reported: 'Throughout the county, except where gloving is a constant source of occupation at home, women are largely employed in the fields. A good deal of the work done by women is in the winter, among the turnips, on the threshing machines, or in the barns.' Boys, too, he stated, were taken by farmers at a very early age—sometimes when only six, or even when younger. A very large proportion of boys were employed in farm work between six and nine years of age: and the straitened circumstances of the peasantry was the occasion for this early commencement of labour.

In Devonshire children were not employed in farm work quite to the same extent as in Dorset; and at some meetings of boards of guardians and chambers of agriculture in 1868 it was agreed that children ought not to be employed under ten years of age. The employment of women, too, in agriculture had declined, and it was often found to be difficult to obtain their services when required. Similarly in Wiltshire there was a growing disinclination on the part of the wives of the peasantry to engage in farm work. Speaking from opinions which he had gathered, Mr.

Norman, the Commissioner who visited Wiltshire, remarked: 'Those whom I visited and talked to often told me that although they themselves had always been in the habit of working, they had made up their minds that it did not answer, and that they would not encourage their children to take to it. They seem to be arriving at a conviction that where a cottage is to be kept clean and tidy, and a family provided for, the whole time of the mother of the family should be spent indoors; and that the money she can earn by going into the fields is insufficient to compensate her for the necessary loss which is occasioned by her absence from home.' The Commissioner pointed out, however, that the increased use of machinery rendered the employment of women unnecessary in many occupations in which they were formerly engaged: and that, in addition to this, there was a growing preference on their part for indoor work wherever it could be obtained. In Somersetshire also, at this time, very much the same state of things prevailed so far as the employment of women was concerned; but large numbers of little children were employed at ages varying from six to nine: and sometimes little ones, of only five years of age, were sent to work!

5.

WORK, EARNINGS, FOOD, DRINK, AND DRESS.

Nothing which concerns the English peasant is, perhaps, so well known as the nature of his work; for few, even amongst the most constant of the dwellers in towns, are ignorant of at least the most important of the operations of agriculture. The proper draining of land, and the necessary and preceding trench digging; the ploughing and harrowing; the manuring, sowing, and weeding; the cutting, stacking, and housing of the crops; the tending of pasture; the care of the flocks; shearing, milking, cheese and butter-making; loading, carting, and unloading; preparing food for and feeding horses, cows, sheep, pigs, and poultry—these are some of the thousand and one things that constitute the daily and hourly work of a farm, and give

employment to our hard-working race of peasant men, women, and children, according to place, season, and weather; and during a long course of years the character of these various occupations changes little except in the direction of method, suggested from time to time by improvements of various kinds, or altered by the introduction of machinery.

The part taken by women and children in the work of the farm is not so well known; and, indeed, it varies in different counties, and in different districts of the same county. At the time when the Commission of 1842-3 made its inquiries it was found that in the western counties the women in some villages were accustomed to reap, though the practice was unknown in others. The practice of turnip hoeing was similarly confined to particular localities. Amongst other occupations of women engaged in agriculture and farming, were—according to the seasons—working at the hay or corn harvests; weeding and picking stones; planting, earthing, and digging potatoes; pulling, digging, and hacking turnips; attending to the threshing machines; winnowing corn; beating manure, and loading it into carts; planting beans; in the cider districts, picking apples; in the dairy

districts following the routine of dairy work, and sometimes even leading horses at the plough! Of all these occupations the most fatiguing for a woman was harvest work, on account, not so much perhaps of the hard nature of the work, as of the long, trying hours, of the standing and the walking. The work of the dairy, too, in all its details was most severe and trying. One Wiltshire doctor told the Commissioner that in the frequent cases in which he was consulted by peasant women suffering from overwork, the cause of the ailments was generally attributed to the excessive fatigue of dairy work—milking and making cheese twice a day being described as work that was 'never finished,' to use a common expression; and the symptoms complained of were, amongst others, pains in the back and limbs, overpowering sense of fatigue—most painful in the morning—want of appetite and feverishness.

The ages at which women were employed varied, the Commissioner found, from fifteen to seventy! Their daily hours of work were ordinarily, in winter, eight hours—from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon; and at other seasons of the year, ten hours—from eight in the morning to six in the evening, less an

hour at mid-day for dinner; though during harvest time the occupation was often extended to twelve hours, and sometimes to sixteen hours—from four in the morning to eight at night! The medical testimony obtained by the Commissioner appeared to point to the conclusion that the employment of women in farm work was not in general injurious to their health, except in cases—and they were certainly numerous—where young girls were employed under the age of puberty, and in cases where women, of whatever age, were exposed to cold and wet. But it must be obvious that the risk of such exposure was constant, though very much greater in the winter than in the summer; and against outdoor winter employment for women the medical evidence was chiefly directed.

Describing the work of boys on farms at the period of 1842-3, the Commissioner remarked:—'Until a boy begins to be employed in the regular work of a labourer his occupations are numerous, varying with the seasons, the kind of farm he works on, and particularly with his own strength. The principal occupations are keeping birds, watching cattle in the fields, getting in wood for the house, gathering turnips for cattle, driving horses or oxen at plough;

harvest work, helping in the stable to get in hay, and potato and bean planting, &c.; going upon errands, and any occasional jobs for which his strength is sufficient; but there is no work which is at all laborious, although it may be irksome—bird-keeping, perhaps, being the most so, from its monotony; but this occupation is not without its amusements.' The hours during which boys worked forty years ago were about eight in winter, from eight to four o'clock, and about twelve during the rest of the year, namely, from six o'clock to six o'clock. Girls were ordinarily employed in less laborious occupations than those provided for boys, such as planting or picking potatoes, and helping at the hay harvest so far as their strength would permit; though the Commissioner referred to the practice which was common some years before, when the worst evils of the system of parish apprenticeship existed, of sending girls into the fields with boys, and making no difference in their occupations!

Coming now to the question of the earnings of the peasantry of the western counties at the period under review, we find the Commissioner stating that the wages in money were for men in Wiltshire, 'sometimes as low as eight shillings,

and at other times of the year as high as ten shillings a week, for work that is paid for by the piece.' During the winter, wages were eight shillings, but in the spring, and at other seasons, they were nine or ten, and in the hay and corn harvests 'considerably more;' but the work at those harvests was also considerably more, and the payment was 'by the piece.' The Commissioner concluded that 'on the average perhaps of the whole year, if the labourer is constantly employed, his wages may be taken at nine shillings and sixpence a week.' 'But,' he added, 'it does not appear that he has any other advantages from his master in addition to his wages, as in some other counties, unless it be that occasionally he has beer, and sometimes straw for his pig, allowed him; but these are accidental advantages, and are not to be taken as forming part of his regular wages.' Wages, he reported, were higher in Dorsetshire than in Wiltshire; in the neighbourhood of Blandford more than eleven shillings a week with some privileges in addition, such as free carriage of fuel, cottage at a low rent, and in some cases rent free, and the advantage of 'grist' corn—an advantage, however, thought the Commissioner, of questionable benefit. The 'grist' was generally

half a bushel of corn, though in some cases more, sold to the labourer by his employer at a reduced price. 'In some cases,' remarked the Commissioner, 'the grist is corn sold to the labourer at six shillings, or even five shillings, a bushel, whatever might be the market price. In other cases it is even sold one shilling a bushel under the market price. But most frequently it appeared to me that the grist is inferior corn ("tail ends" or "tailings"), not marketable in a common sense, and sold at a price "quite equal to its real value."' Of Devonshire the Commissioner reported that wages were, in the parts he visited, about equal to those of Dorsetshire; and he stated that in the part of Somersetshire he visited, the average wages, during the whole year, paid in money, appeared to be rather lower than in Wiltshire; but the peasants of Somersetshire had in addition, he remarked, as in Devonshire, an allowance of three pints daily of cider, 'considered by both master and labourer as worth about one shilling or one shilling and threepence a week.' But in Somersetshire generally, he believed, the peasant had very few or no advantages in addition to his wages; and he came to the conclusion that 'were the case accurately investigated,' it would be found that

in Somersetshire the labourer was 'worse off than in Wiltshire, and considerably worse off than in Dorsetshire and Devonshire.'

Throughout the four counties which form the subject of these chapters, the earnings of women varied according to circumstances—depending a good deal, probably, upon the quality of the work—from sixpence to tenpence a day, with occasional allowances of cider in the cider counties; the wages rising for the extra work of harvest to one shilling a day. Girls of tender age could earn only half a woman's wages, whilst boys, according to their strength and capacity, could earn sums varying, at the outset, from eighteenpence per week—advancing, however, through gradual stages of sixpence extra, until, when they reached the full stature and strength of a man, they could command the full measure of a man's pay. In the cider counties existed the practice of giving boys small daily allowances of cider over and above their wages.

In addition to the small cottage gardens in which the peasant could grow flowers and vegetables, the plan of letting him, for a certain rent, a piece of allotment or 'potato ground,' as it is commonly called, prevailed, at the period now under review, in the western counties.

The quantity so let was either an eighth, a quarter, a half, or three-quarters of an acre, and occasionally a whole acre; and the Commissioner reported that the allotment system had been rapidly on the increase in Wilts, Dorset, and Devon, but had not been adopted in Somersetshire to any considerable extent.

Speaking of the food and drink of the peasantry of the western counties, the Commissioner described it as consisting, in Wiltshire, of wheaten bread, potatoes, a small quantity of beer—but beer only as a luxury—and a little butter and tea, with sometimes a little bacon, or the entrails of a pig; but bacon only in cases where the earnings of the family were not limited to those of the husband. Where bacon could not be obtained a little fat was used to flavour the potatoes. In Somersetshire the Commissioner believed that the food of the peasantry consisted of similar articles of dietary to those in Wilts; and in Dorsetshire and Devonshire the food of the peasants was also much the same: but the Commissioner was of opinion that the consumption of bacon, in the two last-named counties, was more constant than in the two former.

From what the Commissioner reported of dress, it must be concluded that it was

inadequate, especially in the case of peasant women. Yet when the poor garments became wet they could not change them—in many cases because there was no second set—but were compelled to go to bed whilst they were being dried; and men, women, and children oftentimes were obliged in the morning to put on damp clothes, owing to the inability to properly dry them during the night. Yet the want of a change of working clothes did not prevent the generality of working women, the Commissioner stated, from having a better gown and other articles of dress for Sundays or holidays; and the ability to provide these better clothes was doubtless owing to the establishment and maintenance, in rural districts, of clothing clubs, under the rules of which sums of from one penny to threepence per week were regularly paid in to the club funds; and the amounts thus subscribed were increased, at the season of Christmas, by the donations of charitable persons, thus providing a premium for thrift and economy.

Passing from the consideration of the period of 1842-3, to that of 1850 we shall find a change in the condition of the peasantry of the western counties indicated by a lower rate of wages than prevailed in the preceding period

which we have brought under review. But in explanation of this change it must be stated that the beginning of the year 1850 was a time of great and general depression in the agriculture of this country. Mr. Caird reported at that period—the period of his special inquiry, to which allusion has already been made—that the wages of the peasantry of Devon varied from seven, to eight and nine, shillings a week, in addition to the daily allowance of three or four pints of cider. The earnings of the peasant in Dorsetshire he stated to be eight shillings a week, with a piece of potato-ground, fuel, and beer in harvest-time, with extra money for the extra work at that season—the allowance of beer being a gallon each day: a quart for breakfast, at ten o'clock; a pint, at half-past eleven, for luncheon; a quart for dinner, between one and two o'clock; a pint at four, with something to eat at five; and the rest when the work was finished. Women were paid, at that time, sixpence a day, and boys from half-a-crown to three-and-sixpence per week. But on the smaller farms, where the tenants were poorer and the population denser in proportion to the means of employment, the weekly wages of the peasant were as low as seven shillings a week, and in some cases only

six ! and Mr. Caird stated that he was told ‘ that even that small sum was in many cases partly paid in inferior wheat charged at a price which the farmer could not realise in the market ! ’ But low as the rate of wages was at that period, it had not fallen in the same proportion as the price of provisions, and Mr. Caird remarked that the Dorsetshire peasant was therefore at that time, ‘ more content with his circumstances than he was in times when the farmers enjoyed a prosperity in which he did not participate.’ In Wiltshire, Mr. Caird found that there was an over-supply of labour from which both farmer and peasant suffered. The farmer, employing more men than his work required, was compelled to pay them upon a rate of wages so low as to be insufficient to give the amount of physical power necessary for the performance of a fair day's work. Under this system, labour was really more costly than in counties where the general condition of the peasant was better. The wages were lower on Salisbury Plain than in Dorsetshire, and lower also than in the dairy and arable districts of North Wilts. To explain this, in part, it was stated that the rate of wages was altogether under the command of the large farmers, some of whom employed the whole labour of a parish.

Six shillings a week was the amount paid to the peasants for ordinary work by the most extensive farmer of South Wilts, who held nearly five thousand acres of land, a large part of which was his own property; but seven shillings was the more common rate; and out of these sums the peasant had to pay one shilling a week for the rent of his cottage, thus reducing his miserable earnings to five and six shillings a week; and if the agricultural depression of that period continued, even those wages, it was said, would have to be reduced! Where the family of the peasant could earn something at outdoor work his pittance was eked out a little, Mr. Caird stated, but, he added, 'In cases where there is a numerous young family, great pinching must be endured.' Here is an account, from a Wiltshire labourer, of his day's diet. After doing up his horses he proceeded to his breakfast made of a little flour with a little butter, and water from the tea-kettle poured over it. For 'lunch' at mid-day he took to the fields a piece of bread, and (when he could afford it, in circumstances in which he had no young family) some cheese. But the mid-day feast did not exhaust the last of his luxuries, for he returned in the afternoon to a few potatoes, and, possibly, to a little bacon,

though only those who were in comparatively prosperous circumstances could afford this supreme luxury. There was compensation in store, however, it will perhaps be thought, in supper—an important meal of the day with the west country peasant. The supper of the Wiltshire labourer of 1850 consisted of bread and water! Naturally and necessarily the peasant's physical appearance was in keeping with his wretched diet, and he wanted the vigour and activity which marked the well-fed peasant of the northern and midland counties.

Of Somersetshire Mr. Caird, as we have already mentioned, said, curiously enough, nothing. But he gave an interesting and valuable chapter, towards the conclusion of his volume, on 'the labourer,' in which he showed that whilst, since the time when Arthur Young made his tours of inquiry through the rural districts of England in 1770, the wages of the peasantry in the northern counties had increased by about 66 per cent., the wages of those in the whole of the southern counties had increased by only 14 per cent.; and that in some of these counties there was no increase whatever in the period of eighty years—the wages of the peasant in Berkshire and Wiltshire being the same in 1850 as they were in 1770,

whilst in Suffolk they were absolutely less! The proximity of the agricultural districts of the north to the mining and manufacturing centres in that region provided at once the explanation of the difference in the rates of pay between the northern and the southern agricultural districts —which arose, as it still arises, from the increased demand for labour in the neighbourhood of the mining and manufacturing centres. The line of high and low wages might, in fact, be broadly indicated by a line drawn from a point a little to the south of Boston—where the Wash touches the south-eastern corner of Lincolnshire—across the southern part of that county, passing thence about midway through Leicestershire; continuing, across the northern part of Warwickshire, on and between the counties of Stafford and Worcester and—after passing into Shropshire—taking a curve in a north-westerly direction through that county, and ending near the mouth of the Dee. The wages of the peasantry to the north of that line were, in 1850-1, 37 per cent. higher, on the average, than the average of those in the counties southwards of the line. Roughly speaking, this line is coincident with the termination, southwards, of the great coal-fields of England.

Few things indeed, in the history of industry, are so remarkable as the change which has taken place, since 1770, in the relative positions—in so far as concerns the rates of wages of their agricultural populations—of the northern and southern counties of England: for in 1770 the average wages per week of the northern peasantry was 6*s.* 9*d.*, and of the southern 7*s.* 6*d.*! The wages of Wiltshire at that period were below the southern average by 6*d.* per week, and the wages of Lancashire, for instance, were below the northern average by 3*d.* per week. But whilst in 1850 the wages of the peasant of Wiltshire had remained stationary at the miserable 7*s.* of 1770, those of the Lancashire peasant had risen to 13*s.* 6*d.*, having more than doubled in the same period! But living, perhaps it may be thought, was cheaper in 1850 than in 1770, and if so there would be a set-off against the stationary wages of the peasantry of Dorset and Wilts. The reverse was, unhappily, the case: for though from 1770 to 1850 the rent of land in those counties had just doubled itself, and the produce of wheat per acre had increased, in the same period, by 14 per cent.; the peasant's cottage rent had been increased by 100 per cent.; meat had

risen in price by more than 80 per cent. ; butter by 100 per cent. ; and wool by upwards of 100 per cent. ! Bread, however, the great staple of his food, was about the same in price as in 1770.

The work, food, drink and dress of the peasantry of Devon, Dorset, Somerset, and Wilts had altered very little, if at all, in their character between 1850 and 1868-9 ; nor could any improvement be recorded, in the last-named period, as having taken place in the earnings of the peasant labourer. We may, therefore, proceed to some brief consideration of the subject to be discussed in the concluding chapter of, this, our glance at the past.

6.

EDUCATION AND MORALS.

The state of education and morals in the agricultural districts of the West of England, must necessarily form one of the most important and interesting subjects to be discussed in connection with the condition of the peasantry. Deep and widespread ignorance has, unquestionably, been one of the greatest misfortunes of this class: whilst the habits and customs of agricultural labour have largely tended to affect the prevalent state of morals. How far there has been improvement, during recent years, it will be the object of the subsequent chapters to show. Here, we shall take a brief survey of the condition of things from 1842-3 to 1868-9 as revealed in the Reports of the Poor Law and of the Agricultural Commissioners.

We shall only make brief mention of the system—in many ways evil in its tendency—

of compulsory parish apprenticeship, under which the children of the peasantry were apportioned amongst the farmers in their neighbourhood—for that system was reputed to be falling rapidly into disuse even at the earlier period to which this volume relates. It was a system oftentimes of great cruelty both to parents and children, and though, in some few instances, it might have been productive of advantage, it led, in a large number of cases, directly to immorality and suffering.

When it is remembered how much the welfare of a family depends upon the mother, it will be seen that some explanation is furnished of the cause of the intellectual inferiority of the present race of peasant labourers by reference to the educational status of the women of forty years ago. In his report for 1842-3 Mr. Austin records, as follows, the results, under this head, of his inquiry in Wilts, Dorset, Devon, and Somerset:—'A great many women accustomed to work in the fields, like other women of the same class, are unable to read and write, or if to do either, it is very imperfectly. This is more particularly the case with the women above thirty; but, generally, even where they have been taught to read and write, the women of the agricultural labouring class are in a state

of ignorance affecting the daily welfare and the comfort of their families. Ignorance of the commonest things—of needlework, cooking, and other matters of domestic economy—is described as nearly universally prevalent; and when any knowledge of such things is possessed by the wife of a labourer it is generally to be traced to the circumstance of her having, before marriage, lived as a servant in a farm-house or elsewhere. A girl brought up in a cottage, until she marries, is generally ignorant of nearly everything she ought to be acquainted with for the comfortable and economical management of a cottage. The effects of such ignorance are seen in many ways, but in no one more striking than in its hindering girls from getting out to service, as they are not capable of doing anything that is required in a family of a better description. The further effect of this is, that not being able to find a place, a young woman goes into the fields to labour, with which ends all chance of improving her position; she marries and brings up her daughters in the same ignorance, and their lives are a repetition of her own.'

The semi-pauperised condition of the peasant of the western counties necessitated the contribution of every penny that could be earned by their

children to the fund for the maintenance of their families; and thus encouragement was offered to the system of employment at the tenderest age; and such necessary occupation of time led to the almost total neglect of education in the West of England. In the greater number of agricultural parishes there were day schools in existence, at which the rudiments of education were taught, and there were, of course, Sunday schools for religious instruction: but work and education could not go on simultaneously, and the frequent withdrawal of the peasant's children in order to assist, during times of pressure—at harvest and at other times—in the work of the farm, caused a most serious interruption to intellectual progress. A considerable amount of evidence was obtained by Mr. Austin in 1842-3 on this subject; and the opinion of those who were questioned was unanimous in affirming that farm-work materially interfered with learning in the village schools. What little was acquired in the first school days was usually forgotten by the time a child returned to its studies; and the age at which the serious and life-long labour of the peasant had to be commenced in earnest and school had to be finally abandoned, was so early, that it was a rare circumstance to find that any

thing beyond the ability to read a little and to write a little, had been acquired; and such meagre qualifications as had been obtained soon, and naturally, became dulled from want of practice.

Coming to the subject of morals the Commissioners gave evidence of the vast evils wrought by the overcrowding of cottages—and consequent promiscuous herding together of the sexes—evils intensified by the custom of beer and cider truck, and by the practice of associating men and women together in the work of the hay and corn harvests. Writing to the Commissioner on this point in a long letter dated December 26, 1842, the Hon. and Rev. Sidney Godolphin Osborne remarked: 'Whilst I trace the immorality of the labouring classes to defective education, the want of means to preserve decency in their families, and the temptations to intemperance which are to be found in the manner in which the beer-shop keepers, unchecked by legal interference, offer at every hour of the day, and almost every hour of the night, all the inducements likely to draw the labourer from home, and to fix in him a love of drink and bad company, I trace much of the crime he commits to *absolute want*:' and the same writer concluded his letter with a picture

of the peasant life of 1842 which may fitly close our notice of that period :—'Pamphlets on cottage husbandry, plans for cottage buildings, tracts on morality, treatises on economy, have been sent forth with no sparing hand ; but in nine villages out of ten the cottage is still nothing but a slightly improved hovel, morality is borne down by the pressure of temptation on minds unfortified by education in good principles, and the wages of the stoutest and most industrious scarce find the coarsest food, the smallest sufficiency of fuel. In my opinion, unless those above them soon determine to give up some of their own luxuries, that they may give to the labourer such wages as shall enable him to rear his family, in comfort, in a dwelling in which decency can be preserved, and within reach of a school and a church in which he and his may be taught the learning fitted for their station here, and tending to place them in the way to heaven hereafter—unless some great effort is made to obtain these objects, our peasantry will become, not the support they should be to the country, but a pregnant source of all that can tend to subvert its best institutions.'

In no part probably of this country has the progress of education proved to be so slow as in

the rural districts. Yet though for this reason it is not easy, in looking through the voluminous reports of the Commissioners who inquired in 1868-9 into the condition of the peasantry of the western counties, to gather that any material advance had been made in this direction, there were discernible signs of improvement, though the improvement was but slight; and amongst other evidence in support of this conclusion may be mentioned one derived from a Parliamentary Return published in 1867, and showing the proportionate number, per cent., of marriages in 1855 and in 1865 respectively, in which the men and women married had signed the marriage register with marks. In Devonshire, for instance, the proportion of men who thus signed the register was 27 per cent., and of women 33 per cent., in 1855; whilst, ten years later, the proportionate numbers had fallen to 18 per cent., of men, and to 22 per cent., of women. There was evidence too, in 1868-9, of a greater desire on the part of parents to secure education for their children than had previously existed: though plans and proposals of education were more conspicuous than any practical efforts to make instruction a reality.

There were signs, too, of a slight improvement

in morals, in so far at least as a diminution of drunkenness was concerned: but the terrible evils of overcrowding still existed in full vigour, and the 'mop,' 'hiring,' or 'statute' fair, to which no reference has yet been made, had not ceased to disgrace some of the smaller towns of the western districts. These fairs, annually held to enable servants, of both sexes, to be hired, were, oftentimes, the occasion of the greatest drunkenness and profligacy. Young girls dressed in their finest clothes were exhibited like cattle to be hired by the would-be employers, who came to the fair to seek their services; and the scenes which frequently took place at the close of the day were too disgraceful for description. But, though the 'mop' fair had not then, as it has not yet, become an institution of the past, there were, happily, signs that its decline had commenced.

PART II.

PEASANT LIFE IN 1872.

PEASANT LIFE IN 1872.

1.

A SUNDAY WITH CANON GIRDLESTONE.

Early morning in June could scarcely open upon a prettier scene of its kind, looked at from a distance, than a Devonshire village upon which has fallen the 'hush' of Sunday. The profound quiet—made 'audible,' now and then, by the 'cock's shrill clarion'—serves to assist the imagination in creating impressions of beauty—for the eye is but the servant of the mind. Red stone and cob-walled cottages, left in their native warmth of hue, or whitened, with roofs of thatch, slate, or tile, contrast strongly with the greenery of their own little garden enclosures, and with the verdant clothing—bright in its spring freshness—of level meadow, upland, and

hill all around. Peace and stillness brood upon the scene, and the cottagers are steeped in slumber made heavy by the toil of the preceding week. Can aught but comfort, contentment, and happiness exist under roofs whose picturesqueness gives so peculiar and characteristic a feature to this Devonshire village?

We must answer this question by the following record of a noble work—carried on during six years by Canon Girdlestone in the village of Halberton—the particulars of which were furnished to us during a visit which, on the Canon's invitation, we paid to him at Halberton in the month of June 1872, shortly after we had commenced our first tour of inquiry into the condition of the peasantry in the West of England.

Canon Girdlestone's invitation was accompanied by the courteous offer to place us in possession of all the facts connected with the system of peasant migration which he had established and maintained from 1866 to 1872. The narration of these facts will fitly precede, and appropriately lead up to, our own chapters on peasant life in 1872.

The village of Halberton lies about midway between the town of Tiverton and the Tiverton

junction of the Bristol and Exeter Railway. Previous to his going there Canon Girdlestone had lived in Lancashire, and, in that county had been accustomed to see farm-labourers who were well paid, well housed, and in every respect well cared for. The condition of the Devonshire peasants, when compared with that of the peasantry of Lancashire, presented a painful contrast. The first fact which the Canon ascertained on taking up his residence at Halberton Vicarage was, that the wages of the labourers amongst whom he had come to live—able-bodied, well-conducted men—were, in some cases, only seven, and seldom more that eight shillings a week. He, at once, naturally asked himself, 'How is it possible, on such wretched wages, for a man to house, to feed, and to clothe, not only himself, but his wife and children; and to pay, in addition, the doctor and the midwife when their services are required; to provide shoes, fuel, light, such incidental expenses as school-fees, and, in fact, many other items which cannot be enumerated, but which enter, nevertheless, into the cost of living?' It was evidently impossible to answer such a question. But Canon Girdlestone set himself closely to investigate the condition of the North Devon

peasant, in order completely to satisfy himself as to the actual circumstances of his case. He thus learnt the following facts :—

The system of agricultural labour prevailing at Halberton was representative of the whole of North Devon with very few exceptions. In addition to the average wages of able-bodied labourers, already stated to be between seven and eight shillings per week, paid in money, there was a daily allowance of, in some cases three pints, in other cases two quarts, of cider, the quality of which ordinarily rendered it unsaleable. Carters and shepherds being employed on different work, necessitating much longer hours of attendance, were usually paid either one shilling a week more than ordinary labourers ; or, in lieu of extra wages, had their cottages and gardens rent free.

The North Devon labourer had, Canon Girdlestone affirms, absolutely no privileges in addition to his money wages. There was the nominal privilege of what is called ' grist ' corn, already referred to, the labourer all the year round being allowed to have wheat from the farmer, his employer, at one fixed price, whatever the state of the wheat market might be. In dear seasons this was an advantage, but, when wheat was

cheap, the labourer still paid the same price, which, in such a case, was frequently higher than the market price. But the advantage gained during seasons of scarcity was counterbalanced by the fact that the 'grist' corn was always of inferior quality, consisting as it did of the tailings, or the wheat which was too small in grain for the market. From his acquaintance with the 'grist' corn custom, Canon Girdlestone came to the conclusion that it conferred no privilege whatever upon the labourer.

As to work, the labourer was obliged to commence at seven o'clock in the morning, and he was supposed to leave off about half-past five in the evening, being allowed during the day half an hour for 'forenoons'—luncheon—and an hour for dinner. At this rate, the nominal day would last ten hours and a half. Really, however, the regular labourer was often kept many hours later, on overtime, but without any extra pay whatever, and sometimes from six in the morning until eight and nine o'clock at night! Piece-work in North Devon, at the time referred to, was not very general, the majority of the labourers being employed on the regular weekly wages already named. In harvest time—both in hay and corn harvest—the men were usually

employed much beyond the regular hours, frequently until nine and ten o'clock at night. For this extra work, each day, they usually got their supper, but seldom any additional wages, except in cases where the harvesting was done by piece-work. But it has been seen that piece-work was not the general practice.

Women were employed to a great extent, and they earned sevenpence or eightpence a day. But deducting the wear and tear of clothes—which was considerable in the case of women—the advantage was so small as to be scarcely appreciable. On this ground, many women would have refused to work at all, but for the fact that they were very often compelled to do so by the agreement made between their husbands and the farmers; the latter making the employment of the wife a condition of the engagement of the husband.

Fuel was only given to the labourer in payment for the work of 'grubbing up' the foundations of a hedge, or cutting a hedge down, such work being always performed during overtime—the fuel obtained being what was 'grubbed up.' In very many cases the peasant of North Devon was forbidden by the farmer to keep a pig, or even poultry, for fear he might steal the food

which he required for fattening them. Potato ground could only be rented by the labourer from the farmer at a rack-rent—very frequently at four and five times the rent paid by the farmer to his landlord !

The food of the North Devon agricultural labourer was stated by Canon Girdlestone to consist of, for breakfast, what was called 'tea-kettle broth.' This was made by putting into a basin several slices of dry bread, which was then soaked by having hot water poured upon it, after which the sop was seasoned with a sprinkling of salt, and now and then an onion in addition ; sometimes, however, with half a teaspoonful of milk. But milk could only be obtained on rare occasions, as the surplus milk was almost invariably given by the farmers to their pigs. The peasant's 'forenoons,' or luncheon, usually consisted of bread and hard, dry pieces of skim milk cheese. The same fare constituted his dinner. The 'forenoons' and the dinner, being taken during the intervals of work, were not enjoyed with so much zest as was the labourer's supper, which was the last as well as the best meal of the day, and was always taken at the conclusion of the day's work. The supper, as a rule, consisted of potatoes and cabbage,

flavoured and made rich, when the labourer was allowed to keep a pig, by a tiny piece of bacon. Butcher's meat found its way sometimes on Sundays—but only on very rare occasions—to the peasant's table. When by any chance it could be obtained, it was always in very small quantities.

At the age of about forty-five or fifty, the peasant was usually found to be 'crippled up' by rheumatism, occasioned by exposure to cold, and by being frequently obliged to remain in wet clothes, either when there was no change to be had, or when there was no fire by which the clothes could be dried. At all times feeble from lack of a proper amount of food, the North Devon agricultural labourer, necessarily unable out of his miserable wages to make any provision either for times of sickness or for old age, had, during illness, and also finally, when totally incapacitated for work, to come upon the rates.

The general sanitary condition of the village was very bad. Picturesque as they were externally, many of the peasant's cottages were unfit for the housing of pigs. Pools of stagnant water stood in different parts of the parish, many of the ditches of which were offensively odorous. Not unfrequently heaps of manure

were thrown up just under dwelling-house windows. The whole village was badly drained ; open sewers ran through it, frequently trickling down from the cottages into the village brook, from which cattle slaked their thirst and the villagers and their children often drank ! From such a practice ensued the natural result—disease and death. The sanitary government was in the hands of the board of guardians, consisting chiefly of farmers. Disliking to incur expense in such matters as drainage, because, as principal ratepayers, the burden fell largely upon themselves, nothing was done by the guardians to improve the sanitary condition of the place ; and hence the perpetuation of the serious evils which have been enumerated. Every labourer who was a householder in Halberton was entitled to vote for the election of guardians, waywardens, overseers, and vestrymen ; and thus had, it may be supposed, the power of remedying the state of things from which he suffered. But Canon Girdlestone stated that he never saw a labourer at a vestry or other meeting. The men, he affirmed, dared not go !

Insufficient wages were, however, supplemented out of the general rates, and though this method of supplying, or helping to supply, the necessities

of the local peasantry was not pleasant or acceptable to those ratepayers who did *not* employ labour, it was advantageous to those who did!

Kind treatment, it might have been hoped, would at least help to make some amends for the lowness of the rate of wages prevailing at Halberton, for the miserable dwellings of the peasantry, and for the unhealthy surroundings of those dwellings. Such treatment was unhappily the exception and not the rule, judging by the following illustrative cases:—

A carter saved a valuable team for his master, a farmer, by rushing at the horses' heads when the animals had one day taken fright at something and were running away. The man fell, in doing so, under one of the wheels of the waggon. His ribs were broken, but his bravery saved the waggon and team. For two months he was confined to his bed, during the whole of which time the farmer, his master, refused to give him one sixpence in wages, and the man had nothing but what he got from the rates! Canon Girdlestone, one day during this labourer's illness, met the master and asked him to give the poor fellow a quart of milk occasionally for his children whilst he remained unable to work for them. The Canon reminded the farmer that the labourer

had been maimed in his, the farmer's service, and that he had saved him a valuable team of horses, adding that the milk was a trifle which would not be missed. Will it be credited? The farmer, who was a substantial yeoman, refused to give his injured servant either the milk which he was asked to give, or anything else, and he never even went to see him!

Another carter in the employ of a Halberton farmer was crushed by a restive horse in his master's stable through no fault of the man's. Through his injury he was laid up, and his wages were immediately stopped by his master, who refused to give him any sort of assistance. This was not all. The man occupied a cottage belonging to his master, and, being a carter, he held this cottage rent-free as a part of his wages. During the whole of the time he was disabled he was not merely refused a single penny of his wages, but the rent of his cottage was charged to him, and the amount was deducted each week from the wages of his son, who worked for the same farmer!

In another case a carter in the employ of a Halberton farmer was sent by his master on a long journey to a distant place. The journey took him twenty hours. The master, a man of

substance, refused to give him anything for his additional work beyond a bit of bread and beef and fourpence!

To record, unimpassioned, such instances as these is a somewhat difficult task. But we simply record them, leaving the facts, uncoloured as they were related to us by Canon Girdlestone, to speak for themselves—merely adding that whilst too many similar cases might be given, there are, on the other hand, we believe, not a few farmers whose blood would tingle with indignation on learning the circumstances we have detailed.

Such as we have described them were, with few exceptions, the condition of life and the treatment experienced, when Canon Girdlestone first came amongst them, by the peasantry of North Devon, whose cottages—hovels of only two rooms, with, consequently, insufficient provision for the decent accommodation of families —were not fit, many of them, to house cattle in; and whose earnings were not enough to keep body and soul together. And although the district was a rich and important one, it was populated by a peasantry enfeebled in body and depressed by their deplorable circumstances.

The question at once arose in Canon Girdle-

stone's mind, What was to be done? He could not permit the state of things which he found existing to go on without making some effort to put a stop to it. He did nothing hastily. He had, over and over again, visited the homes of the labourers; had made minute and searching inquiries into all their circumstances and surroundings. He could find nothing to palliate the wrong which was inflicted upon them by the system under which they worked; and, as a Christian minister, he could not remain unmoved at what he saw and heard.

He first tried the effect of private remonstrance; but that proved unavailing. Then he determined on the bolder course of addressing the farmers from the pulpit and reproving them, in his capacity as a pastor and a teacher, for the manner in which they treated their human labourers, to whom, he said, they had been accustomed to give less consideration than they gave to their cattle. The sermon in which he made this home-thrust raised a terrible storm in the parish. The farmers were highly indignant at the conduct of the Vicar, and from that moment made open war upon him, adopting, amongst other methods of attack, that of writing, in reference to what he had done,

offensive letters which were published anonymously in a local newspaper. About the same time the annual tithe dinner took place, and it was pre-arranged that when the Vicar's health was proposed the glasses, instead of being filled, should be reversed empty. The Canon, however, having learnt this intention beforehand, left the room, where the dinner was being held, before the time arrived for proposing his health.

As it became necessary to accept the state of things which had been produced by his bold and outspoken protest in the pulpit, Canon Girdlestone determined to put into execution a plan which he had formed. He accordingly wrote a letter to *The Times*, giving a clear and plain statement of the wages and of the condition of the agricultural labourers in the north of Devon. The effect produced by this letter was remarkable. The Canon was overwhelmed with letters from all parts of England and Ireland, and with newspapers also from different parts of the country, containing letters and comments on the subject of the condition of the Devonshire peasantry. The private letters contained offers, from farmers and others residing in England and Ireland, of good wages, with the

certainty of comfortable homes, for such of the men in Canon Girdlestone's district as would accept them. Some of these correspondents remitted money to pay the whole expense connected with the proposed removal of the men whom they wanted. Others remitted money with the stipulation that a part of it should be returned out of the wages of the labourers, in such a manner as they could afford to repay it. Then there were sums of money received by the Canon from philanthropic persons, who placed them entirely at his disposal. This money he determined to lay out in partly paying the expenses of removing labourers when it happened that places were offered without any remittances being sent to pay the cost of travelling, and other items.

Having obtained the means of securing his object of removing the miserably-paid peasants of Devonshire to places where they would be better remunerated, better housed, and better treated in every way, Canon Girdlestone set himself manfully to work to organise a regular system of migration. He had the men; he knew where to send them; and he had the money furnished to defray the cost of sending them. Only one difficulty now presented itself.

How was he to set the stream in motion? The answer appears simple, but, practically, the difficulty was not so easy of solution. The peasantry of Halberton and North Devon had been so long accustomed to their miserable circumstances that they dreaded—with the want of energy and enterprise which their depressing condition of life had engendered—making any change. A kind of 'home sickness' appeared to affect them. They dreaded the journey in the first place; they dreaded the change of habits. They feared there might perhaps be some uncertainty as to their new homes being suited to them. Hence many of them clung to the wretched state of things to which they had become used: to their hovels and to their state of semi-starvation. In some instances they were so strongly affected with this dread of change that when every arrangement had been completed and they were just on the point of starting for their new homes, they begged to be allowed to remain, giving back the money they had received towards defraying their expenses.

It can easily be understood that it needed no little courage and no small amount of energy and determination to overcome the difficulties

which Canon Girdlestone found were thus thrown in his path. But the disinclination of the peasants to move was not the greatest part of the difficulty. There was an immense amount of opposition on the part of the farmers and the landowners in the district. Canon Girdlestone was, in fact, engaged for years, during which his work was carried on, in single-handed conflict with nearly the whole district of squires and farmers. Even the clergy declared themselves against him. He was, in fact, completely ostracised and tabooed by local 'society.'

But the enmity of the better classes in the district soon took practical shape. The Vestry of Halberton, composed almost entirely of the farmers in the neighbourhood, began their opposition by refusing to vote a church-rate that was needed. At the various vestry meetings they would not hear the Vicar speak. No labourer dared to show his face at these meetings; hence the farmers had it all their own way. With great courage and determination, the Vicar insisted, not only upon being present at the vestry meetings, but upon taking the chair, as he was entitled to do. But the farmers would not let him speak, and drowned his voice when he attempted to do so. Patiently, however, and

with a bold front the courageous minister would wait until there was momentary quiet, and then would say, 'Now, gentlemen, when you have done abusing me, we will proceed to business.'

One farmer, bolder than the rest, at a vestry meeting held on Easter Monday, in 1867, went up to the Canon, who was presiding, and told him, in language that cannot be literally repeated, that he was not fit to carry offal to a bear. Two or three days afterwards this extraordinary scene formed the subject of a cartoon in *Punch*. Following up this system of persecution, and as a means of depriving the Vicar of his voice in the affairs of the parish, the farmer-vestry claimed the right to appoint both of the Churchwardens. The question, for the annoyance of Canon Girdlestone, was even carried to the Court of Queen's Bench. But judgment was given against the Vestry, and the heavy costs which were incurred having to be paid out of individual pockets, appears to have taught the malcontents a salutary lesson. Then, once on the occasion of the distribution of the charity bread, the farmers attempted to create a disturbance in the church. The police had to be called in, and this circumstance was made a cause

of complaint against the Vicar. The complaint was carried to the Quarter Sessions at Exeter, but was dismissed.

Still the war of opposition was vigorously carried on by the local farmers, who threatened to desert the church, stop the playing of the organ, the ringing of the bells, and the singing of the choir ; and even to empty the church schools. A number of the farmers, indeed, left the church and repaired to the Wesleyan chapel in the village. But the minister of the chapel, a plain-spoken divine, told them they had better go back to their own church. This, however, they would not do, so they remained at home on Sundays. The enmity of the irate agriculturists was extended even to the ladies of Canon Girdlestone's family, who were slighted in every way, and even passed by in the road unnoticed by the local magnates.

The preceding facts are curious and instructive. It is almost incredible that so much violent and bitter opposition should have been aroused simply because a brave and conscientious clergyman was earnestly striving to benefit the underpaid, half-starved labourers by whom he was surrounded. But the pockets of the local agriculturists had been touched, and their most selfish

instincts aroused. Few attempts at reform, however, have ever met with more unwearying and unscrupulous opposition than that which Canon Girdlestone experienced. But he anticipated resistance, and he was accordingly prepared for it. He carried out his plans, in the face of every obstacle, boldly and perseveringly, and with an exhibition of singular energy and admirable method.

The system of migration commenced in October, 1866. From that date until the month of June, 1872, the admirable work was continued, and in that period between four and five hundred men, many of them with families, were sent away, by the direct instrumentality of Canon Girdlestone, to Lancashire, Yorkshire, Durham, Kent, Sussex, and other counties.

He sent a number of men to the Manchester and to the West Riding police forces. From their miserable cottages in Devonshire these peasants went to really comfortable homes in the places already named. They left wages of eight shillings a week, and they secured in their new employment earnings which were never less in any case than thirteen shillings a week, and which ranged from that sum to as much as twenty-two shillings per week, in addition to

which they had good cottages and gardens rent free.

From first to last this work of Canon Girdlestone's was eminently successful. But the success which attended his efforts was largely due to the vast amount of personal labour which was bestowed upon it. It can easily be understood, for instance, that the negotiations connected with the removal of a single labourer entailed a good deal of work; and the work was of course multiplied when a family—two-thirds of the total number removed from 1866 to 1872 were married and had families—was sent away. First, the situation had to be obtained, the wages and conditions of the new employment settled, and the travelling expenses forwarded. In each case this work necessarily entailed some correspondence. A good deal of trouble, too, was caused by the necessary inquiry into character, especially because in many cases the farmers would not give the men any character at all on account of their leaving their employ. Canon Girdlestone, however, was naturally scrupulously particular to ascertain the character of the men he sent away, as he, of course, would be held responsible for any failing in this respect. When, however, the character was found to

be satisfactory, the situation obtained and the wages fixed, there was a considerable amount of labour entailed in superintending in each case all the arrangements preliminary to the start. The packing up and the preparations for the journey had to be seen to. The majority of the peasants were perfectly helpless in this respect. Almost everything had to be done for them, their luggage addressed, their railway tickets taken, and full and plain directions given to the simple travellers. The plan adopted, when the labourers were leaving for their new homes, was to give them plain directions written on a piece of paper in a large and legible hand. These were shown to the officials on the several lines of railway, who, soon getting to hear of Canon Girdlestone's system of migration, rendered him all the assistance in their power by readily helping the labourers out of their travelling difficulties and seeing them safely booked for their destinations. Many of the peasants of North Devon were so ignorant of the whereabouts of the places to which they were about to be sent that they often asked—when their destination, for instance, was some well-known place in the North of England,—whether they were going 'over the water.'

It is really difficult to estimate the immense amount of labour which, during his six years of philanthropic work, was thrown upon the hands of Canon Girdlestone. The only assistance which he obtained was from the members of his own family, who aided him in his unceasing labours. But his work of migration, large in itself, became the centre of a great system. The men who went away, with very few exceptions, prospered; and they, in their turn, procured situations for their relations and friends in Devonshire, and undertook the work of getting them removed without any assistance from Canon Girdlestone. The total number of peasants, therefore, removed from Devonshire to the North of England was very considerable. But the stream which began to flow from that county to the more prosperous—agricultural, mining, and manufacturing—districts of England, soon had the effect of stirring the stagnation which had before existed in neighbouring counties. Migrations to the North set in from Dorsetshire, Wiltshire, and Somersetshire, until at length the stream had acquired a considerable volume.

We were glad to find on the occasion of our visit to Canon Girdlestone at Halberton that the

misfortunes which, it had been predicted, would overwhelm the courageous Vicar, as the result of his advocacy of the cause of the peasantry, had not happened. We attended the morning and afternoon services at the church and listened to the excellent sermons delivered by the Canon in the well-filled building. The singing was led by an admirably-trained choir, Mrs. Girdlestone being the organist. In company with Canon Girdlestone we also visited the successful and well-attended Sunday school connected with the church. The day schools, we learnt, were equally flourishing; and, notwithstanding the great demands made upon the Vicar's time by the maintenance of his system of peasant migration, he found the opportunity—aided materially in this, as in all his good work, by the ladies of his family—to encourage attendance and stimulate the progress of education by adopting the plan of obtaining situations for the most deserving of the pupils in his schools.

Later in the same month of June, 1872, which was the period of our visit to him, Canon Girdlestone and his family took their departure from the scene of their energetic and benevolent work, and went to reside at Olveston in Gloucestershire; and whilst the peasants of Halberton and the

country round, were deprived by his retirement from amongst them of the presence of an earnest and courageous friend in the worthy and excellent clergyman who had stood by them for so long a time, the kind, gentle, and generous ministrations of the ladies of the Vicar's family—who were ever active in good work in all times of sickness and need—were missed from many a humble home.

2.

FROM THE PLOUGH TO PROSPERITY.

It is a rule, we think, that in those parts of any country where the condition of the inhabitants is the most deplorable, there exists the least desire on their part to rise from the position into which they may have sunk. Misery oftentimes engenders apathy; and hence it is not surprising that the peasantry of the western counties should have lost, as they appeared to have done in the earlier part of 1872, even the desire to improve their condition. But as to most rules there are exceptions, there are exceptions to our present rule, and one of these is furnished by the career of George Mitchell, whose life history—communicated to us by himself on the eve of commencing our first tour of inquiry—will serve to illustrate circumstances of life which have, unhappily, been the lot of not a few amongst

the tillers of the soil, and to show at the same time how much may be accomplished by energy, sobriety, and patient perseverance.

The subject of this sketch was born at the little village of Montacute, which is prettily situated at a spot a few miles distant from the town of Yeovil, in Somersetshire. His earliest recollections from his childhood until he had reached his nineteenth year were of nothing, he told us, but of hardship and misery. At seven years of age he was first sent to work in the fields, in order that he might be able to contribute something to supplement the family earnings. But he was only able to earn a few pence for a whole week's work. He retained the most vivid recollection of the terrible privations to which he was, at that time, subjected. In the summer mornings he sometimes commenced work as early as four o'clock, and frequently with no more to eat than a little piece of bread. On reaching the farm he was supplied with a small quantity of sour cider, and then he would begin his employment. For the whole of the day, on many occasions, he had nothing to eat, he assured us, except what he could find in the fields. Incredible as it may seem, it is nevertheless the fact that he used to hunt in the hedges for snails,

which, when he found, he would roast and eat; and this he had often done to stop the cravings of hunger. In the wild-berry season he sometimes gathered berries to eat. After his day's work the poor child, frequently weak, hungry, and exhausted, would return to his miserable home, where the family—ten in number—had gathered to partake of their 'supper.' Suspending the three-legged crock over the fire, his mother would nearly fill it with water. Into this she would put a tablespoonful or two of flour, the second quality, obtained from the 'tailings' or 'grist' corn. Then she would add another spoonful or two of flour from her meagre store, and stir the whole round until the mixture boiled. Around the pot were meanwhile gathered a group of hungry children, looking wistfully and longingly at the operation; each child ready with his little coarse brown dish. As soon as the boiling process was completed, the mother would pour into each dish a quantity of the flour and water, or thin paste, as it really was. When the children had all been served, the flour gruel was flavoured by the addition of salt; sometimes by adding a small quantity of treacle to it. This frequently constituted the only *meal* of the day. But often the little creatures

were compelled to go hungry to bed, in order that, in the obliviousness of sleep, they might find a temporary relief from the cravings of unsatisfied appetites.

As a youth our hero was treated, he affirms, with the greatest harshness and cruelty by his unfeeling master, and kicked and cuffed continually. This rough treatment was continued during the whole of the time that he was serving as a farm-labourer. When about nineteen years of age his frame had become so inured to the hardships to which he had been subjected that, notwithstanding his life of privation, he was strong and vigorous. This result may no doubt be ascribed to the fact that he was endowed by nature with an iron constitution. At this time, although he was able to do the work of a man, he was paid no more than four shillings a week. The reader will scarcely credit the statement, but it is nevertheless perfectly true. For this pay he was compelled to work, during harvest time, from four in the morning until ten at night! On one occasion, during the haymaking season, he rose at four in the morning, and harrowed a field of turnips. He then commenced haymaking. After toiling for nearly eighteen hours, his exhausted frame, strong and vigorous

though it was, began to sink under his long-continued labours. He lay down to rest upon a 'pook' of hay. His master saw him, and ordered him to help in unloading another waggon of hay, accompanying the request with a string of oaths. George refused to do so, pleading that his strength was completely worn out, and that he had scarcely tasted any solid food the whole of the day. His master called him a lazy rascal, made a rush at him, and attempted to kick him. George avoided the blow, and went home, determining that he would emancipate himself from the slavery to which he had been subjected. His pride was offended. He had been called a lazy fellow, and he could not endure the thought. So on the next pay-night he gave his master notice that he would leave his service at the end of a fortnight. The master tried hard to keep him, knowing that he would lose a valuable servant. George, however, was determined he would not stay any longer in the employ of such a man. As an inducement to the lad to remain in his service, the master gave him, when the notice expired, for the last two weeks of his time, two extra shillings in addition to his weekly wages of four shillings. George took the money, remarking as he did so that

he would spend the additional sum in buying 'shoe-leather,' that he might leave his native village, and seek his fortune elsewhere. His employer told him that he would be glad to return to his service in a month. 'But, sir,' said our informant, 'that month has never expired yet.' As soon as he had left the Montacute farmer's service he went home and prepared to start on his journey. He had no wealth of luggage, as will be supposed. At that time he could neither read nor write. A few coppers were all that he possessed in the shape of money. But he left home, found employment in a stone-mason's yard, and acquired some knowledge of the stonemason's trade. He stayed in his native county for a year and nine months, during which time he had, in several places, found temporary employment in connection with the same trade, and had been able to get a better insight into it. At the expiration of the year and nine months he had money enough to enable him to come to London, where he continued to follow the business at which he had been working since he had left his native village.

When he came to the metropolis he could not read the names of the streets. In almost every way, indeed, his ignorance of reading and

writing was a great bar to his advancement. But he applied himself to learn, and before long he had overcome the difficulty under which he had laboured. The remainder of his career may be told in a few words. From a mason's lad he advanced to the position of a journeyman on full pay; became ere long a small proprietor, and finally prospered so greatly as to become the master of a large and increasing business. Yet Mr. Mitchell is proud of his origin, and has spent much valuable time and large sums of money in the endeavour to improve the condition of the unfortunate class from which he sprang. Especially in his native village—all honour to him—has he spent his substance without stint; and if one circumstance more than another has entitled him to notice in this volume, it is that the eyes of many a poor Montacute cottager have brightened, more than once, at sight of the manly form and of the genial, honest face—whose appearance has always been the forerunner of that 'help' which is worth so much more than mere 'pity'—of George Mitchell.

3.

THE VALE OF WRINGTON.

DEEPLY embosomed in the heart of the Mendip Hills, about twelve miles to the east of Weston-super-Mare, and about the same distance to the south-west of Bristol, lies the Vale of Wrington. From Weston-super-Mare the road to this valley runs to the north of the Mendips, through some beautiful scenery. As far as the eye can reach, on every side, stretch rich pasture lands, the various tints of the spring green contrasting delightfully with the golden flowers of the buttercup. Even on the hill-sides the pastures extend, bounded by their dividing hedges and broken here and there by thickets of trees. Numbers of sheep and oxen, all along the line of route, are seen grazing on the pastures. The county is indeed celebrated for its dairy produce, the celebrated Cheddar cheese, which is furnished

from the neighbouring Cheddar valley, being widely known for its excellence.

Proceeding from Weston-super-Mare in the direction of Banwell, we met an old labourer trudging wearily along, and we stopped a few minutes to question him. We learnt that he was seventy-seven years of age, and had worked in the district as a farm-labourer nearly all his life. He had no wife or family, but had only himself to support. At his age he could not, of course, do much active work. Still he was regularly employed by a farmer, working as well as he could during the day from about six in the morning to six at night. His wages were seven shillings per week. He paid out of that sum for his cottage eighteen-pence per week, thus leaving five-and-sixpence with which to find himself in food and clothes. No doubt, wretched as his circumstances were, he was comparatively well off in having so large a sum with which to support only himself. But it was pitiable to find such a result at the end of a long life of hard toil, and to think that a poor old creature of seventy-seven, who must at that advanced age have needed some comforts, was reduced to a sum per week which could only be sufficient to find the barest necessaries. In the particular neighbour-

hood where this old man lived there had been, just before our visit, a slight rise in the wages in consequence of the Warwickshire 'strike.' Skilled labourers were receiving eleven, and in some cases twelve shillings a week.

A little further on we saw a strange sight. Lying a little way back from the road, we descried what might have been taken for a pigstye, but for the fact that a man was standing in its doorway engaged in cutting up the body of a sheep. Upon calling him out and questioning him concerning himself and his cottage, we were invited to visit the interior of the latter. Unless we had seen it we could scarcely have believed that such a place could exist in England. It was necessary to stoop very low to get inside this habitation of an English agricultural labourer. The total length of the hut was about twenty-one feet, its width nine feet, and its height, measured to the extreme point of the thatched roof, about ten feet; the height of the walls, however, not being so much as six feet. From the top of the walls was carried up to a point the thatched roof, there being no transverse beams or planks. In fact, had there been any, we could not have stood upright in this hovel. There was, of course, no second floor or 'upper

storey' to the place, and the one, small groundfloor, was divided in the middle into two compartments, each being about nine feet square; one used for a bedroom and the other for a sitting-room. The ground was irregularly paved with large stones, with earth between and in their crevices. On our remarking that the floor must be very damp, if not wet, in winter, the man said, 'Oh no, Sir, it don't "heave" much;' by which he meant that the moisture did not come up very much through the stones. From the thatch, in all directions, hung festoons of spiders webs, intermingled with sprays of ivy, which, but for the squalor of the place, would have given a romantic appearance to the hut. John — (the inhabitant of this 'cottage') was a short, thick-set man, sixty years of age. He had lived there, he told us, a quarter of a century. His predecessors were a man, his wife, and six children, all of whom, he said, had slept in the 'bedroom,' nine feet square. John told us that he could not work now so well as he used to do; but nevertheless he looked strong and healthy for his age; and his principal duty—a responsible one—was to look after his master's stock. His wages were five shillings a week! Out of that he paid his master two-pounds-ten a year rent for his 'cottage,' and

ten shillings a year more for the privilege of 'running' his pig—for John had a pig, as well as some fowls—on his master's land. John also rented one-eighth of an acre of potato ground, for which—still out of his miserable wages—he paid fifteen shillings a year. And yet this man appeared happy amidst it all. His poor patched garments looked singularly inconsistent when seen in connexion with his pleasant-looking face. He spoke well of his employer. His cottage walls were made of 'cob' or hardened mud, and some time since the rain had come through the old thatched roof, and he thought it was very good of his master to put a new roof and a new door to his 'cottage' when he asked him to do so. Our hero had been married, but had lost his wife. One daughter, however, was still living, and she had married a policeman in London. John said that when his cottage became no longer fit—according to his idea of fitness —for a 'residence,' the 'master' intended to pull down the mud walls and plough up the site.

After a further drive of some six miles through an extensive tract of rich agricultural land, we reached the Vale of Wrington. In the parishes of Wrington and Burrington the wages of the

peasants were in some cases eleven shillings a week, in others twelve. But the state of the population was deplorable. In this district, in fact, as in too many others, the inhabitants suffered from not having in their midst a resident landowner who might have made it his business to look after their social and physical necessities. The greater number of the cottages in the village of Wrington were in a miserable condition. Some of them had positively become so bad that they could not by any possibility be made habitable : and they were therefore, in a few cases, turned into barns or store-houses, and in others, we believe, put to no use whatever. In fact, all the cottages in Wrington, with very few, if any, exceptions, were in a bad condition, and even thus they were not capable of decently housing the poor population of the place. Overcrowding to a deplorable extent was the result, producing all the terrible evils which invariably spring from it. As another result of the limited cottage accommodation in Wrington, some of the labourers were daily obliged to walk two miles to their work from their homes, and, of course, the same distance in returning home after each day's work. It would not matter what the weather might be : the inevitable two miles' walk must be performed

by these poor fellows, often through the pouring rain both going and coming.

Of course it is often the case that farming operations are suspended during very wet weather; in which case men who are employed by the day lose their day's wages altogether. But when the rain is not sufficiently heavy to stop work, the labourers are naturally enough glad to do what they can, and a two or three miles' walk through a steady rain, not heavy enough perhaps to preclude altogether the much-desired work, but quite heavy enough to wet through to the skin the thinly-clad peasant, is, it will be admitted, a miserable prelude to a hard day's toil. Then, at the close of the day's employment, wet, tired, and hungry, there must be another weary plod, oftentimes through the rain again, and along deep-rutted, miry roads, before the damp cottage is reached, where a scanty meal of the coarsest and commonest kind is the sole reward, at the best of times, for the long hours of cheerless toil.

It may be thought that there is a brighter side to this picture than the one which we have described. No doubt a walk to work on a fine spring or summer morning is much more pleasant than a walk through the rain; but the summer

walk is one thing to the well-fed, sedentary man who takes it for pleasure, and quite another thing to the poor, ill-fed peasant, who has the cheerless prospect before him of a day of hard manual labour. To have to walk four, five, and sometimes six, miles in addition to a hard day's work in the fields, would cause a terrible strain upon the physical strength of even the most robust.

The deficiency of cottages in the village, besides giving rise to the evils of overcrowding, and imposing upon a great number of the labourers the necessity of walking long distances to and from their work, naturally made rents high, and thus increased the hardships of the poor villagers. The rents were as much as seven pounds a year when there was no garden attached to the cottage, and nine pounds a year for cottage and garden. When agricultural labourers have great facilities for renting allotments of the landowners or farmers on reasonable terms—a privilege which is very rare in Somersetshire—they are enabled to add to their small means by the annual produce from their ground.

At Wrington, however, we found that the allotments for the peasants were very few in number, owing to the desire of the owners of

land to increase the size of the large farms by throwing into them every available plot of ground. We learnt that there were a thousand acres of land in the neighbourhood used as a common, but well adapted for sites for cottages. No new ones, however, had been built, and hence the really serious want of house accommodation in the district.

To all the hardships and privations of the inhabitants of the overcrowded cottages of Wrington a really alarming amount of sickness was added, owing to the very bad and defective state of the drainage in the place. In many cases, in fact, the cottage closets were built over the village brook from which the inhabitants drew some of their water supply!

Even the administration of justice was conducted in a small room in the village, instead of, as should have been the case, in a suitable building specially set apart for that purpose.

Milk, a most important article of diet, could scarcely be obtained at all, by the labourers, of the Wrington farmers. In fact, there was only one farmer in the village who would sell milk, which in most cases was given to the pigs.

Farmers ought to make great efforts to give their men the opportunity of obtaining for their families an abundance of milk, which would prove an invaluable addition to their ordinary bread diet.

4.

AN INCENTIVE TO EDUCATION.

BORDERING on the line of the Mendip Hills, in the Vale of Wrington, is the pretty village of Burrington, situated in the midst of a district celebrated especially for its rich dairy produce and for the manufacture of the far-famed Cheddar cheese. The Rev. William Bishop de Moleyns is the Vicar of Burrington. Previous to his appointment to it he was, for some twenty years, the curate of the adjoining parish of Wrington, and during the whole of his residence in the district he has distinguished himself by his constant attention to the wants and necessities of the labouring poor.

We accepted a kind invitation to spend a day with Mr. de Moleyns at Burrington Vicarage, and we took the opportunity, during our visit, of becoming acquainted with the school work

performed in the parish, under the immediate superintendence of the Vicar. We were greatly interested by the facts which we learnt, and as they are unusually instructive, some account of the admirable system inaugurated and maintained by Mr. de Moleyns will find a suitable place in these pages.

The population of Burrington consisted of four hundred and sixty-seven persons according to the last census. On the books of the parish school there were, at the time of our visit, a hundred and nine children, and occasionally as many as a hundred of these were in actual attendance—even in the winter quarter—forty-one of whom came from adjoining parishes; the remainder—one-eighth of the total population—attending from Burrington itself. Twenty-five of the total number attending were the children of well-to-do farmers and tradesmen, who were induced to send their children to the school on account of the exceptionally good education given there. No school board was required in the district, a voluntary rate of threepence in the pound having been cheerfully contributed annually by the rate-payers, in addition to the subscriptions provided by the gentry in the district. The funds, too, for the original school building and for a subsequent

enlargement, were contributed in the same voluntary manner, and without any assistance either from the Privy Council, from the Diocesan Fund, or, in fact, from any society. The education given in the school included reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, English history, drawing, and mapping ; and in these branches of knowledge the children had proved remarkably efficient, thanks to the unwearying efforts of the excellent master and mistress. The report in 1872 of the Government Inspector was to the effect that the school had passed 'a good examination in every branch and standard.' The Diocesan Inspector, too, had reported concerning the admirable tone and discipline which had been maintained in it. The religious no less than the secular instruction was excellent, the school having been declared the most proficient for religious knowledge in the Archdeaconry of Bath. Especial attention had been paid to the teaching of needlework, in which the girls proved apt learners, as shown by the fact that they carried off the largest number of prizes awarded for good needlework by the Deanery Association. A knowledge of needlework is, of course, a most useful and necessary acquisition for the children of the poor.

The contributions from the children towards the school amounted, during one year, to forty pounds. It was not necessary to canvass for the attendance of pupils, as it was found that the farmers and labourers were so anxious that their children should attend that they were glad to let them walk, in some cases, as much as two or three miles from adjoining villages.

The general question of the education of the labourers' children in the rural districts is so important that we are glad to give prominence, in this place, to one or two important features of the Burrington school. We cannot do better than quote from a statement on this point sent to us by the excellent schoolmaster at Burrington. 'One thing,' he remarked, 'which has increased the usefulness of the school is its *social mixed character.* The farmer's child is taught with the labourer's, to the mutual benefit of both. This is a matter which is worthy of consideration, and, knowing the advantages of the system, I regret that it is not more general in our national schools. I account for this, however, by the prejudice entertained by parents. The mixed character of the school, however, effects good, because it produces kindly social feelings, and helps to break down the barrier between classes. The

labourers take a pride in sending their children to school in company with their masters' children, and I am certain that this is the secret of the clean and tidy appearance for which the pupils in this school are especially distinguished. An important object is promoted, too, by our "Bank" or Clothing Club, which is a great boon to those whose weekly incomes are so limited. If the pence deposited are not sent when due on Monday morning, they are called for before Saturday night comes round. The money distributed in one year amounted to upwards of thirty-three pounds, which was spent chiefly in shoes, &c.; and as the fund is distributed at the beginning of winter, the money comes in at a useful time.' The farmers and some of the tradespeople paid fourpence and sixpence per week for each child, according to circumstances. The payment for the children of the labourers was twopence for each child per week, or where there were three children, fivepence for the three.

What served, however, as a very powerful inducement for the labourers to send their children to the Burrington school was the prospect of their being able to obtain, through the influence of the Vicar, good situations for the most promising of their boys and girls on their

leaving the school. Mr. de Moleyns always obtained situations for those in his school whom he considered deserving. Sometimes these situations were places in gentlemen's service; at other times pupil-teachers' places. For many of the boys he obtained situations as clerks in merchants' offices, at good wages. Others became railway porters. Many of the girls went into domestic service. Some of the lads from the school were sent to farm work, and of course, in such cases, with the education which they obtained, they made better workmen, and were able to get higher wages and to claim more considerate treatment than they could have secured without the advantages of education. The most excellent feature in these arrangements was, that Mr. de Moleyns made quite a system of his good work. When a boy or a girl, the son or the daughter of an agricultural labourer, was about to leave school, the parents quite as a matter of course went to the Vicar to get the expected situation; and the help thus sought was never refused. The excellence of such a system as that adopted by Mr. de Moleyns is obvious.

In one letter which we received from the excellent Vicar of Burrington, he informed us

that, for a long time previously, not a single inhabitant of his parish had been an inmate of the district workhouse.

Whilst speaking of this parish, it may be mentioned that an admirable allotment system was maintained in the district. Many years since a number of the cottagers were permitted to enclose pieces of common land on the top of some of the Mendip Hills. These enclosures were subsequently used as 'garden grounds,'—each garden plot averaging a quarter of an acre in extent, for which a merely nominal rent of one shilling and sixpence per annum was all that was required by the Lord of the Manor. These 'garden grounds,' as they were called, were much prized by the labourers, who grew in them their little crops of fruit and vegetables.

5.

CIDER TRUCK.

The 'orchards' of the 'western country' constitute one of the prettiest and most interesting features of the district, nestling, as they mostly do, in the trough of its leafy valleys, though sometimes extending upon the slope of its uplands. Beautiful in itself by the picturesque ruggedness of its trunk, limbs, boughs, and twigs, mossy as these oftentimes are, and splashed with the gold and silver of encrusting lichen, the apple-tree is a marvel of productive utility: and, hence, not only do the extensive apple orchards of the West of England furnish, for consumption, large supplies of their pleasant and edible fruit to markets far outside their own immediate districts, but they provide the raw material of the manufacture, within those districts, of large quantities of the well-known

cider. Some of this refreshing beverage is exported, and very much of it is reserved for 'home consumption' in cask or bottle. It is, of course, produced in varying degrees of excellence or of inferiority, these degrees depending upon the quality of the fruit and its condition at the time of manufacture, and also upon the amount of care and attention bestowed in the process of converting the sweet luscious juice of the apple into an intoxicating drink.

It is doubtless to the abundance of this beverage in the cider counties that must be attributed the origin and maintenance of the cider truck system under which the peasant receives part of his weekly wages in drink. Devon and Somerset are the great apple-growing counties of the west, and it is there that the system flourishes in full vigour. It will be supposed that it is not the best cider that finds its way into the small kegs or firkins of the labourer: and in fact it is ordinarily a very inferior liquor indeed that is set apart for his consumption—thin, weak, sour, and consequently 'washy,' manufactured from the worst of the 'windfalls' of the orchards. Sometimes the windfalls are given to the pigs, and when this

is the case, the labourer has made for him what is called the 'second wringing'—that is to say, the apples for the farmer's 'own drinking' cider are put into the press, and after the best part of the juice has been extracted, the cider 'cheese,' as the mass of apples in the press is called, is subjected to yet greater pressure, and what is expressed from the 'cheese' on this occasion is called the 'second wringing.' This is, of course, greatly inferior to the 'first wringing.' To complete the process, the following plan is sometimes adopted. To every hogshead of the 'second wringing' is added four gallons of hop-water. This is added for the purpose of preserving the 'second wringing,' which without such addition would, from its thinness and inferiority, soon turn into vinegar. It would, we think, be putting too high a value upon the 'second tap,' or peasant's cider, to reckon it as worth one-half the value of the liquor made for the farmer's own consumption. It is frequently, we have been assured on good authority, worth no more than one-third of that value, although in some cases farmers will make no difference between the cider they drink themselves and that which they give their men. As a matter of fact, it is rather difficult to put a market

price upon the 'second tap,' as it is commonly called, because, strictly speaking, it is made for a special purpose, and is not marketable in the ordinary sense of that expression.

The quantity of this sour beverage given to the peasantry in the cider counties varies with circumstances, but is ordinarily three or four pints per day to men. More drink is given during harvest and on other special occasions. Women employed in farm work in the cider districts have a somewhat smaller amount of drink allowed them, and boys get ordinarily a proportionate allowance. But in all cases the drink is given in lieu of money wages, and for an adult the value of the allowance is reckoned at about from one-and-sixpence to two shillings per week. Most competent authorities, however, agree that the value of the cider is over-estimated.

There can be no doubt that the system is a bad one, and that it would be infinitely better that the peasant should have the nominal value of the cider in money. It must, however, in fairness, be stated that to deal with the question satisfactorily admits of some difficulty. In some cases employers offer their men their full wages in money in lieu of part in money and

part in kind. But very often the men will not accept service under such conditions, insisting upon having their daily allowance of three or four pints, sometimes even of five pints of cider. We met a farmer in the western division of Somersetshire, where wages were very low, who informed us that he could not get men to work without cider The fact is, the peasants had become so used to the system that they could not get out of their habits. Nevertheless we consider the system unfair. The men should be paid the value of their labour in money, instead of its being required of them, as in most cases it is, that they should receive a fifth of their scanty pay in sour cider. The truck system is bad generally. The legislature has recognised the evils of it, and we consider that cider truck is the worst part of the system. Every man should receive his wages in full in the coin of the realm, and be permitted to use them as he thinks proper, instead of being obliged to take them—for it is only in some cases that option is allowed—partly in the sour draught of the 'second tap.'

6.

POVERTY AND RICHES.

One of the prettiest journeys out of London is down the Great Western line. To reach the West of England by this route, the traveller must, after quitting Middlesex, pass across the southern portion of Bucks, and thence proceed through a considerable part of Berkshire into Wilts, Somerset, and Devon, thus traversing a fine stretch of country, including some of the most fertile parts of England. After being confined to London during the whole of the winter and the early spring months, it is not easy to conceive anything which is really more delightful than taking a rush into the country in the beautiful month of May. The huge city itself cannot resist the genial influence of the month of spring flowers. Within the great desert of houses the shrubs and trees, which here and there refreshingly break

the dull regularity of metropolitan streets, burst into unwonted verdancy in the 'merrie month.' Even the uncongenial London soil is enriched by the wealth which lies hidden in atmospheric vapours, and which is collected and brought down to earth by the soft showers of April. During May, therefore, there is about the streets a freshness which, once lost, never returns until the succeeding spring. But to obtain a real taste of nature, one must leave far behind the smoke-begrimed houses of the metropolis ; and there is no part of our rich old England where one can find more rich and varied scenery than in the beautiful counties of the west.

What, indeed, would have struck a stranger most forcibly on visiting these districts during the spring or summer months at the period—1872—to which this chapter relates, would have been the contrast afforded by the loveliness of the scenery and the poverty prevailing amongst the agricultural population of the villages. In many of these districts, too, a similar contrast would have been afforded by the richness and productiveness of the soil and the semi-pauperised condition of the race that tilled it. Let the following instances of this especial state of things serve as an illustration :—

To reach the village of Montacute from the main line of the Bristol and Exeter Railway the traveller must change carriages at Durston junction for the Yeovil line, and a journey of a few miles across low-lying marsh ground brings him, after passing Langport, to the little town of Martock. We alighted at the Martock station of the Durston and Yeovil line, and proceeded on foot for two or three miles—a beautiful walk—to the village of Montacute, which is situated in a valley at the feet of three hills—St. Michael's hill, Ham hill, and Stokedown. Our road lay through the village of Stoke-sub-Hamdon. At this place there are very large glove factories, which give employment to the female portion of the population of this and the surrounding villages. We were told that the work performed by the factory women and girls, mostly at their own homes, was excellent. Many of the labourers' families—that is to say, the female portion of them—were employed on the glove work, and but for that there is very little doubt that they must have starved. Some of them were able to earn from the factories two or three shillings a week—for very excellent work a little more—in order to supplement the wages received by the peasants. But when this factory work was

done it was, of course, done to the neglect of the families of the poor.

Crossing the threshold of a cottage at Stoke-sub-Hamdon, we noticed that the stone floor —which might perhaps at one time have been tolerably even, though that must have been very many years before our visit—had numerous large fissures between the flags, where the stone had gradually got broken away, leaving a number of pits. The cottage was placed in a sort of hollow, and consequently, in winter, water would oftentimes soak up through the uneven floor. At all seasons of the year, during wet weather, the floor would 'heave,' as the poor people expressed it; that is to say, the stones and the earth between them and in their interstices, would become very damp—sometimes quite wet. It is easy to understand the miserable state of discomfort of a 'sitting-room' of this description —for this one small damp room was the general room of the family. There was only one other small room—if room it could be called—placed over the stone floor apartment and serving for the bed-room, where the husband, the wife, and several children had to sleep. Yet for this hut a rent of one-and-sixpence a week was paid.

This cottage was one of several, all of the

same size, and all similarly comfortless. A kind of paved pathway, admitting from the road, out of which we had turned, led along by the doors of the 'row,' and in front of this were the several tiny pieces of garden, or 'potato ground,' as they called it. A poor woman whom we saw in one cottage we entered told us that the 'potato ground' did not grow nearly enough potatoes to supply the family. She said her husband was a 'piece-worker,' and earned, when in good health and in regular employment, two shillings a day in addition to a daily allowance of three pints of cider. But the employment was precarious, as 'piece-working' usually was, more or less, especially at such high wages as two shillings a day; and to give us an instance of the loss which her husband sustained during wet weather, she said that the week previous to our visit he had lost two days from that cause, and during the current week he had lost one day. Six shillings, therefore, subtracted from the fortnight's pay, left an average of only nine shillings a week, out of which he had to pay the rent of his cottage and maintain his wife and family.

From Stoke-sub-Hamdon it was not a great distance to Montacute. One is remarkably struck, upon coming in sight of the village, by the

loveliness of the scenery which surrounds it. The fine mansion of the Phelips family, who own, we believe, the whole of Montacute, and also some of the property in the surrounding parishes, is seen just before making a turn in the road which leads up to the village. The mansion of the Phelips family, and the greater part of the houses in Montacute, are built of some excellent stone which is taken from a neighbouring quarry at Ham Hill. Montacute occupies a position to the extreme south of the mid-division of Somersetshire. An extraordinary contrast was presented between the external aspect of the village, the scenery of which is very beautiful, and the misery and squalor which we found within the cottage homes. We made a great number of very careful inquiries, going from house to house, examining their interiors, and asking many questions with regard to the circumstances of the peasantry. But the news of the agricultural labourers' 'movement' had travelled to this district before us, and the farmers had, with a sort of instinct, raised the wages of their men all round one shilling a week. The average wages, which had been nine shillings a week, were therefore ten at the time of our visit. Perhaps if an exact average had been struck, the weekly wages of the Montacute labourers would

scarcely have amounted to ten shillings a week. Here, as at Stoke-sub-Hamdon, and several other of the neighbouring villages, the wives and daughters of the labourers eked out the wages of 'the head of the family' by means of glove-making. Some of the work performed by these female glove-makers was excellent, and it was distressing to think that such a pittance as two or three shillings was all that could be earned for a whole week's labour, often performed by mothers at the cost of the almost total neglect of their young families. We will describe the circumstances of some of those whom we visited.

We went into one cottage consisting of three rooms, which had to house a family of ten persons—a man, his wife, and eight children. The eldest of those at home was sixteen years of age—the others ranging downwards from that age. The father was a labourer seventy years of age, and he worked by the day—when he was able to do a full day's work, and when he could get one to do—earning one-and-sixpence a day. The rent of the three-roomed cottage was one-and-sixpence a week. It is obvious that half of this family could not have held to the barest existence had it been dependent on the uncertain

earnings of the father. Some of the elder children were able to add something—very little it was at the best of times—to the father's earnings. The mother and one daughter, when we called, were busily engaged in glove work, straining their eyes in the poor light which came through the small casement, so that no false stitch should be made or bad work be put into the gloves. There are all sorts of risks in this humble trade; the workers being held responsible for spoilt material and bad or imperfect work, and being hedged round by fines and penalties.

We visited another cottage, and learnt a most painful story. The husband, an able-bodied farm labourer, had, a short time before our visit, been receiving nine shillings a week, but his master had raised his wages to ten shillings. From this sum he had to pay a weekly cottage rent of one-and-threepence for a hovel with two rooms and no garden attached to it. The lower room, with a stone floor, was raised about two feet above the level of the street, and over this was the solitary bedroom which had to accommodate the eight members of this family. Living at home there were six children besides the father and mother. The eldest was a boy of fourteen; the next a girl one year younger. The boy had been earning

three shillings a week, but had had his wages raised to four. Besides these children there were at home four younger children, including twins about five years old. The father, in addition to his weekly ten shillings had a daily allowance of two pints of cider. The mother of this family assured us that they had had no butcher's meat for a whole year. In fact the total earnings of the family would not suffice for a proper quantity of bread. The price of bread in the village was, we learnt, sevenpence-halfpenny the quartern loaf. A little fellow, shoeless, and in rags—one of the twins of five—was standing by his mother, who told us that, the day before our visit, she had not been able to give him a morsel of bread until eight o'clock at night!

The one bedroom over the stone floor apartment was a kind of attic, almost entirely denuded of furniture. There was a window on each side. But several panes of the glass had been broken and the holes stuffed with rags. In this one, small apartment, in some parts of which we could not have stood upright, the eight persons composing this family had to sleep—father, mother, and six children. The mother told us that at one time the family living at home consisted of no less than thirteen persons, who had

all to sleep in the one small bedroom of the cottage!

Another family which we visited consisted of ten persons—the father, the mother, a young man of twenty-one, who was engaged in farm work and lodged at home; a girl of seventeen, who earned two shillings a week at glove-making; another girl of fifteen, who earned half a crown a week at gloving, but did not live at home; a boy of fourteen, another boy of eleven; twin-boys, seven years of age, and a little boy of four. The boy of fourteen earned three shillings a week at a farm, and the one eleven years old eighteenpence a week. Animal food was very rarely partaken of by any one in this family circle. The father rented the eighth of an acre of allotment ground, which cost him seven shillings a year. The potatoes derived from this plot would last the family sometimes three months, but seldom longer.

The next cottage we visited was occupied by a carter, in receipt of nine-and-sixpence per week. He had a wife and six children. We also visited an old man of sixty-nine years of age in a miserable hovel. The poor old creature was quite 'crippled up' with rheumatism. He had no wife or family living. He had been employed

his whole life as a farm labourer, and in his palmy days had received nine shillings a week and three pints of cider per day. But when we saw him he had been obliged to discontinue regular work. He obtained eighteenpence a week from the parish, and a loaf of bread a week in addition. Beyond this regular allowance his means of livelihood were very precarious. He was glad to do odd jobs occasionally, as his strength and infirmities would permit, and on such occasions he was paid by the job. His two-roomed cottage cost him a shilling a week. The squalor of this place was indescribable. The tiny down-stair room—if by any stretch of the imagination it could have been called a room—had not even the ordinary stone flooring. The ground floor was literally the earth! Not a vestige of fire was on the hearth when we saw it. We did not venture to penetrate to the 'bed-room,' but from the size of the entire hut we could judge of its tiny dimensions. The down-stair apartment was much more like a hole than a room. Such an ending as that of this old man to half a century of hard toil in the fields was painful to think of.

We entered a number of other cottages, but it was one unvarying story of misery and want.

It was really a pitiable sight to see the bedrooms of several of the Montacute cottages we visited. An old table, and perhaps a broken chair in addition, would constitute in many cases the only articles of what could scarcely be called 'furniture.' Seldom a vestige of carpet on the floors. A few bedclothes, perhaps, huddled down in one corner. At night these had to be distributed amongst the several members of the family, who, lying about on different parts of the floor, could not possibly, in cold weather, get a reasonable amount of warmth.

In all the homes of the peasantry in Montacute there was, in fact, at the time of our visit, a chilling air of misery and wretchedness. And yet this village was renowned for the prosperity of its farmers, the land in the district being some of the richest in the whole of the county. Its productiveness, too, was really extraordinary—exceptionally great in fact. We were told on good authority that a large farmer might realize a fortune in a few years.

The principal farms in the district contained respectively five hundred, two hundred and forty, two hundred, a hundred and forty-four, and a hundred and thirty-four acres. We were told by a practical man, who was thoroughly

acquainted with farming, who had lived in the district a number of years and knew all about the land, the acreage of the farms, etc., that land in Montacute worth four pounds an acre was let to the farmers at one-pound-ten an acre, and that some land let for only two pounds an acre was, in reality, worth five. The five hundred acre farm, for instance, was, he assured us, worth at least four pounds an acre, but the tenant obtained it for one-pound-ten. Only ten labourers were employed on this particular farm of five hundred acres. On the two hundred acre farm only two men were employed.

Besides the grazing land in the Montacute district, the usual agricultural crops were grown, including wheat, barley, oats, flax, clover, mangel-wurzel, swedes, turnips, etc. To give us an instance of the extraordinary productiveness of some of the land in Montacute, our informant said that one piece of ground, which he pointed out to us, had produced in eighteen months crops of the value of two hundred and two pounds. This particular piece of land was eight acres in extent. In eighteen months it had produced three crops—two of clover and one of wheat. The value of each entire crop of clover was forty-five pounds. The wheat produced was

of the value of fourteen pounds an acre. This return was not stated to us as being unusual by any means. It was a full crop, but not exceptionally good. The rent of this land was two-pounds-five an acre, and it must have been worth more than double that sum.

We do not know why the Montacute farmers obtained their farms on such unusually moderate terms. Few landlords, probably, would be so little alive to their own interests as to underlet in a similar way. We can only speak to the facts as we found them at the time of our inquiry. It might have been that the arrangements between the Squire—who, we believe, did not usually reside in the district—and his tenants had been of long standing, and there might, consequently, have been an unwillingness on the part of the former to disturb terms of lease that had been handed down, perhaps, from his predecessors. Perhaps the owner of the Montacute estates was careless about the rents received for his land. But the facts were as we have given them, and we lay particular stress upon them, because it had so often been urged that the reason why the farmer underpaid his labourers was because he had to pay a full, if not a rack, rent to his landlord, and because also the profits of farming were very small.

Such, however, was at least not the case in Montacute, which, at the period to which we refer, afforded a strikingly painful contrast between exceptional prosperity on the one side, and the most extreme poverty and destitution on the other.

7.

WAGES AND BENEVOLENCE.

From Montacute we directed our inquiries to the neighbourhood of Bridgwater, where we found that the wages of the peasantry were, taking a fair average, about nine or ten shillings a week, with the addition of from three to four daily pints of cider. On a piece of high ground called 'the park' at the village of Cannington, four miles from Bridgwater, a view can be obtained of a very extensive tract of low-lying, but extremely rich, pasture land, stretching away for many miles towards the Bristol Channel. This low-lying land is watered by the river Parrett, which, rising in Dorsetshire and flowing along a course some fifty miles in extent, enters Somersetshire near Crewkerne, and thence, flowing by way of the rich marsh land already mentioned, joins the sea at Burnham. Bridgwater is the centre of one of

the richest agricultural districts of England, and between it and the Bristol Channel there is a portion of the rich low-lying pasture land, already referred to, called the Pawlett Hams. The fertility of this particular tract had proved to be so extraordinary that it had risen in value, within a period that could be remembered by people living in the district, by not less than three hundred per cent., namely, from two to six pounds an acre. The value for grazing purposes, therefore, of this fertile area, which covers some two hundred miles square, must be very great.

We made some very particular and careful investigations into the condition of the peasantry in the neighbourhood of Cannington. We questioned amongst others a vigorous, able-bodied labourer whose circumstances may, we think, be fairly instanced as representing the condition of the labourer in that part of Somersetshire. Cottage rent in the district was, on an average, from one shilling to one shilling and sixpence per week, according, in most cases, to the size of the cottage, and depending sometimes upon the size of the garden which was attached to it. The wages of the Cannington labourer whom we questioned were two shillings a day for piece-

work. But he usually lost his employment in wet weather; so that, making due allowance for his losses in that respect, his wages would only amount on an average to from nine to nine-and-sixpence per week. He had a wife, he informed us, and five children, the eldest twelve years of age, and the youngest a baby of three. These five children were all girls, and consequently none of them could earn anything to supplement his wages. He paid for the rent of his cottage eighteenpence a week, besides paying a few pence, amounting in all to about sixpence weekly, for schooling for his children—all of whom he sent to the village school—and for subscriptions to a coal and to a clothing club. Deducting, therefore, two shillings per week from an average of nine-and-sixpence or ten shillings, it is obvious that it would be an impossibility for this man to feed and clothe his family and himself on the remainder. No doubt the subscriptions paid by agricultural labourers to the benefit clubs which exist in many villages are returned to them with interest. These clubs are partly supported by charitable subscriptions; and the peasants are thus encouraged to subscribe their weekly pence. The small sums accumulated in this way during the year are distributed at

Christmas—that being, perhaps, the season of greatest need.

The charitable subscriptions to these village institutions for agricultural labourers represent some of the 'privileges' which the peasants enjoy. But the advantages gained by these institutions have, we fear, been greatly exaggerated. Supposing, for instance, that a man could regularly put by sixpence a week out of his weekly pay of nine-and-sixpence, the yearly total would be one pound six shillings. If double the value of that sum were returned to him at Christmas in coal and clothing—and it is very rarely, if ever, that the labourer's deposit is *doubled*—what benefit would such a sum be to each member of a family of seven or eight persons when the amount is spread over a whole year? Supposing the subscription to the coal club, for instance, produced at Christmas time, at the then price of coal, as much in the case of this Cannington labourer, as eight hundredweight of coal—that would be, we are sure, the utmost extent of the Christmas benefit—what quantity of coal would that be per week, supposing the best use of it was made that could be made? The fractional dividend would be small indeed, and if, with the sudden accession of an unusual

quantity of coal, less than a sufficient amount of care were exercised in its consumption, the result would be almost inappreciable ; as it would be also in the matter of clothing, if from the annual fifty-two shillings, the price of eight hundredweight of coal be deducted and the balance divided amongst seven persons, as the only provision for a year's clothing for that number.

It is quite clear, too, that nine-and-sixpence a week could not find a family of seven persons in a sufficient quantity of bread. How, then, is the problem to be solved—namely, the possibility of existence under such circumstances as those of the Cannington labourer ? Canon Girdlestone once remarked, when referring to the state of semi-starvation in which the agricultural labourers of North Devon lived, that they did not live, in the proper sense of the word. They merely 'didn't die.' It is quite certain that individual benevolence or the rates could alone have kept these poor creatures from absolute starvation.

8.

ALLOTMENTS.

A GENIAL west country magistrate, Mr. Arthur Kinglake, writing some years since on the 'allotment system' and its effect upon our peasantry, remarked: 'He' (the labourer) 'becomes for the time being,' (as possessor of an allotment,) 'an owner of the soil, and he has a feeling of independence which nothing else can give, and which at once exalts his character. His ground yields him a large supply of vegetables for his family, and enables him to keep and fatten a pig or two, and likewise some poultry, which fetch large prices. Besides these advantages from the allotment system, his children are trained to habits of industry and carefulness. I agree,' added Mr. Kinglake, 'with the opinion of a well-known and much esteemed Dorsetshire squire, that the contented grunt or murmur of

a fattening pig is pleasanter to the agricultural labourer's ear than the delicious notes of the sweetest nightingale.'

Much has been said of the benefits which the peasant derives from what is called his allotment. It has been alleged that his allotment provides him with a considerable store of vegetables for the consumption of his family, and at the same time it has been generally supposed that every peasant has an allotment of ground on which to grow his small crops of vegetables. No doubt if a labourer has the opportunity of renting, either of the farmer or of the landowner, a good-sized plot of ground, at a very small rent, he does derive an appreciable advantage from its cultivation. It is obvious that his means would not admit of his renting, except under very rare and exceptional circumstances, more than a very small plot of ground. About the eighth of an acre—in some cases, but seldom, however, the quantity may be more—is the usual size of a labourer's plot; and it can easily be understood that under the most careful and remunerative system of cultivation, so small a piece of ground could not be made to produce a very large quantity of vegetables. Still, when an allotment is granted to the labourer on reasonable terms,

it is undoubtedly one important means of supplementing his small wages. In the West of England, however, there are not a great number of labourers' allotments, the owners of land being frequently disinclined to let out their ground in that way. The labourers' allotment must not be confounded with the cottage garden, which is generally very small indeed, and used chiefly for planting flowers. The allotment is generally, and in fact almost invariably, separated from the cottage. Sometimes a farmer will let out a certain portion of his farm in allotments for his own men. In other cases, the landowner under whom the farmer rents, will let a small portion of his estate to his tenant's labourers. In other cases, again, the lord of a manor may appropriate certain portions of land for labourers' allotments, receiving an uniform rent from each.

But when stress has been laid upon the advantages which the peasant derives from the produce of his allotment, it has not been thought necessary to inquire what rent he pays for his small piece of ground.

It would seem natural to expect that a farmer would let his underpaid labourer a small plot of land at a rent equivalent to that which he himself pays his landlord. In numbers of cases,

however, on the contrary, the farmer manages to reap a considerable profit out of his small tenant. We heard of numerous cases of this kind in the neighbourhood of Bridgwater. The average rent of land in that district, excepting the Pawlett Hams, is about three pounds an acre. When labourers are able to obtain allotments at all, the size of the plot let to each man is usually, as we have seen, about one-eighth of an acre, or rather we should say it is called the eighth of an acre, but it is usually less. In fact, there is, as a rule, no exact measurement of these allotments. They are roughly estimated to be the eighth of an acre, but the measurement frequently, we fear, goes against the labourer. The actual rent, however, paid by the men to their employers amounts in many cases to as much as twelve pounds an acre. The poor peasant, with his scanty wages, is therefore charged *four times* as much as the farmer himself pays to his landlord! But unfortunately the matter does not end here. Although let at so extortionate a rent, in the cases to which we have alluded, the land is often taken by the labourer in a rough and uncultivated state. Sometimes, but not always, the farmer will lend his plough and his horses to his allotment holders, free of expense. But we were told of cases where,

after the labourer had dressed and improved his allotment, it was taken away from him, and another plot of uncultivated land given to him instead; the reason given by the farmer for this proceeding being merely that he had decided not to let out again in allotments the plots which he had taken away! Of course such cases as these are exceptional, but the charging of rack-rents, and in many cases of extortionate rents, for the land let out in allotments, is a very general custom in the West of England.

The labourer is, of course, quite in the farmer's power. If he wants the allotment he must pay the farmer's terms for it; and so miserable are the circumstances of the men that they are always, and very naturally, glad to get these plots on almost any terms which will enable them to make the smallest return out of them for their expenditure in rent and labour. Sometimes farmers will let allotments to their men on very reasonable terms, will provide them with seed potatoes for planting out, and will even allow the men to get manure for their plots from the farm-yard. But such instances are exceptional.

9.

THE VALE OF TAUNTON.

Besides including within its area a large extent of unusually rich and productive land, the Vale of Taunton is widely known as a great 'cider country.' Corn and agricultural crops of all kinds are grown in abundance; but its numerous orchards are an especial feature of the district, producing large quantities of the fruit from which is made the beverage that forms so important an element in the agricultural wages system of the West of England—the system of 'cider truck,' which has been already mentioned as unfair in its incidence on the peasantry, and injurious in a moral, if not in a physical, sense.

Taunton itself has been the scene of some tragic incidents in the history of the west country peasants. The ignorant and infatuated

tillers of the soil who, in 1685, followed the fortunes of the Duke of Monmouth in his ill-starred attempt at rebellion, found their scythes as ineffectual against the troops of King James the Second as they find them in the present day useless as a means of earning a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Monmouth's army was principally composed of the peasantry of the western counties. We are told that the better classes held aloof from the unfortunate Duke, who, with his sturdy peasant band, to the number of four thousand, entered Taunton, and was proclaimed King on June 20th. But a very brief period of triumph ensued, for the royal troops were mustering in the neighbourhood. The peasants, however, intrepidly followed Monmouth, who advanced to give battle to the enemy. Attempting to surprise the Earl of Feversham, who with his army was posted on Sedgemoor, near Bridgwater, Monmouth and his followers advanced across the moor. The rustics had been creeping furtively forward, armed with the implements of agriculture. Ditch after ditch had been passed, and they were almost upon the foe, slumbering in false security—for it was night—when all at once a ditch, deeper, darker, and broader than any they had hitherto passed,

stood before them. They attempted in vain to find a fordable spot; and, in the confusion which ensued, a pistol was discharged by accident. The royal troops, springing to arms, opened a terrible fire upon the poor peasants. Though Monmouth, like a coward, fled for dear life, his peasant followers, left to themselves, fought on manfully with their scythes and rustic tools. But it was in vain, for the poor fellows were literally 'mowed' down. At length, forced by overwhelming numbers, they wavered and gave way. Then there ensued a scene of fearful butchery, and a thousand of the hapless peasantry were left dead, or in the agonies of death, upon the battle-field. The soil of this fair county was then indeed watered with the blood of her bravest sons. But the victors were still relentless. Dead and dying were hurried into the same graves. The time being the middle of June, the corn was not yet ripe, but it stood high and afforded shelter for the fugitives who sought, in terror, its friendly protection. They were followed, however, dragged from their hiding-places, and butchered in cold blood. Those who escaped death on the field were reserved for the tender mercies of the blood-thirsty Jeffreys, and Taunton, as is well known, witnessed

the darkest scenes of this historical tragedy. In that town alone a hundred and forty-four were executed, and two hundred and eighty-four received sentence of transportation. The peasants condemned to death were hung, scores of them, upon the sign-post of the 'White Hart Inn,' and their heads and limbs were posted about on trees, hedges, and steeples.

Taunton has on more than one occasion stood siege against an invading force; and once, during the civil wars of the Commonwealth, a west country pig is said to have saved the town. The garrison of the castle (a portion of which still remains), reduced to one pig, but wishing to persuade the besiegers that there was ample provision within the castle walls for a lengthened siege, drove this solitary and unfortunate animal round the ramparts, pricking it to make it squeal and impress the enemy with the belief that they possessed an unlimited supply of 'bacon.' A similar story has, we believe, been told of other of the west country castles; but it is generally considered that Taunton Castle was the scene of this pig story.

Around Taunton we found that the labourers, generally, were very badly paid. On our way from the town to the village of Norton

Fitzwarren, we encountered a fine specimen of an English agricultural labourer. He was tall, robust, and muscular; twenty-three years of age. We questioned him as to his circumstances. He had a wife and two children. His wages were nine shillings per week, out of which he paid one-and-ninepence per week for his cottage rent. He obtained, in addition to his wages, the usual quantity of cider. He believed that his master intended increasing the wages of his labourers by a shilling a week. This had been done in the surrounding districts, and we found that the average wages which were given were from nine to ten shillings a week, with cider in addition. To carters and shepherds one shilling more per week is given generally than to ordinary labourers. But it must not be forgotten that for their extra pay they have, in most cases, to work much longer than the ordinary men.

As far as our inquiries had extended, we found that the condition of the peasantry largely depended upon the individual generosity of the farmers. Some farmers treated their men well, gave them good wages, with allotment ground at a low rent, and would, unasked, make an advance in wages when necessary. We are sorry to say, however, that such cases were exceptional. What

made it worse for the labourers was that the system of low wages had engendered, generally, habits of improvidence. It is not at all to be wondered at. When men find that by the most persevering attempts it is impossible to make both ends meet, they, almost naturally, fall into reckless habits. Between Norton Fitzwarren and Taunton we met a large farmer and owner of land in the Norton parish. This gentleman, whom we knew, had recently advanced the wages of his labourers. In conversation with him, we found that he shared the opinion, in common with the more intelligent and better class of farmers, that to raise the peasant will in the end be the best thing that can happen for the farmer and landed proprietor. He agreed with us in our opinion that the best thing both for masters and men would be an equal division of agricultural labour all over the country, so that the question might be reduced to the natural limits of supply and demand. In some parts of England labour was badly wanted, and agriculturists were able and willing to pay good wages. It was therefore desirable that all surplus labour—and perhaps the existence of surplus labour in the West of England was partly the reason of the miserable wages which were

given to the peasants there—should be removed to other parts of England or to the colonies. If the movement of the peasantry in 1872 did nothing else, it would, it was hoped, serve a very useful purpose by equalising the labour in the various districts of England, so that the surplus in one district might counterbalance the demand for labour in other places.

10.

MODERN COWHERDS.

We paid a visit to that part of the West of England rendered famous by the story of King Alfred. We were almost inclined to think that a thousand years had wrought a change in the circumstances of the west country peasant which was anything but creditable to our advanced civilisation. Every one remembers the tale of the cowherd into whose cottage Alfred was glad to enter for a short time to escape from his enemies, and to concert those plans which he was immediately afterwards destined to carry out so successfully. One might envy the quiet and seclusion of the Athelney peasant of the ninth century; and it is not difficult to imagine that the life of the rustic labourer of that period was a happy one, and that, however much he might then have been deficient in education, he

was, at least, surrounded by material comforts. In all that we have been able to say from the experience gained during our visit to the West of England in 1872 concerning the then condition of the rural labourer in that district, we do not think we have adduced anything which will more conclusively show how degraded was the labourer in that part of England at the time of our inquiry, than the fact that, in a thousand years, no real improvement had taken place in his condition either mentally or physically. In fact, we fear he had rather retrogressed than advanced in any way. The average west country peasant was, in almost every way, deplorably ignorant. The civilisation which had found its way into the agricultural labourer's cottage had, indeed, rather produced wretchedness than contentment, for it had engendered wants and desires that could not be supplied and attained.

The Isle of Athelney is situated at the point of junction between the rivers Parrett and Tone. It is no longer covered with wood, as in King Alfred's time, but has been turned into a modern English farm. Passing through the village of Athelney, we entered a labourer's cottage. We were attracted to visit its interior by the sight of a small crowd of little children who blocked

up the doorway. Passing across the tiny piece of front garden which served to grow a few potatoes for the family, and stooping under the doorway, we entered the 'basement.' We were politely invited by the 'good-wife' to take a seat in the chair on the stone floor. Thus shut in from the outer world, we felt that it was impossible for even the most imaginative mind to suppose that there was any similarity between the peasant of that time and the peasant of a thousand years before. All before us was unromantic; there was nothing present but the reality of modern wretchedness. The occupier of the cottage was a regular farm labourer, and he received for the support of himself, a wife, and eight children, all of whom we saw, nine shillings per week from a modern English farmer. The eldest of the children was a girl of twelve; the youngest was a baby of three months; seven were girls, and the infant in arms was the only boy. Five pounds a year was the sum paid to the landlord for rent, and a little more than seven shillings a week was therefore left to supply the bodily needs of ten persons, with the addition of a few pence earned occasionally by the eldest girl for willow-stripping. Not one of the family had tasted animal food for about six months,

except what on very rare occasions had been given by chance benevolence. Bread was the great luxury. Baker's bread, which we learnt was in Athelney sevenpence the quartern loaf, was, however, an unknown delicacy in this family circle. The good-wife informed us that she could not possibly afford to buy baker's bread, but that she obtained the meal and manufactured at home a coarser article for herself, her husband, and her little ones. The good-wife who scolded King Alfred for allowing her cakes to burn was surely a happier being than this modern mother of eight children. The question naturally arose, How could this family of ten exist at all under such privations? Private benevolence was the secret. A private gentleman in the neighbourhood filled the kind and useful office of benefactor, and distributed gifts to the poor.

Leaving Athelney, we soon entered the village of Stoke-St.-Gregory. On the marshes in the neighbourhood are grown large quantities of willow-trees. The stripping of the bark from the 'withies'—as the twigs of these trees are called—gave employment to a number of women and children in the neighbourhood. The rate of remuneration was fourpence a bundle, and by working for nearly twelve hours it was

sometimes possible for a woman to earn one shilling a day. A number of the cottages in the parishes of Stoke-St.-Gregory, North Curry, and Hatch Beauchamp were very bad—some of them being, in fact, mere mud hovels. Along our line of route we noticed the several gradations from the pigstye to the inhabited cottage of the peasant. We saw a number of cottages in a state of transformation. It was curious to note how very easily a mud hovel was turned into a 'barn,' by taking out what might perhaps be termed the 'windows' of such a hovel, and substituting boards in their place. We learnt, however, that some new cottages had, just before, been built in this locality. The average wages in Stoke-St.-Gregory and North Curry parishes were, we found, nine shilling a week for ordinary labourers, and ten shillings in most cases for carters and modern 'cowherds.' In some of the districts in the neighbourhood we learnt that men were receiving only eight shillings a week. This we understood was the case at Hatch Beauchamp. A woman living in the parish of North Curry assured us that her husband, although, when we inquired, in receipt of nine shillings per week as a regular farm labourer, had only recently been promoted to that stipend,

having not long before been paid eight shillings a week. His cottage, we found, cost this man four pounds six shillings a year. He was, however, privileged to rent of the farmer a quarter of an acre of potato ground, at a rent for that quantity of land of two pounds five shillings a year. We inquired what price the farmer had to pay, on the average, for land in the neighbourhood of North Curry, and were informed that the value of the land was two pounds ten shillings an acre. So that the farmer in this parish charged nearly *four times* as much for the labourer's allotment as he paid himself! The family of this peasant consisted of his wife and six children.

Although the wages were so low in the place we have just been describing, we were glad to find that in one or two other places a somewhat more healthy state of things had commenced. Whilst in the West of England we received a letter from Mr. C. H. Fox, a large manufacturer, residing at Wellington. Mr. Fox said: 'The current rates for ordinary agricultural labourers in this neighbourhood until about a year ago were nine or ten shillings per week, with cider, for ordinary labourers. The same with a cottage and garden for carters and shepherds; or, if

without cottage, twelve shillings per week. On the south side of our Blackdown hills, in the villages of Clayhidon, Hemyock, and Church Taunton, the rate was lower than this—eight shillings and cider with cottage, or nine shillings without, being the average miserable remuneration of an able-bodied labourer. Now all this is rapidly changing. We have sent away a considerable number of men from that locality to the colonies. The North and Wales are attracting great numbers. Men are becoming scarce, and the natural excellent result is rapidly following. Last week I was informed that a neighbouring farmer offered fourteen shillings per week each in money for two able-bodied farm men; and I am glad to be able to hope that the more natural law of supply and demand will very shortly establish in this neighbourhood the advance in wages and material prosperity which is so desirable.'

Mr. Fox appeared from this letter to have been doing at Wellington and in the immediately surrounding districts what Canon Girdlestone did for so long a time in Devonshire. There is no doubt that this kind of philanthropy was practical and business-like, and if more extensively exercised would have led to the happiest results for the peasantry of the West of England.

11.

A FAMILY OF TWELVE.

THE eastern division of Somersetshire extends from the populous cities of Bath and Bristol on the north to the line of the Mendip Hills, which, stretching across the county from Whatley, near the town of Frome, in the east, to the Bristol Channel at Weston-super-Mare, may, roughly speaking, be considered as the boundary between East and Mid Somerset. We found that in the eastern division of the county higher wages were given to the peasantry. Probably the proximity of that district to the cities of Bath and Bristol exercised some influence upon the rates of remuneration. Weston-super-Mare is a very rising town. A mere village in 1842, its population had rapidly increased, and had actually become doubled between 1851 and 1861. The town has been called Bristol-

super-Mare, and it is to Bristol very much what Brighton is to London. The presence of the large manufacturing population of Bristol and of two such fashionable resorts as Bath and Weston-super-Mare were no doubt, therefore, the cause, in a great measure, of the condition of the labourers in agriculture in the eastern division of this county being not quite so bad as in the other parts. Taking this division of the county generally, we found that the average wages were not higher than eleven or twelve shillings a week, with the addition of the usual quantity of cider. We questioned a farm labourer sixty-three years of age as to his experience, extending over a period of fifty years, during which he worked on farms in that part of Somerset. We were informed by a gentleman who had known him for a great many years, that this man bore an unblemished character. He could read and write very well, and was what is termed a skilled agricultural labourer. He had occasionally, during harvest time, been able to earn as much as one pound a week, but taking one season with another, during his fifty years' service, his average wages, he assured us, were only twelve shillings a week. He ordinarily worked in the summer from five A.M. to

six P.M., and frequently, during harvest, from half-past four in the morning until twelve at night. Farmers not unfrequently give no money payment for extra work at harvest time. For very hard work, often extending over six extra hours per day on those occasions, the labourer often gets nothing but an extra allowance of cider and his supper. Our informant told us that on his average wages of twelve shillings a week he had brought up a family of ten children; his excellent wife adding to his income by taking in, from time to time, some needlework. At one time his wife and five of his ten children were prostrated by a fever. On that occasion it was only by the benevolence of the medical man who attended them—and the doctors in the rural districts are generally very good to the poor—that he was able to avoid the burden of overwhelming debt. No such luxuries as sugar or butter ever found their way into his family. Candles also were rarely used by the labourers, who had, often, during long winter evenings, to sit without candlelight, often without fire. It is difficult to imagine anything more miserable than sitting hungry for many weary hours in the cold and in the darkness.

12.

THE 'PRIVILEGES' OF THE PEASANT.

SOME of our most interesting and valuable facts relating to peasant life in the West of England were collected during a visit which we paid, in 1872, to a remote district in the south-western part of Somersetshire and bordering upon Exmoor. We had visited hitherto chiefly the districts in the neighbourhood of the larger towns. But away towards Exmoor there lay an important agricultural country which contained a sort of isolated agricultural population, shut in amidst hills which give to that part of Somersetshire all the characteristics of the neighbouring county of Devon. We had looked forward with especial interest to a visit to this locality, because we believed that from its comparatively isolated situation it would afford, in all probability, a unique illustration of the operation of the

semi-feudal system which had retained so firm a hold upon our English agricultural districts. The locality in question boasted of no large towns, and it would perhaps have been difficult to find any place in England more completely and essentially rural in its character.

To reach the extreme north-western portion of Somersetshire it was necessary to proceed to the Williton station of the West Somerset line—connecting Taunton with Watchet—and from that point to take the coach running between Williton and Porlock. We occupied the box-seat of the coach, and were somewhat amused, shortly after we had got clear of the little town of Williton, to be told by the talkative driver, who by some means had heard of our visit of inquiry, that he believed there was a government 'inspector' travelling through the West of England; that he was 'takin' notes' of the condition of the farm labourers, and was going to publish all that 'he could find out,' concerning them.

The route from Williton to Dunster lies through some of the most beautiful scenery of Somersetshire, and we had pretty peeps at the Bristol Channel from time to time as we ascended the crest of an eminence. We soon

passed Washford, Bilbrook, and Carhampton, and found ourselves at the little village of Dunster. Turning a point of the road, just before entering the village, we caught a fine view of Dunster Castle on our left. The castle, the seat of the Luttrel family, placed on rising ground in the midst of its beautiful park, presenting a most imposing appearance. From Dunster we walked to Wootton Courtney, a small village about four miles from the first-named place. The road wound amongst hills, and the scenery was so lovely and so thoroughly Devonian in its character, that we could not help thinking that the line dividing the two counties had been drawn too far to the west.

The land of Wootton Courtney and of the district around was chiefly owned by four principal proprietors. The very slight rise in wages which had taken place in every other district we had visited had also taken place at Wootton Courtney about two months before our visit. Before this rise the average wages of agricultural labourers had been no more than eight shillings a week, with the addition of two pints of cider daily, the value of which, per week, was set down at one shilling. Supposing the cider to have been worth so much as it was

computed to be, the total earnings in money and kind were thus but nine shillings per week. From this sum there was the cottage rent to deduct, most of the two-roomed hovels being let at a rent of one shilling a week.

One farmer in Wootton Courtney was paying to his regular labourers, at the time of our visit, no more than six shillings per week in money. But in addition to this he gave them each a cottage — a two-roomed hovel — valued at the weekly rental of a shilling. In fact, therefore, he was paying his men seven shillings per week, with the usual addition of two daily pints of cider. With one singular exception, which we have already named—the labourer at Banwell, with his five shillings a week, and his 'privileges' previously enumerated—we should think there would be no agricultural district in England which could produce a parallel case to that of the peasants just referred to.

With few exceptions, the hovels of Wootton Courtney—for we can call them nothing else—contained but two rooms, one over the other in most cases; the lower room being, of course, the general sitting-room for the family, the other room, above the sitting-room, serving for the one sleeping apartment. Some of these

two-roomed hovels had no gardens. The state of discomfort of a family of four, five, six, seven, or eight persons — often more — compelled to perform every domestic office in two rooms, can perhaps be imagined better than it can be described.

The tiny bedrooms of each of the two-roomed hovels had to accommodate all the members of the family: father, mother, grown-up children, and sometimes lodgers, all sleeping in one room. Such a state of things is positively shocking, and produces worse results even than the direst poverty. What could the poor creatures do? They needed shelter, and they were forced into this indecent overcrowding by the lamentable deficiency of cottage accommodation.

A great deal has been said concerning the privileges of the agricultural labourer. The facts which we elicited on this point at Wootton Courtney were very interesting and important.

In most cases the farmers of the district allowed their labourers portions of potato ground, the allowance being on an average one-eighth of an acre. The yield of potatoes from this ground, whatever it might be, good, bad, or indifferent, according to the prevalence or to the absence of the potato disease, would no doubt be, for some

part of the year, a great help to the labourer, and would provide about the only change in the prevalence of a uniform bread diet. In fact, it is really difficult to know how the poor creatures, in the absence of the benefit derivable from the cultivation of a few potatoes, could possibly have found a sufficient quantity of food to keep themselves and their families from absolute starvation.

Some of the allotments held by the labourers of Wootton Courtney had, however, to be rented from the lord of the manor. We understood that these allotments, let out by the lord of the manor, were nearly all of them about the same size—namely, thirty-five 'yards,' or nearly a quarter of an acre. The rent annually paid for these small plots of ground was, in each case, eleven shillings and eightpence.

For fuel the peasants generally cut turf from the moors. In several parts of Somersetshire the moors afford large quantities of this turf, or peat, which is regularly cut, dried, and sold to the people in the towns and villages throughout the county; thus constituting a rather active branch of industry, giving a subsistence to many hundreds of the poorer inhabitants, who in such cases, however, are not engaged at all in farm work, but live by selling 'turf.' The 'turf,' as

it is called in that part of the country, makes excellent fuel. It is principally used in towns for lighting fires, but the peasants often use nothing else for fuel. On the moors, where it abounds, the 'top crust' is first taken off, and then underneath there is found a very thick bed of 'turf,' which extends for a considerable number of feet into the earth. This is dug out, cut into small squares, and then carted into the towns and sold at the doors.

In the neighbourhood of Wootton Courtney the peasants were able to provide a considerable portion of their fuel from the 'turf.' There was also a tacit understanding between the farmers and their labourers that when the latter had dug and cut their 'turf,' the former would give them the use of their horses and carts to haul it to their homes. The promise to do this, though, was on the condition that the horses and carts should be lent only when they could be spared. The result consequently was, that very often the poor labouring man after piling upon the moors a quantity of turf, found it spoilt by rain, when the farmer deemed it 'inconvenient' to lend horse and cart. These contingencies, consequently necessitated that the peasant should purchase coal from time to time. So that the 'turf'

privilege was not so great as it might appear. It appeared when the 'turf' had been burnt, that the ashes constituted an excellent manure, and sometimes the farmers bought them of the men to use for their land.

In this particular district, as in some other parts of the county, as also in Devonshire, there existed, we found, a 'privilege' which has been made a good deal of by farmers and landowners, but the value of which, notwithstanding the estimation of its supposed advantages is, we think, very questionable. We refer to the system, already briefly alluded to, of giving 'grist corn.' The 'privilege' amounted, as we have seen, to an allowance to the peasant to have at all times corn at a certain price per bushel, whether the market price was above or below that sum. No doubt, as we have already intimated, a good and generous master would see that his labourer got corn of at least a fair quality; but at Wootton Courtney the 'grist corn' chiefly consisted, we found, of the 'rakings' from the field, after the bulk of the cut crop had been taken away. These 'rakings' often lay, we were told, for some time in the field, and in wet weather—which in our changeable climate, as is well known, constantly occurs during harvest—they got soaked

and began to grow out. The consequence, therefore, was that when the poor peasant got his 'grist' it was frequently useless; and from what we could learn, therefore, it was the farmer and not the labourer who benefited from the system, which was supposed to confer so great a privilege upon the latter. Now and then the farmer might allow the peasant as much as a bushel of 'grist corn' once a fortnight at the regulation price, but the average quantity allowed was much less. In the neighbourhood of Dunster and Wootton Courtney, the average allowance was between two and three pecks once in the fortnight. The quantity, however, depended upon the individual generosity of the farmer, and also upon his sense of honour and fair dealing. During the harvest month the men could earn something extra by working overtime. Some farmers during that season gave their men the ordinary wages, and their meals in addition; others paid them—the best and strongest of the men—half-a-crown and three shillings a day without any meals. It must be remembered, however, that the men for this extra pay often had to work from four in the morning until ten at night; sometimes on moonlit nights until as late as twelve. But for this annual assistance the

agricultural labourer—who usually had to pay the small sum thus gained to the village shopkeeper to settle old 'scores'—would have got ruinously into debt.

At Wootton Courtney and in the neighbourhood we found that the children of the peasants could earn something by picking on the hills the whortleberries during the season—July and August—when these berries were ripe and plentiful. This wild fruit was used a great deal for pies and puddings by the poorer classes of people in Somersetshire. In fact, we believe, it was the only fruit that the peasants were able to afford. The berries also were sold in great quantities in the towns, being hawked about by itinerant vendors. These whortleberry dealers went out to the hills, in the moor country, and established a kind of market overt, to which the pickers brought their fruit. Children sometimes during the whortleberry season were able to earn eightpence and one shilling a day; but this was very precarious, and the quantity picked and the sums gained depended upon many circumstances.

We learnt that the rector of Wootton Courtney and his curate were very good to the poor, and that there was never a case of distress in the district that failed to elicit their active

sympathy and help. The rector kept a number of cows and gave all their milk to the poor inhabitants. The admirable school connected with the parish church contained a hundred and fourteen pupils in a population of four hundred.

One must naturally have great esteem for the clergyman who has the good sense to know that merely spiritual instruction is of little avail in a district where the poor are lacking the most common of material necessaries. It is a noble union of ministerial functions to combine temporal gifts with spiritual admonitions. But it is one of the most mischievous results of the semi-feudal system which had too long prevailed in our agricultural districts, that the field-labourer should have been dependent, to so great an extent, upon private benevolence. It was most unfair, too, that the burden of supplementing the wages of the peasantry should have been borne by any but those who benefited from their labour.

This system of benevolence, good in itself, is mischievous in its results when its exercise is required not only for relief in times of exceptional sickness and misfortune, but at all times. The labourer, in fact, under this system,

is paid partly for his labour by the gifts of the benevolent, instead of deriving his whole support, as he should be able to do, from his employer.

At the time of our visit to north-west Somersetshire the construction of a new railway, from Watchet to Minehead, had necessitated the felling of a quantity of wood in the neighbourhood, and this work, opened up in the district, had had its effect, we were told, in an increase of the average wages of the peasants from eight to nine shillings per week. Some mining operations in the district had also contributed to the same end; for the men engaged in the wood-felling and in the mining operations were able to earn half-a-crown a day: and the new occupations, by draughting labour from the farms in the locality, had produced the usual effect of enhancing the value of the labour of those who remained to till the soil.

13.

A SHORT STORY OF PEASANT LIFE.

It must often be the occasion of surprise to many readers of fiction that so large a fabric of narrative, description, and fancy can be built, as is commonly done by a skilful pen, upon so very small a foundation of fact as that which oftentimes suffices as the entire subject matter of not a few novelists. How much the following brief and pithy description —communicated to us in a letter from Canon Girdlestone—of the condition of the peasant life of North Devon, at the period, 1872, to which this section of our volume relates, might be extended if need there were, for the purposes of the romancer, it scarcely needs an imaginative mind to conceive. Though some of the statements have been, in a sense, anticipated by the fuller and more detailed narrative of

Canon Girdlestone's benevolent work in North Devon, the following sketch is given as representing a state of things which—though existing at the time of our first tour of inquiry amongst the peasantry of the western counties—'history' will, it is hoped, never repeat:—

'In North Devon, as a rule, with of course certain exceptions, on the estates of philanthropic owners, wages are, for labourers, eight or nine shillings a week with two, or one and a half, quarts of cider daily, valued at two shillings per week, but much over-valued. Carters and shepherds get one shilling a week more, or else a cottage rent free. The labourer has no privileges whatever. He rents his potato ground at a high rate. Though fuel is *said* to be given to him, he *really* pays its full value by grubbing up for it old hedges in after-hours. In wet weather or in sickness his wages entirely cease, so that he seldom makes a full week. The cottages, as a rule, are not fit to house pigs in. The labourer breakfasts on 'tea-kettle' broth, hot water poured on bread and flavoured with onions; dines on bread and hard cheese, at twopence a pound, with cider very washy and sour, and sups on potatoes or cabbage greased with a tiny bit of fat bacon. He

seldom more than sees or smells butcher's meat. He is long-lived, but in the prime of life "crippled up," *i.e.* disabled by rheumatism—the result of wet clothes, with no fire to dry them by for use next morning,—poor living, and sour cider. Then he has to work for four or five shillings per week, supplemented scantily from the rates, and, at last, to come for the rest of his life on the rates altogether. Such is, I will not call it the life, but the existence or vegetation of the Devon peasant. He hardly can keep body and soul together.' Towards the end of this letter Canon Girdlestone added: 'Wages, during the last few weeks, have risen on many farms one shilling per week.'

14.

THE WEST OF ENGLAND SANATORIUM.

Where a sad condition of life prevails amongst a large population, it would be indeed deplorable and unfortunate were there not here and there some lights to relieve the far-reaching shadows. Sometimes it is private benevolence which comes to the aid of suffering individuals. At other times such benevolence takes another form, and, by co-operation and organization, establishes institutions for assistance on a larger scale and after a more systematic method than can be rendered by individuals.

One of our most pleasing reminiscences of our tour amongst the peasantry is a visit we paid to the West of England Sanatorium. It was a lovely morning as we left the handsome town of Weston-super-mare, and took our way along the Uphill road. The sun was shining gloriously,

and the soft sea-breeze was exercising its gentlest influence; and these characteristics of a genial spring morning were the fit accompaniments of the pleasing scene which was in store for us at the Sanatorium. But we must premise that there is no watering-place anywhere on the coast of our beautiful island more suitable in every way than Weston-super-mare as the site of an institution similar to the one about which we are going to speak; and there are probably few places in England so well suited for that purpose. Weston-super-mare is, without doubt, one of the most pleasant of sea-side resorts. It is perhaps the most beautiful watering-place in Somersetshire. It is essentially modern, and therein lies its excellence as a place for recreation and enjoyment. It has grown to its present position, as we have already seen, by very rapid strides, and there is every probability that a great future is in store for it. Being one of the two healthiest towns in the kingdom, the establishment in close proximity to it of the West of England Sanatorium, whilst a wise and prudent act, was, at the same time, an act that reflected great credit upon Weston-super-mare. Notwithstanding the rapid strides of the town, the Sanatorium has grown much faster. Its birth dates from no

longer ago than 1868. From a very small commencement in that year it has become developed into an important institution; and there is every probability that, although at the present time it has grown so large as to have entirely lost its local character, it is even yet but the nucleus of what it is destined one day to become.

The especial object of the West of England Sanatorium is to provide a temporary home for those in the humbler walks of life who are recovering from illness, and who may require, but who have not the means, to seek rest and recreation. To the poor peasant, to the artizan, or even to the struggling clerk, or to the wives and families of such, it is impossible, under ordinary circumstances, that the strength lost through severe illness can be restored by a resort to the sea-side, because such a step would be attended with too great expense. At a nominal cost, therefore, the West of England Sanatorium provides all the requirements of a convalescent retreat, and places within reach of the poor the comfort and enjoyment which, without such an institution, would be brought only within reach of the wealthier classes.

Under the courteous guidance of Mr. Arthur Kinglake, one of the chief promoters of the

Sanatorium, and of the honorary surgeon of the institution, we went over the building, and made ourselves acquainted with its admirable arrangements. By the courtesy of the lady superintendent we were permitted to see the inmates; and it was indeed a pleasing sight to mark the returning glow of health on the faces of the convalescents, and to notice the happiness and contentment engendered by the kind and gentle treatment which prevailed at the excellent institution. The noble and unselfish men who plan such institutions as the West of England Sanatorium, and give their time and their money for the benefit of their poorer fellow-creatures, must have their reward in the consciousness of having done that which is right and good, and must feel with the writer of the following lines when he exclaims :—

> 'Oh sweeter than the sweetest flower
> At ev'ning's dewy close,
> The will, united with the power,
> To succour human woes.
>
> 'And softer than the softest strain
> Of music to the ear,
> The placid joy we give and gain
> By gratitude sincere.'

One of the most munificent donors to the West of England Sanatorium was Mr. William Gibbs, of Tyntesfield, a gentleman of large means and as large a heart. We felt, on the occasion of our visit, that much more of this kind of practical philanthropy was required in the West of England, not merely for the extension of its Sanatorium, but for the elevation, from their depressed condition, of the tillers of its rich and beautiful lands.

PART III.

AMONG THE PEASANTRY IN 1873.

AMONG THE PEASANTRY IN 1873.

1.

'COTTAGE HOMES.'

Nestling at the feet of two hills, which rise boldly, yet with graceful symmetry, from the sea level, lies the sweetly-secluded little town of Porlock. From Minehead to Porlock, the distance is six miles, through the finest scenery in all Somersetshire: the finest because it is purely Devonian in character, and the county of Devon is second to none for romantic loveliness. Taking this route in the month of June, 1873, our path wound away from the town of Minehead; it gracefully bent to right and to left through an amphitheatre of beautiful hills; now sinking between high hedges surpassingly rich in their verdant clothing, which, in the

fulness of its early summer glory, blotted out all but the blue sky overhead ; and now passing into soft gloom as it found its way under a natural archway of trees. We had proceeded some little distance in our ramble from Minehead, when, at a turn in the road, we came upon a little scene, the like of which is rarely to be met with. From the main road a lane led away to the right ; and a peep through the high hedges revealed just a glimpse of the whitewashed wall and low-thatched roof of a cottage. It was impossible to resist the temptation to turn in the direction of this cottage. Down one side of the lane gurgled a limpid stream of water ; and from the hedge-bank hung, in all their beauty of form, the graceful intermingled fronds of lady ferns, hartstongues, and shield ferns, which lapped the surface of the brook. In front a hill rose boldly above this charming 'bit.' Another turning, this time round to the left, after a few steps up the lane, and a pretty sight met our view. Straight in front a narrow path led up under a kind of vista. On the right of this path there was a row of creeper-bound cottages, eighteen in all, as we afterwards ascertained. Facing the cottages was a row of little gardens, over-shadowed by fruit-trees. Here and there

rustic beehives were scattered over these gardens, which contained flowers and shrubs in addition to their little crops of vegetables. The walls of some of the cottages were almost hidden by the plants and shrubs which trailed upon them, and the little 'nook' was shut in, on almost every side, by orchards. Surely Mrs. Hemans must have visited this very spot when she wrote the lines :—

> 'The cottage homes of England,
> By thousands on her plains,
> They are smiling o'er the silvery brook,
> And round the hamlet fanes.'

There in very truth were the 'cottage homes,' situated in one of the most beautiful spots in the beautiful west of England, and, hard by, bubbled the fern-lapped 'silvery brook;' and the 'gurgle' of the pure water as it tumbled over the stones, mingling with the hum of the bees and the voices of the birds singing in the adjoining orchards, made a chorus of soft sounds which were a fit accompaniment to the whole scene :

> 'From glowing orchards forth they peep
> Each from its nook of leaves,
> And fearless there the lowly sleep
> As the birds beneath the eaves.'

'The lowly sleep.' The 'lowly' human element was not wanting. We caught sight of a child without shoes sitting on a doorstep. It was that of No. 1 in the row. We went up the steps, knocked at the door, and was asked, 'Would we please to walk in?' by a woman who, with a baby in her arms, stood up on the stone floor as we entered and curtseyed, after the custom of the country, on catching sight of us. We sat on a chair which was politely offered to us. What a change from the outside! A piteous tale was unfolded in response to our numerous inquiries. The husband was a carter, and as the wages in this district had been 'risen' during the last few months, he was then in receipt of an income of ten shillings a week, in addition to which he had three pints of cider daily when driving the horses for ordinary work, and an extra pint daily when ploughing. No cottage-rent given, no 'privileges.' The cottage had a tiny bit of garden-ground—fifteen yards —in front, and there was the 'privilege' of paying seven shillings and ninepence a year for a few yards of potato ground. The cottage-rent, under the old squire, had been two pounds two, but the new squire had raised it to three pounds five. In addition to this, out of his meagre

wages this man had to pay ten shillings a year for rates—namely, poor rates, 'school rate,' and gas rate, for the parish of Minehead. The poor folks wondered, naturally enough, why they had to pay a gas rate when there was no gas within more than a mile of them. Deducting these items of expenditure from the grand total of ten shillings there was left the sum of eight shillings and sevenpence on which to subsist each week. In this family there were the husband, his wife, and five children, besides the husband's mother, a poor old bedridden woman ninety-three years of age. The eldest of the children was a boy of nine and half years of age. This little fellow had commenced his career as a farm labourer at the age of eight. His wages were then fourpence a day and a pint of cider. The previous Lady-day, however, his master had raised our little hero's wages to fivepence a day. The remaining children of the family were a girl of eight, a boy of seven, our little shoeless friend of five, and a baby boy not quite two years of age. All, except the husband and the poor old 'granny,' stood before us—these poor people are too humble to sit in presence of a well-dressed stranger. In the one miserable downstair room were grouped these ragged creatures,

looking wonderingly at us. On the table stood a brown pan, filled with butcher's offal. This had been that day purchased at Minehead, and would, when cooked, constitute the rare 'delicacy' of this family of eight. We inquired concerning the poor old grandmother, and learned that she had been bedridden for many long years. 'Would you please to walk up stairs and see her, sir?' said the mother. We replied that we should like to see her, and we were accordingly shown up the narrow staircase. Winding round to the right, we were not long in reaching 'the first floor.' Exactly facing the stair-head was one room, and immediately to our right was another. Preceding us, our conductress led the way into the first-mentioned room.

Never have we witnessed so sad a sight as we saw in that miserable garret of a miserable hut. There was one bedstead, besides two other—we cannot say articles of furniture—things purporting to represent a table and a chair, on the bare floor. On the bedstead, in the darkest corner of the room, which might have been some twelve or thirteen feet long, by some eight or nine feet wide, and perhaps seven feet high, lay the poor old bedridden grandmother, her poor wrinkled face looking the picture of patient and uncom-

plaining misery. Nothing on the floor besides the wretched bedstead and the table and chair; no pictures, even of the rudest kind, on the walls. One tiny window, cut through the thick wall of the cottage, admitted a little light into this chamber, and there, with her head in the darkest corner, had lain *for years* this poor old creature, the helpless mother of an English peasant.

It is terrible to witness want and misery in the foul slums of a great city; but it is assuredly much more terrible to find it in rose-bound cottages—embosomed in the most charming of country nooks, where the very richness of nature seems to rebuke the meanness of man. The poor old bedridden woman had received from the parish a weekly allowance of two shillings and a loaf of bread. But it would seem that even the parochial eyes had moistened at sight of her helpless misery, and the parochial pocket had furnished forth one extra shilling a week in lieu of the hebdomadal loaf of bread. We tendered a small sum in money to the poor old grandmother, whose wrinkled face shone for a moment with a pleased expression, whilst she fairly overwhelmed us with thanks which were altogether disproportioned to the amount of the gift. Turning away

we went, before descending the stairs, into the other of the two bedrooms. Words can hardly convey with sufficient effect an impression of the abject poverty which silently but eloquently told its piteous tale in that small room! A wretched, ragged-looking bed was before us. It filled up the greater part of the room. An old brown, worn, patched tester stretched over this bed, in which the father, mother, and the two youngest children slept. Looking at the ceiling over this tester we noticed dark stains in the plaster, and we said, 'Does the rain come in there?' The rain had come in upon their bed, we were told, often and often in wet weather, but now the roof was repaired, although many vain requests had been preferred before this work was done. On the floor at the foot of the bedstead there was a nondescript heap of rags, amongst which the three elder children slept. Seven human beings in this tiny, ill-lighted room! As in the case of the adjoining chamber, there was only one small window. Several of the panes were out, and we expressed our surprise that the landlord had not ordered new ones to be put in. But the landlord never mended windows; that was the tenant's duty; and this was one of the 'duties' which the

poor tenant of this 'Rose Cottage' had neglected. These poor creatures may be pardoned if they cannot understand the proper and legal relationships which exist between landlord and tenant.

2

PIGLAND.

THE row of embowered, creeper-entwined cottages which contained the hovel we described in the last chapter, was a hamlet in itself. It was, in fact, a place we had been looking for, although it was quite by accident we had lighted upon it; and it was not until afterwards that we learned the name by which it was called. The occupier of No. 1 in the row, whose circumstances we have described, was, the poor wife informed us, often ill and unable to work, so that his weekly wages did not, even on the average, reach the sum which has been named. The family kept a pig; but it was then a very young one which they had, and it would not be fit to kill for some time. They had paid twenty-six shillings for it. The last pig had been a dead loss, for it got the 'measles,' and, when

killed, was unfit to eat. A good deal has been made by farmers and others of the 'labourer's pig' question, and a great deal of misapprehension with reference to the advantage of a pig to the peasant prevails amongst those who do not understand the matter. The fact is that the pig is to the farm labourer a kind of savings bank, in which he puts the few scraps he can save out of his scanty fare; and these scraps are augmented by weekly purchases of barley meal. A half-bushel of barley meal would cost half-a-crown, and would not be any too much for a 'growing' pig. In very many cases, we should certainly think in the great majority of cases, the meal and anything else which may be bought for the pig cannot be paid for at the time, as will easily be believed, out of the wages of the peasant. So during the time of fattening, the 'scores' for the weekly supply of meal accumulate; and when the pig is killed, a goodly portion of the carcass has to be given—this is often the particular plan adopted—to the tradesman in lieu of a money payment for the pig's 'feed.' Another portion of the animal is sold in order to pay the cottage rent, and not unfrequently nothing besides, or next to nothing, comes to the labourer for all his anxious care

and trouble. When, as in the case just related, the pig gets the 'measles' or dies, it is like the breaking of a penny bank, and all the hardly-earned savings are lost beyond recall. Putting things at their best it is a happy thing for the labourer when, besides satisfying the tradesman, paying his rent, and saving a little piece of bacon for his own use, he can get money enough for the sale of his pig to enable him to purchase another 'suckling'—or rather one just passed that interesting stage of pig existence—to start another 'live' savings bank. We will suppose that when ready to kill the average weight of a pig, fattened by an agricultural labourer, is, say, eight 'score.' That, reckoned at fifteen shillings the score, would realise six pounds. Deduct from that the twenty-six shillings paid for the pigling—and it would be a very small one that could be got for that price—and the balance is four pounds fourteen. Deduct from that the 'cost of maintenance,' and the 'back-rent,' and then let us judge whether pigland, the rustic Arcadia of poets and descriptive writers, is so enviable a place as it is represented to be. The labourer's pig, however, is, in fact, a kind of surety with the petty village tradesman. The peasant would get no 'credit' if he had not some such

security as a pig affords. It is a fleshy bond, due execution of which is, not unfrequently, exacted to the disadvantage of the labourer. There is this advantage, too, about the pig system. It is the one ambition of the peasant to keep a pig. It is something for him to look upon with pride. It acts as an inducement for him to save. He delights in his pig; for he regards him or her, as the case may be, with emotional feelings which only an agricultural labourer can understand. But it must be remembered that it is not every poor labourer—very far from it—who possesses a pig; and those who do, as we think we have shown, are not the lucky beings that they are represented to be.

It is marvellous how much light may be thrown upon the agricultural labour question as the result of patient and persevering investigation conducted by a personal visit to the agricultural districts.

3.

WOMEN LABOURERS.

VERY much, as we have said, that is interesting and valuable may be gleaned as the result of patient and persevering investigation, conducted by means of personal visits to the agricultural districts. A few actual facts, obtained in this way, are often of much greater utility than volumes of mere theory. In order to make our investigations as close and complete as possible, we adopted the plan of walking from village to village and interrogating, in every possible way, all whom we met. Those whom we questioned had, of course, no reason for telling us anything but the truth. But we were always careful to ask different people the same questions, and thus, by sifting and comparing the evidence we obtained, we were sure of getting at nothing but facts. We could judge ourselves of the richness or barren-

ness of the land, and of the good or bad state of its cultivation, and we could therefore make our own deductions from all that we heard. Farm labourers, although ignorant enough concerning everything outside their own particular sphere, have oftentimes valuable though rude ideas of the agricultural system adopted in the districts in which they live. We rarely failed to question any labouring man or woman whom we might chance to meet on our road.

Between Minehead and Porlock we met a poor old woman, with a bronzed and weather-beaten face, toiling along under a load of long poles, which she had evidently cut and trimmed herself. It was then between eight and nine o'clock, and she was just returning from her hard toil. 'What wages may you get now?' we asked. 'Aightpence (eightpence) a day, Sir,' she answered. She was, she further informed us, seventy years of age, and, poor old soul, probably on account of her feebleness, she had to work from six o'clock in the morning until eight and nine o'clock at night for her daily eightpence, with the usual allowance of some cider. She could not, of course, she told us, work every day—probably not more than four out of the six days—so that her weekly labour would produce the

sum of two shillings and eightpence with which to keep body and soul together.

A number of women were employed in the neighbourhood of Porlock, where, twelve months before our visit, the state of the agricultural population was most wretched. But the discovery of some oyster beds at Porlock Weir had, by creating an extra demand for labour, raised the rate of wages, which, in some cases, were, we found, nine shillings, in others ten, eleven, and twelve shillings a week. Many of the cottages in Porlock were wretched hovels, some of them having only two rooms; and not a very long time before our visit, the wages of farm labourers were as low as seven or eight shillings a week. One considerable farmer employed, to as great an extent as possible, superannuated labourers, women, and children, in order to get the work done at a cheap rate, and he gave to a number of his men wages no higher than eight and sixpence a week, with the addition of cider. Out of this sum these people had to pay cottage rent. The ordinary pay of women labourers employed by farmers around Porlock was eightpence a day with cider, or ninepence, and, in some few cases, tenpence, a day without any allowance of cider.

4.

EXMOOR.

FROM Porlock we determined to cross the wild expanse of Exmoor into Devonshire. Exmoor forest, as it is called—although it is no longer a forest—occupies an area of something like fourteen square miles, the greater part of which is uncultivated, although some portions have been reclaimed by its proprietor. A great number of sheep are grazed upon the moorland, and there is no doubt that much of the land which is now absolutely waste might be brought into cultivation if a little more enterprise were imported into agricultural pursuits in the West of England. No doubt there are difficulties in the way, and it would be somewhat costly to bring the requisite quantity of manure across the moor. But we were assured that the operation would pay. What is required, however,

is that there should be greater security for capital invested in the soil.

We spent some time in making inquiries at the little village of Exford, which lies close on the borders of Exmoor, but is not actually comprised within the moor boundary. It is distant seven miles from Porlock. Exford contains a somewhat isolated agricultural community. There is actually no cider system at Exford. In fact, there was very little cider in the place at the time of our visit, the scarcity of apples during the previous two seasons being partly the reason for this; and cider was not sufficiently valued to induce its importation into the village. Beer was therefore the drink of the Exford peasant. In the neighbourhood of Exford the land was owned by several small proprietors. We were told by the intelligent landlord of the 'White Horse' that some of the farmers in the district had never seen a railway or a train. One family farmed between them their own estate, consisting of about seventeen hundred acres. No member of this family had ever married. There were three brothers and three sisters, varying in age from fifty-eight to eighty. Even the farm servants in this particular farm had all remained single,

although they had respectively reached forty, fifty, and even sixty years of age. There seemed, in fact, in this district a peculiar disinclination on the part of the inhabitants to marriage. The result was a serious diminution in the number of the people. The amalgamation of small farms had also aided in the work of depopulation, and the combined effect of celibacy and of the amalgamation of the farms was exhibited by the previous census, according to which, in this very small parish alone, the numbers had fallen a hundred.

We were assured, on excellent authority, that throughout the district there prevailed a great amount of apathy in regard to the cultivation of the land. If a farm was big enough to secure, under a system of lax cultivation, an income of from a hundred to two hundred pounds a year, that was quite sufficient for the ambition of the moor farmer, who would make no effort to increase the productiveness of his land. The increased demand for labour, and the consequent rise in wages, were, we were assured, enough in themselves to deter the farmers from making any exertion. With the characteristic obstinacy of their class, they would determine not to employ more men

than could be had for the same money as they had previously paid for labour. If it were only of the Exford district that this could be said the evil would not be one of very great magnitude; but farmers as a class are subject, we fear, in a very great degree, to this species of inertia, and the result is a most serious one for the country. Those who have commiserated the lot of the farm labourer have generally thought of him as the recipient of nine shillings a week, with a wife and about as many children as his weekly number of shillings. It is somewhat hard to get the public belief below nine shillings a week. It is, in fact, difficult to conceive that any employer in England could possibly bring himself to offer a labourer a less sum than nine shillings for a week's hard toil. We ourselves, however, remember quite well the case of a Somersetshire farm labourer who, many years since, received only seven shillings a week from a prosperous landowner and farmer, and this peasant had to maintain a wife and several children; and about the same time as this case came under our notice, a labourer assured us that he was one of sixteen children, and that his father had only eight shillings a week, though some of the children

doubtless earned something. But times have altered since then, and the seven and eight shilling men had, in 1873, been promoted to eight and nine shillings respectively. We believed, in fact, that seven shillings a week had been quite out of fashion for a good many years. What was our astonishment, therefore, to be informed, whilst at Exford, in 1873, that, not long before our visit, in the district of Timberscombe, a village a few miles distant, farmers were giving their men only seven shillings a week, which sum had, however, subsequently been raised to eight shillings a week, the rate prevailing at the time of our inquiry.

Following our road across Exmoor we came upon the village of Withypoole, situated in a cultivated hollow, about two and a half miles from Exford. In this village the poor labourers and their families were in sad plight, for there were no gentlemen living in the valley, and even the clergyman did not live within three miles of the village. The poor in the agricultural districts depend to so great an extent upon private benevolence, instead of relying as they should be able to do upon fair wages paid all in coin of the realm, that it is not difficult to understand the hardships of the

poor families of Withypoole. Wages were—all summed up—two shillings a day; in some cases only ten shillings a week. As at Exford, there was no allowance of cider. Women, working for eightpence a day, were employed from seven o'clock in the morning to seven and eight in the evening. There was actually no school of any kind in the place. There had been a private school for the children of the labourers, but the schoolmistress had been taken ill, and education at Withypoole was therefore at a standstill. The cottages, we ascertained, were many of them very bad, containing only, in some cases, one general room and one bedroom for families of seven, eight, and nine persons. One poor woman, into whose cottage we went, told us a sad tale of hardships and privations. Scarcely any milk could be obtained by the poor families, as the farmers kept nearly all that was produced from the cows for the rearing of calves. The high price of meat no doubt very naturally induced farmers to breed stock to a greater extent than usual, and, as a consequence, more milk was required for the calves. In every way, however, the poor labourers' families were the sufferers, because whilst they were deprived of milk, the

dearness of meat—elevenpence and a shilling a pound at Withypoole—put that article quite out of their reach.

Pursuing the road from Withypoole across the barren moor for a few miles, we at length passed through the gate which divides, at that point, on the road to North Molton, the counties of Devon and Somerset. The country between the boundary line of the counties and North Molton is very uninteresting, but the characteristic loveliness of the Devonshire scenery is observable after passing through North Molton. Both at North and South Molton and the districts lying around them, agricultural labourers' wages had previously risen under the operation of causes which never fail to produce a beneficial effect in the rural districts. The new Devon and Somerset line from Taunton to Barnstaple, then in process of completion, passed across the north of Devon, and necessarily created a demand for the best and strongest of the neighbouring peasantry. A railway, too, was being made along the coast from Watchet to Minehead, and the railway men were paid three and threepence per day, or at the rate of nearly one pound a week. Close to Minehead also, some chemical works had been established, and these gave

employment to a number of the farm labourers in the district. The combined influence of the railway and of the chemical works had raised the wages of the peasants from their previous dead level. Still, in some cases into which we inquired in that particular district, we found men with families receiving no more than nine shillings per week, with the usual allowance of cider; and having out of that sum to pay cottage rent, which would reduce the wages to seven, and seven and sixpence a week. Some farmers however were giving eleven and twelve shillings a week, with cider in addition. In some very few cases we believe more was given; but the average wages did not exceed eleven shillings even in the immediate neighbourhood of Minehead; whilst in the districts around, the wages were less.

In the neighbourhood of North Molton, iron and copper mines had been opened; so farmers in these districts were compelled to give their men twelve and thirteen shillings a week. As far as we could learn—and we made many and diligent inquiries concerning the wages of the peasants in the North Devon districts—a change for the better had commenced in those districts. This, it must be remembered, was the field in

which, for so many years, Canon Girdlestone laboured, and there can be no doubt that his admirable work had made its mark upon North Devon. In general, a much more liberal spirit prevailed, at the time of our inquiry, amongst the agriculturists in South Devon than amongst those in the northern part of the county. But it was quite time that a more liberal spirit should prevail amongst agriculturists in every district in the West of England. When it is considered that in Devonshire, out of an area of 2,585 square miles, or 1,654,400 acres, no less than 1,200,000 acres are under cultivation, the importance to the nation at large of so great a tract of cultivable land being made properly productive must be manifest. Although some improvements in the wages of the peasantry had been made, much remained to be done. In every district through which we pursued our investigations, the labourers—whilst admitting that during the previous twelve months wages had been raised—referred to the increase in the cost of living which, during the same period, had taken place, as a circumstance which went, they thought, very far to neutralise the advantages which they had derived from the concessions that had been made.

We venture to think that few people who have seen what we have seen of the labouring rural population in the West of England could fail to sympathise deeply with them. In this part of England, more especially, perhaps, in Somersetshire and Devonshire, the manners of the people are strikingly simple and artless. Rarely in passing through a country road does a stranger fail to be greeted with a respectful salutation from the poor country folks, and the simple and earnest kindness which one meets on every hand is often quite touching. There never seems to be the remotest idea of taking advantage of a stranger; and services never appear to be rendered with any ulterior motives of gain. But it was sad to see people whose natural dispositions were so excellent sunk so very low in the social scale, so wretchedly housed, so miserably underpaid, and so ungenerously treated; and it could not, we felt, be other than the sincerest wish of every man who really loved his country, to see the West of England peasant raised to a position of comfort and happiness —socially, mentally, and physically; a position to which his excellent heart, his loyal, faithful, and uncomplaining disposition, and his life of hard and unceasing toil fairly entitle him.

PART IV.

ENGLISH PEASANTS OF TO-DAY.

ENGLISH PEASANTS OF TO-DAY.

1.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

Does the subject of 'peasant life,' in this year of grace, 1880, possess any interest for English readers? After the burning lights, which have been brought to bear upon the condition of the tiller of the soil in this country, have been turned away from him and directed to other objects, and he has once more become, so to speak, lost from sight amongst the shadows in which he was before immersed, is it possible to obtain either instruction or amusement from the narrative of an eye-witness who will endeavour, simply and straightforwardly, to record his impressions—uninfluenced by prejudice and unaffected by class interests—of the peasant life

of to-day ? We venture to think that, in spite of some wild talk that has been indulged in, and of a little indiscretion which has been shown on behalf of the country labourer, there still flows in the hearts of English people a deep current of sympathy for his humble lot : and that there exists a widespread feeling of interest in his welfare. This, at least, is the case, if we may judge by the communications which we have received from all quarters in response to the invitations for correspondence which, by the courtesy of various Editors, we were enabled to make public. Clergymen, medical men, sanitary inspectors, and others, most kindly and cordially offered us assistance, and we are glad to know that the cloud of 'depression,' which has cast its shadows over many a struggling farmer, has not entirely hidden from view the poor workman who has, at least, to bear much—very much—of the physical 'heat and burden of the day.'

Much, however, as we value the careful, thoughtful, and conscientious testimony which has been tendered us, we are anxious for our own and for our readers' sake, to ascertain, by personal investigation, so much, at least, of the present condition of things in the agricultural districts of the West of England, as to be enabled to vouch

for the absolute accuracy of all that is put forth in these pages.

It is with this intention, and with the earnest desire to be strictly impartial, that we find ourselves starting from Paddington, by rail westward, on a tour of inquiry through Wilts, Dorset, Devon, and Somerset, on the afternoon of a July day. Diverging, at Reading, from the line of our route in 1872, we rapidly pass across the south of Berkshire, and entering, on its eastern side, the confines of North Wilts, it is a short and easy journey thence by way of the junction line, which, from Savernake, skirts the beautiful forest of that name, to Marlborough, our first point of destination. The country along which the railway passes is purely agricultural, and no peculiar or striking feature of the district marks the dividing line between Berks and Wilts; for gentle hills are covered from their bases to their tops with corn and pasture—with just sufficient of dividing hedge and bordering tree to give pleasant variety to the pretty landscapes. Though the sun shines brightly the air is fresh and crisp, and we experience a sense of invigoration as we pass in amongst the swelling downs of Marlborough to the town which quietly, and as it seems, sleepily, nestles between them.

On our way two farmers entered the compartment of the carriage in which we were sitting, and a conversation commencing between us on the subject of the weather and the crops—the topic of most deep and absorbing interest for the agricultural mind before and during the period of harvest—we soon directed it to a discussion as to the present position of the labourer. In the opinion of one of the two farmers, the Agricultural Children's Act had been detrimental both to the peasant and to his master.

Education, argued our new and liberal-minded acquaintance—a large farmer in a somewhat outlying district of Wiltshire,—injured the farmer and was bad for the labourer. From this opinion, however, the second farmer dissented in so far, at least, as the peasantry were concerned; for, he believed, with the generality of sensible people, that an educated, must necessarily be a more intelligent and useful, servant, in whatever capacity he might serve, and that his knowledge could not fail to be advantageous both to himself and to his employer. But upon the delivery of this sensible opinion farmer number two put himself *hors de combat* by speedily falling asleep, leaving the conversation to be carried on by his brother agriculturist. The latter, thus relieved

of one opponent, came back with renewed insistance to his previous contention, expressing the decided opinion that the Agricultural Children's Act—which, though it is to a large extent inoperative, was designed to do for rural districts what the Elementary Education Acts do for our towns and cities—was the principal cause of the existing agricultural depression! It seems that in our informant's district the act was put into operation, and he consequently found himself deprived of a large amount of cheap labour, which he had secured by utilizing the services of children upon his extensive farm. He kept a large number of horses, he explained to us, and was formerly in the habit of allowing these to feed from the lanes and hedge-sides in his neighbourhood. The horses were sent out to feed under the care of children whose duty it was to prevent them from straying. But now that the district school authorities insisted upon claiming his former *employés*, a much larger supply of corn than of yore, was needed for the horses' feed; and the additional outlay for this purpose amounted to about a hundred and twenty pounds per annum. This had given rise, in the mind of this Wiltshire farmer, to so much 'depression,' that he looked at everything else in connection with agriculture

through the medium of his own feelings—for he had not, we ascertained, suffered so much from other causes as agriculturists in general.

Being bad for himself, and prejudicial to his pecuniary interests, our agricultural friend came to the magnanimous conclusion that education must be bad for the labourer, bad for his children, and bad for 'the country.' When he had arrived at this conclusion he had reached his destination, and left the carriage, greatly to our regret; for one does not ordinarily meet with so much liberality of sentiment, and we began to feel curious to ascertain what were our acquaintance's opinions on other questions of the day.

There is something which gives a buoyant sense of exhilaration in a journey across a fine agricultural country on a sunny day early in July, when the air has just been cooled by refreshing showers; when the summer meadows are still gilded, here and there, by buttercups; whilst the grass, as yet uncut, stands high in the full flush of luxuriant growth, and the fresh green of the cornfields is encrimsoned by the glow of poppies. There are no dust and heat from drought; the clean, hard roads are inviting to the pedestrian, and the fresh landscapes make one think that even peasants must derive

some enjoyment from their surroundings, hard though their lot be and exhausting as is their daily toil. And there doubtless is some compensation in the situation and in the nature of their work for the otherwise sad conditions of their existence. In the free air of the fields nature provides a sort of antidote for the atmosphere of the overcrowded cottage, and there must be something to cheer flagging spirits in the brightness, and breeziness, and beauty of the country, with its bird songs, its busy insect life, and its flowers.

But a change comes over the scene; clouds gather in the sky; the brighter hues fade from the landscape; there is a sound of thunder, and rain begins to fall heavily. The birds cease singing, and the sunless fields, which so lately were gay and bright, now wear a gloomy aspect. All this happens whilst we are rapidly speeding across the same tract of country; and our pictures of peasant life do not wear quite so roseate a hue as they did before, when we remember that the labour of the rustic is not always fair-weather work, and that his is a winter as well as a summer experience.

There are lights, now, as well as shadows upon his path, but the shadows are deeper

than they should be, and even the enjoyments, to be obtained, sometimes, under the brighter aspects of nature, are not the same thing to different persons, and the sense of pleasure is one thing to a well-fed, well-clothed, sedentary man, and quite another to a hard-worked, ill-fed peasant.

2.

TWO LIFE HISTORIES.

But the old conditions of peasant life are, we trust and believe, changing—and though the change is not perhaps very rapid in its operation, it is going on at a much quicker rate than perhaps the most sanguine friends of the poor toilers in our fields could have anticipated ten years ago.

Meanwhile, there are those amongst our peasantry—the old and worn out of both sexes—who can expect to benefit but very little, if at all, from the movement which is exercising so beneficial an influence upon the strong and the stalwart—the bone and sinew of our rural population. But before the poor old men and women who will soon, in all probability, be in their graves—and who are now eking out, by charity, and by aid of the very small amount

of labour of which they are capable, what is but a miserable existence—disappear, it will be instructive to learn something which can be briefly told of their past. Very soon, as we have said, they will not be living amongst us to tell their story—and it is important that the record should be obtained and preserved.

It was with this feeling and with this object that we made inquiry concerning the history and circumstances of an old woman and an old man who had been engaged in farm-work in the neighbourhood of Marlborough, the one for upwards of half a century, the other for more than seventy years. We were assured, by those who had known them for very many years, that both had led irreproachable lives and could be thoroughly relied upon to give a truthful and impartial account of their experiences.

The farm woman, whom we questioned first, was sixty-six years of age, and had begun work on a farm at thirteen. She then earned threepence a day, the payment advancing, until she had attained her twentieth year, by successive stages of fourpence, fivepence, and sixpence. After that, she continued to advance towards a maximum, for ordinary work, of ninepence per day, increased to one shilling per day and an allowence of beer for

the extra work of harvest. Her father had been dead sixteen years. He was a farm labourer and was seventy-three when he died. His wages had never exceeded nine shillings per week, except at harvest time, and he not unfrequently earned but five weekly shillings. Her mother had also worked in the fields—very often for three-and-sixpence a week. Yet she lived to the good old age of eighty-five. Our informant told us that, so straitened were her means, she was obliged to work the day her father died. Her hours of labour were ordinarily from eight in the morning to eleven, when an interval of two hours was allowed her for meals—work recommencing at one and continuing to five in the afternoon. But her wages were deducted during wet weather if nothing could be found for her to do under cover—because she worked by time. Her occupation was chiefly weeding, though sometimes she led horses at plough; and, not unfrequently, in doing her work she got wet up to her waist. In leading horses in the bitter weather which often comes between Michaelmas and Christmas, she had frequently, she told us, shivered with the cold.

Her food was chiefly bread, with sometimes a bit of bacon, and occasionally three pennyworth

of butcher's meat in a week. Her luxuries consisted, per week, of two ounces of tea, from half to three quarters of a pound of sugar, and a quarter of a pound of butter. But it is clear that these things, added to the weekly cottage rent and the expenses of clothes and boots—she could make a heavy pair of lace-up boots, costing ten shillings, last a year, with careful management, even during active work, —it is clear, we repeat, that these things *were* luxuries to this poor woman, and could not be obtained except when full employment was secured: for she assured us that, 'wet and dry,' on an average of the year, her wages, though nominally ninepence a day, were really only three-and-sixpence per week.

When we saw her she was arrayed in a sunbonnet of bluish-green print—her dress or gown being of brown linsey at threepence-halfpenny the yard, set off by a blue apron made of material worth sixpence the yard. Coarse woollen stockings worn with their heavy boots are considered by farm women the most comfortable articles of this kind. The poor old soul, though sixty-six years of age, had been doing out-of-door work until the preceding Michaelmas. She could read pretty well,

though she had never attended a day school, what she had learnt having been acquired at a Sunday school in her earlier days; and she was very proud of the fact that a Testament had been presented to her as 'a prize' for reading and saying the catechism.

Eighty-one was the age of the peasant who next came to answer our inquiries. He had commenced farm-work at eight, and secured, therefore, very little 'schooling,' so little indeed that his acquirements—got at a 'dame-school'—only enabled him to read large letters such as those on direction-posts and waggons. He had never learned to write: and there was no Sunday school in the place in which he lived; but the service of the church which he attended was held once a day on Sundays. His day of boy labour on the farm lasted from six in the morning in summer, to six at night—and this for a child of eight! But it brought him in eighteenpence a week; and at nine he earned two shillings, getting sixpence more when he was ten—his occupation at that tender age consisting of odd jobs, carting and leading horses at plough. At ten he was able to lead the horses at harrowing, and in another year he was advanced to three shillings a week, gaining an

additional sixpence for each year up to fourteen. When sixteen he was strong enough to do a man's work and he then had six shillings a week. From that time he advanced a shilling a week for three successive years, reaching his maximum of nine shillings as an ordinary labourer at nineteen. At twenty he took a carter's place for seven pounds a year, with food and lodging —having, however, to pay for his washing. This place he kept three years and then took to 'dray work' with occasional farm work, for a farmer and brewer, at nine shillings a week, but with, now and then, gifts of food. At twenty-five his wages were ten shillings weekly, and this magnificent income induced him to marry. He was able to secure a carter's place at twelve shillings a week, and upon that he brought up a family of nine children—four only of whom were now living. His children went with him to the plough, and the youngest son, still living, and fifty-one, was doing well as a sort of 'general dealer.'

The smock-frock of fustian—now, although so strong and good in every way for a peasant's dress, largely getting into disuse—and the well-known corduroy, formed the staple article of his clothing during his long life; whilst the

food of himself and of his family consisted, besides bread, of potatoes and cabbage, with occasional bits of bacon, provided by his keeping a pig, and the luxury, at times, of a little butter, tea, and sugar. A four-roomed cottage, occupied for many years, cost him six pounds annually. Besides his wages he obtained allowances of small beer reckoned to be worth eighteenpence a week.

Notwithstanding his age, this man had a hale and healthy-looking face. He had his opinions on educational matters, believing that, though reading and writing were good and useful, there was danger in 'summing,' which, he thought, would tend, as he expressed it, to 'breed cunning.'

3.

PRESENT MONEY EARNINGS.

We have already indicated that a favourable change in the circumstances of the west-country peasant has taken place during the last eight years: and the advance which has been made is a substantial one. This advance would have been much greater than it has been, but for the recent existence of a period of severe agricultural depression. Through that period the peasantry of the western counties, though they have had to suffer a reduction of wages from the level—the highest which has existed during the present century—that obtained just before the depression set rigorously in, have passed without material disadvantage and in better circumstances than they had ever known prior to 1872.

That the good harvest of 1880 will be found to do much to relieve the extreme incidence of the 'depression' there can be little

doubt. Meanwhile the labourer has not yet recovered the position which he occupied prior to it. But there are undoubted indications—to which more particular reference will be subsequently made in this volume—that he will never go back to his former condition, so long as the pursuit of agriculture continues to be a considerable industry in this country.

In the present chapter we shall endeavour to give an account, which shall be fairly representative, of the present earnings of the peasantry of Wilts, Dorset, Somerset, and Devon, indicating, first the results, in each county, of our own personal investigations; and next, those which we have learnt by the courtesy of various correspondents.

The average earnings, in money, of the peasantry in those districts of Wiltshire lying around Marlborough are from ten to eleven shillings per week. In some cases ten shillings are given, in addition to a cottage rent-free. It is thus at Fyfield, on a farm belonging to a large brewer. The wages, on this same farm, of the head carter are fifteen shillings a week with a good cottage. Shepherds, in this neighbourhood, have two shillings weekly more than the ordinary labourers. The daughter of one shepherd we found working

for ninepence per day, with a daily allowance of fourpence in lieu of beer—the liquor given in Wiltshire, where drink is given as part wages. The same shepherd's grown-up son was earning nine shillings a week, and had eightpence a day allowed for beer. But at a village a little further away, Kennet, there is no allowance of beer or beer-money except at hay and corn harvests, and cottages have to be paid for, at the rate of a shilling a week out of the wages of ten shillings. Here, however, the peasants can sometimes earn —if they work by the piece—two shillings per day; one man, whom we found engaged in picking (*i.e.* clearing from weeds) a field of swedes, informed us that he was allowed for this work ten shillings an acre, and that he could do an acre in five days.

At Avebury (famous for its Druidical remains) the average wages are eleven shillings. In one family whose case we investigated, there were seven children, making nine in family with father and mother. But one of the lads earned four-and-sixpence, and the other half-a-crown per week, and one girl was in service. The mother of this family worked for ninepence a day. Another family, however, consisted of five young children who earned nothing. The father

obtained ten shillings a week, working ordinarily from seven in the morning till six at night. The mother worked, as often as the needs of her little ones allowed, for ninepence a day, working from eight in the morning until six at night. She could, she informed us, only work on an average every second day; so that the total earnings of the two for the support of seven people were never more than about twelve-and-sixpence per week, and out of this, cottage-rent, a shilling a week, had to be paid.

Between Marlborough and Oare we met a strong, healthy-looking young labourer, some thirty years of age. He lived, he informed us, in the neighbourhood of Warminster, adjoining Salisbury Plain, and was a skilled 'lump' or piece-worker. He was steady and industrious, we were satisfied from inquiries we made of him; and was in the habit of working for various farmers, and he could do any work (including thatching, which is a distinct art): so he could earn by close and constant work fifteen shillings a week. But these wages included everything, and there were no 'allowances' of any kind beyond.

At and around Oare, ordinary wages are ten shillings, carters and shepherds getting two extra

shillings a week, in the shape of one shilling in money and a cottage, worth one shilling a week, rent free. In this district, however, ordinary wages two years before were, we learnt, twelve shillings; but they had been reduced, first to eleven and then to ten, owing to the depression, or, as the peasants expressed it, 'the bad times.'

We called at the cottage of a shepherd at Oare. The general 'downstair' room was very neat and clean. The shepherd's wife informed us that her husband's wages were eleven shillings with cottage rent free. But twenty 'lug,' or one-eighth of an acre, of potato-ground, which they rented, cost them, she said, ten shillings a year. At this rate, of four pounds an acre, there must have been a 'fair profit' for the farmer who let the land, which was worth about two pounds an acre. There were four young children in this family, and the mother assured us that it was a great struggle to keep them decent. At another cottage we visited at Oare, a man, his wife, and six children, had to be maintained on ten shillings a week—the earnings of the father; and there we found that the 'hard times' precluded the indulgence of meat as an article of diet, and that bread was veritably their staff of life.

Around Wilcote, ordinary wages are ten and eleven; and at Pewsey, and in the neighbourhood of this agricultural town, as it is called, wages are the same, and with no advantages in addition to the actual money payment.

It was pleasant, sometimes, to find instances in which other members than the chief breadwinner of a family were earning money towards the general support. At Manningford we questioned a little lad of fourteen, whom we met leading a horse and waggon. His wages were three-and-sixpence weekly, and those of 'father' were ten. An elder brother, living away from home, was earning ten shillings a week, and the family at home were father, mother, and four children, whose total wages amounted to thirteen-and-sixpence. A little beer was allowed at harvest. Coming round a corner of our road, we met another, and somewhat older, lad, leading a horse that drew a horse-rake. He was earning four-shillings a week.

Just beyond Upavon we encountered a picturesque little family group of peasants—father, mother, son of twenty, and daughter of nine, taking their dinner, brought in a basket by the mother—under shelter of a hayrick. The earnings of the family were—father, eleven shillings

(the general rate in the district); the son, who was present, nine shillings, and two other sons —who were not of the group—aged respectively fifteen and thirteen—five-and-sixpence and four-and-sixpence; making a total for the family of thirty shillings a week. But though these people were thus fortunate in having four breadwinners in the family, the case was mentioned to us of acquaintances in a neighbouring village, where a family of eight—father, mother, and six young children—had to depend entirely on the eleven weekly shillings of the father. It was still customary, we found, in this district, to employ women in farm work—and their earnings amounted to ninepence each per day.

At Nether Avon wages are ten and eleven shillings for ordinary farm labourers, and very often a family of several children has to be maintained upon these earnings. On the other hand, there are cases where the breadwinners are fortunately numerous. In one of these, into which we inquired, we found a family in receipt of an aggregate income of one pound fourteen shillings and sixpence, earned in the following manner—ten shillings by the father; ten each, also, by two sons, aged respectively twenty-seven and twenty four; and four-and-

sixpence earned by another son, thirteen years of age.

In other parts of Wiltshire which we visited we found that the prevailing rates of peasant wages were ten, eleven, and sometimes twelve, though it would be fair perhaps to give the average as eleven, shillings per week. Not very far from Amesbury, and on the verge of Salisbury Plain, we met a shepherd of the plain with his accompanying dogs. This man's earnings, we found, were twelve shillings weekly with a cottage rent free. For the 'keep' of his dogs—it is ordinarily only one that a shepherd keeps—he was allowed, annually, he told us, a sack of barley meal—the sack of the meal actually supplied to him being worth sixteen shillings, so that the dog allowance amounted to not quite fourpence per week. For the 'lambing' season he was paid an extra sum of two pounds. But he had to give, at this season, extra care and attention, and to incur additional responsibility—and his duties often required that he should be up all night. Such work must be very hard and trying, and to give us an instance of its onerousness, our informant stated that, on one particular occasion, during a whole fortnight in the lambing season, he was not able to take off his clothes or boots.

Even around and near Salisbury we found that the wages of the peasantry maintained very much the same average as they held in other parts of Wiltshire.

During harvest the earnings are increased by increased work, and amount, sometimes, to half-a-crown or three shillings a day for men, and one shilling a day for women, with an addition in some localities of cider, beer, tea or coffee, with bread and cheese or biscuit on occasions of exceptional lateness at work. In one part of Wiltshire, the neighbourhood of Westbury, where railway, manufacturing, and other works came into competition with the farmers for the employment of their men, the rate of wages during the winter of 1879-80—which was a time of especial depression amongst the farmers—was maintained as high as twelve-and-sixpence and thirteen shillings weekly for men, and a shilling daily for women, subject to deductions for bad weather. In the same localities railway labourers could earn fourteen and fifteen shillings a week; and in iron, and in coke and coal works, wages ranged from fifteen to thirty shillings weekly.

Writing to us on the subject of the harvest and of the general earnings of the peasantry in the

important district of Wiltshire lying around Wilton, a correspondent states: 'We are now in all the hurry and drive attending upon the getting in of the harvest, and not only all the regular *employés* but a goodly number of "strappers" are engaged in this work, all of which is "tutwork" (piece-work). Most, if not all, the wheat is being cut down by patent mowing machines, so that the terribly trying work of cutting it down with the scythe and reap-hook has not now to be done by the men; but they and their wives and children "tie up and isle." This work is paid for by the acre—five shillings being generally the minimum and seven the maximum price paid per acre; but some of the farmers in this neighbourhood—either from inability to pay or niggardliness—are giving only three-and-sixpence per acre. Others, however, are giving four-and-sixpence and five-and-sixpence per acre. Where the scythe and reaphook are used the price paid is ten shillings an acre for cutting, tying up, and setting up into "isles." A man and his wife will tie up and "isle" two acres in a day of some twelve or fifteen hours. These harvest times are the halcyon days, in a pecuniary sense, of the farm labourer, enabling him to wipe off some long

R 2

"scores" run up at the shopkeeper's during the year.' When the peasants, hired for 'tutwork' are employed, our correspondent adds, on turnip and swede hoeing, they are paid for the former at the rate of six shillings an acre. For the latter, or swede hoeing, they are paid according to two rates, corresponding to the two hoeings of swedes—six shillings an acre for the first and four for the second. The regular wages of the district of Wiltshire to which reference has just been made, for men employed by the week and not by the piece, is eleven shillings—though twelve is the rate paid by a few farmers, carters and shepherds getting for their extra attendance two, and, in some cases, three, additional weekly shillings.

In the parts of Dorsetshire which we visited this year, the ordinary wages of the peasantry range from ten to thirteen shillings. At Melbury Abbas, two miles from Shaftesbury, the 'average' is ten or eleven. In one case, however, into which we inquired, we found the father, a strong active man about thirty-five years of age, getting twelve shillings a week, a son of this peasant, a lad of thirteen, earning five, and another son, aged twelve, earning three-and-sixpence weekly. There were six in the family, besides the father

and mother, two of whom were at school, and two, including a baby of seventeen months, at home. At Compton Abbas wages range from ten to twelve, and similarly at Fontmell Magnus. But at Iwerne Courtnay there chances to be a good deal of building work going on upon the estate of the principal proprietor, and that circumstance, by producing some competition for labour, has served to increase the earnings of the peasantry to twelve, thirteen, and fourteen shillings per week. In the pretty little village of Thornycombe, lying in a hollow formed by the dip of uplands, two miles from Blandford, wages range from eleven to thirteen shillings, and a similar rate prevails at Milborne St. Andrew. At Puddleton, within a mile or two of Dorchester, the money earnings of the peasantry range from ten to fourteen shillings per week. Women work on farms all the year through at Puddleton, and are paid on ordinary occasions eightpence a day. This is also the winter rate of payment for women, but they can earn a shilling a day during the harvest.

Representative districts of Devonshire may be said to be the extreme eastern part of the county, including the districts around Honiton; in the south, the vale of Exeter and the South

Hams; in the north-east the districts around Tiverton, including Halberton and its neighbourhood; in the north-west the districts around Bideford and Barnstaple, and in the west the country round Holsworthy.

The money wages around Honiton average from ten to twelve shillings per week; around Exeter they are very much the same, sometimes rising to thirteen shillings a week. A correspondent at Teignmouth—an officer in Her Majesty's Inland Revenue, and the collector of agricultural statistics in a large and important district extending over a number of parishes for many miles around Teignmouth—informs us that the rate of wages in that particular district averages about eleven shillings per week; but he states that first-rate men will sometimes earn as much as thirteen shillings weekly, though inferior workmen may not get more than nine. Writing from Kingsbridge, of the South Hams district, a correspondent says: 'Twenty years since the wages of an able-bodied labourer in this district did not exceed eight shillings per week; but then it was supplemented by a sort of truck. The peasant got what corn he wanted for his family at twelve shillings per bag for wheat, and six shillings per bag for barley: and as that price

was generally under the market value it was considered equivalent to an addition of so much to the wages. This system, however, while it generally insured the family a supply of bread, did not work well, as the labourer often complained that he got the inferior corn. How the peasant subsisted and reared his family on such a pittance has often been matter of wonder to me. The wages in this district now range from twelve to fifteen shillings per week; and, on most farms, the men are allowed from a quart to three pints of cider per day. This is valued at about eighteenpence per week. Many farmers think as I do, that this system is bad and should be abolished, and the value, in money, of the cider, given to the labourers. But as a rule the men themselves are averse to the change. At harvest time they have double wages, or they have meat and drink at the farmer's table as long as harvest lasts. But I am afraid that whilst wages have advanced the labourers have very much deteriorated in their work. It is a general complaint with farmers (and I believe they have cause to complain) that they cannot get the young labourers to do as much work, or to do it as well, as was done by the older men. There is not the desire to give satisfaction;

they do not take pride in their work, and evince a tendency to 'scamp' it. This is very different from what I can remember of the past times. I think one reason of this is the abolition of the system of apprenticeships, for the different manner of master and man has brought about neglect of interests on both sides—a state of things prejudicial to both.'

Of that part of South Devon which includes Totnes and the districts around, we found, upon personal investigation, that the money wages were on an average eleven or twelve shillings a week, with cider for daily consumption in addition, making a total, reckoning the cider as worth one-and-sixpence a week, of twelve-and-sixpence or thirteen-and-sixpence weekly.

Around Tiverton and Halberton wages range from ten to twelve shillings a week, with cider in addition, in some cases, though in others a money payment is made in lieu of cider.

A medical man, who is also a magistrate for his division of Devonshire, writing to us from Bideford, says: 'I am able to give you some information respecting the peasant life in this part of Devon, from observations extending over nearly forty years. The condition of the agricultural labourer in North-west Devon has,

during this period, improved greatly, and his wages have risen in a greater proportionate degree than those of the mechanics of the district. Some thirty years ago, seven shillings a week was the average money-payment to our farm labourers. They had some perquisites, which might have been worth a shilling a week, making the entire earnings equal to about eight shillings a week each. At present twelve shillings a week in money may be reckoned the average rate at which agricultural labourers are hired: but it is not usual for them to have perquisites added when paid at this rate. During the last twenty years our agriculturists have hired out-door labourers in preference to in-door, and a large number of these have duties assigned them out of the hours of their usual daily service; namely, to attend on the cattle and to see to the horses, &c.; and for this extra work a cottage with garden is usually given free of rent, making the wages, in such cases, amount to fourteen shillings a week. The wives of the labourers, in a large number of cases, earn a little by sewing gloves for the glove manufacturers, who carry on a considerable trade, the centre of which is Torrington. But women do not commonly work

in the open fields. They sometimes, however, go out for the day as washerwomen, and earn a shilling and their food in each instance, for their day's service. Taking the whole of a labourer's earnings into account I am satisfied that they amount to ten pounds a year for each family above what was obtained twenty years ago.'

Of the extreme western portion of Devonshire a medical correspondent writing to us says: 'The district of which Holsworthy (a busy thriving little market town, recently blessed with railway communication) is the centre, is probably the most uninteresting in Devonshire. It is purely agricultural, and consists for the most part of moorland. It is very sparsely populated, there being about one person to every eight acres. The usual wage is about ten or twelve shillings per week with cottage and certain perquisites.' 'As tiller of the soil,' adds our correspondent, 'it is notorious that the present labourer as an "all-round" man, is greatly inferior to his predecessor of twenty or thirty years ago. The system of apprenticeship produced labourers that cannot be matched now either for morality or usefulness. This applies to female domestics as well as to men.'

The result of our personal inquiries in Somerset is as follows:—In the neighbourhood of Milverton wages range from ten to twelve shillings a week with the addition, in money, of a separate payment in lieu of cider, the scarcity of which has led many farmers to abolish cider truck by compensation. This compensation around Milverton varies from one shilling to fifteenpence per week. When cider was given it was reckoned to be worth sometimes two shillings a week, and never less than eighteenpence. It is therefore decidedly not fair, when the presumed value has, for convenience, to be paid in coin, to pay less than the 'reckoned' worth of the withdrawn allowance. In the immediate neighbourhood of Bridgwater—including Cannington and other surrounding agricultural villages, the wages range from eleven to twelve shillings, with sometimes cider, and sometimes a shilling a week in lieu of it. Occasionally too, cottage rent—valued at one shilling weekly —is given.

Around Martock the peasantry are frequently employed by the day, earning two shillings for each day, but losing their pay during wet weather. Railway labourers, in the same district, can earn fifteen-and-sixpence per week. During

last winter farm labourers' wages were ten and eleven shillings for ordinary labourers, but without any cider or any cider money. At Stoke-sub-Hamdon, wages are similarly paid at the rate of two shillings a day. But in these two districts the gloving industry is still in full swing, and women and girls can earn money by engaging in this occupation. In one family of eleven at Stoke-sub-Hamdon, we found the chief breadwinner was earning twelve shillings a week, one son ten, another eight, and another five or six, according to the work he did. But it may be well to state here that it is quite the exception to discover cases in which so many breadwinners belong to one family, and that such a state of things can never be used as an argument for a low rate of wages for the head of the family.

The Vicar of Burrington in the Mendip valley writing to us of his district, gives wages as 'rather exceeding twelve shillings a week, with cider;' and he adds, 'there is reason to hope that some of the money earned is finding its way into the savings' bank, particularly at harvest and hay-making time, when the wages average a pound a week.'

Of the money earnings at Norton Fitzwarren,

a rich agricultural parish in the vale of Taunton, a large farmer and starch manufacturer gives us the following particulars. He says: 'Wages in this parish have advanced about two or three shillings since 1870; and the following is a fair sample of those now generally paid, but without cider:—carters from twelve to fourteen shillings per week; shepherds from twelve to thirteen; general labourers from eleven to twelve—all exclusive of house rent, which generally costs from fifteenpence to two shillings per week, according to the size and condition of both cottage and garden.' Our correspondent adds: 'Cider has not been given during the last year or two, to any great extent, partly owing to the scarcity of apples, and (I believe) partly from a desire to break down the system. In lieu of cider the farmer usually gives one shilling per week. The quantity of cider, when given, is usually from three to four pints per day, and is often, in this immediate district, a fair article, with some amount of strength or intoxicating power.'

The lowest money wage district in Somersetshire is still, as it was in 1872, the remote locality to the extreme west of the county, lying somewhat midway between the Brendon Hills and Exmoor. It is an isolated district and altogether

'out of the world' so far as the presence of any important town is concerned. Writing to us, from Wootton Courtney, a small village in its centre, the present vicar says: 'With regard to the wages, privileges, and condition of the labourer, this parish may be taken as an instance. The wages of an able-bodied man are generally from nine to ten shillings a week—a carter or shepherd receiving from one to two shillings more. In the majority of cases the houses are let with the farms, or at least a certain number with each farm, and the men who occupy these houses have them rent free with a garden, which additions may be reckoned as worth eighteenpence or two shillings more—this being about the average rent paid by those who do not have their houses free.'

4.

PRIVILEGES.

This chapter will not be a very long one, for the reason that what are called the 'privileges' of the west-country peasant, or gifts or allowances given 'in kind' in addition to the usual money wages, are very few in number, and appear, so far as we can judge from our recent investigations, to be dying out. The 'grist corn' system previously alluded to is already almost a thing of the past. The cider and beer truck system also appears to be in its decadence, and even the practice of giving to the peasant a cottage rent free seems to be falling into disuse.

Everywhere in our tour through Wiltshire, we were told that the money wages of the peasant really represented all his earnings, and that there were absolutely no privileges, beyond, in some instances, the rent-free cottage. Coal and clothing clubs exist in some localities, the funds of

which are increased by charitable donations. But it is only in cases in which contributions are made to such institutions by the employers of the peasants who benefit from them, that it can be said that such contributions amount to 'privileges,' in the sense in which the latter are understood to be an addition to wages.

In Dorsetshire, except in one or two localities, there is a similar absence of 'privileges.' Amongst the exceptions to which we refer may be instanced the case of the peasantry of Puddleton, a village some three or four miles from Dorchester. There, each labourer who is hired by the year receives annually two hundred and fifty faggots of fire-wood weighing, on an average, over a hundredweight each. The faggots are worth one pound a hundred, although the owners will sell them to any of the poor inhabitants of the village at twopence each. But no more than six faggots must be required at this rate during a fortnight. One pound per hundred is the price charged to all people outside. In addition to the faggot wood, the labourers have given to them, annually, a ton and a half of coal.

But few privileges also—in some districts absolutely none — accrue to the peasant in

Devonshire in addition to his money wages. Sometimes a small piece of ground is given rent free in which to grow vegetables. Now and then, too, but very rarely, the labourers are allowed to keep poultry, and are even given the run of the farmyard for them. One large farmer in South Devon told us that he gave his men this privilege, and reckoned it to be worth to them, with straw allowed for their pigs, eighteenpence per week. The same farmer gave his men firewood, which he considered was worth a shilling a week. These privileges, with wages at twelve and cider worth one and sixpence a week, made the total value of the earnings of his men sixteen shillings a week. In one or two instances we have learnt that the privilege of keeping a cow on the farm is allowed; but this particular privilege is very rare indeed; although a correspondent in the north-west of Devon thinks it is likely to increase, because it is looked upon as some kind of substitute for peasant farming. The farmer will sometimes give his men manure for their potato ground. But, as we have said, the system of giving privileges is by no means general in Devonshire, and privileges are, therefore, taking the county as a whole, rather the exception than the rule.

It is very much the same with regard to privileges in Somersetshire as in the three other western counties. In a general way it may be said, with regard to all four, that the system of privileges is dying out. Where it still exists it is on sufferance, so to speak, and is rather owing to the generosity of individual farmers than to any desire to retain it, as formerly, as part of the payment of labour. It is no doubt a healthy sign of the times that wages now keep to a much more uniform rate throughout the West of England than they formerly did. Where privileges remain they are not given, generally, as part payment, but are 'thrown in,' as it were, by the employers, who probably think that if they have any gifts to bestow, their own poor servants are the most deserving recipients, and that even at the best the weekly wages of a farm labourer enable him to provide nothing but the barest sustenance.

5.

COTTAGES AND SANITATION.

One of the most pleasant and satisfactory circumstances connected with the changed, and changing, condition of life of the west country peasants, is the improvement which has been effected during the last eight years in their cottage accommodation. Of the reality of this improvement, taking the West of England as a whole, our personal investigations have convinced us; and our impressions have been confirmed by the communications we have received from our numerous correspondents. Cottages are still, in those districts, very far in many instances from being all that they should be, and there is yet great room for further improvement. But a considerable step in the right direction has been gained, and there is every indication that the improvement will continue and increase.

At Fyfield, in Wiltshire, about three miles from Marlborough, we found some excellent cottages, prettily situated on the slope of a hill. They were solidly stone-built, of recent erection, having roses and creepers trailing against them —and each containing five rooms, three bed and two sitting-rooms. The cottagers consequently had quite sufficient space for the needs of their families, and were enabled to live in comfort.

The dwellings of the peasantry in the neighbouring village of Kennett were, however, of an entirely different character, and here the two-roomed hovel still lingered. We entered one and found it in possession of a family of ten persons —father, mother—who was severely affected by goitre—and eight children, all of whom slept in the one bedroom! By courtesy this one sleeping chamber was called two rooms, but on the flimsiest of pretences; for only a slight wooden partition ran across the apartment, having, midway, a large uncurtained opening, from which each 'compartment' could be freely seen from the other. In one bed of one compartment slept the peasant and his wife, and their baby of six weeks. In another bed, in the same compartment, slept three girls, aged fourteen, eight, and six. In the two beds of the second compartment slept

four boys, the eldest seventeen, the others twelve, five, and four, respectively. The entire room for the accommodation of this family of ten persons, was sixteen feet long by fourteen wide, and six feet four inches high! The family was one of twelve, all of whom were living—one son being at work at a brewery, and three girls being out in service.

At Avebury we discovered further specimens of the two-roomed hovel—in one of which was living alone an old peasant eighty years of age. He had, he told us, been obliged to give up work five years before, but he had begun when only five years of age, and had therefore toiled for seventy years! There was a rough brick-floor to his 'cottage;' blackened wooden joists formed the 'ceiling.' The place, the old man said, was 'damp' in winter. When we entered his dwelling he was doing a little needlework for himself! He was blessed with tables—of a sort; for there were four in the one, down-stair room—rough indeed, and rickety—and two or three chairs of the same character, one or two of which were covered by ragged cushions. There was a 'dresser' of two shelves with a few plates and dishes on it, and there were a few tin utensils also on the wooden mantelpiece that

surmounted the old-fashioned fire-place against which was hung a pair of bellows. At night this poor old man had one little grandchild to sleep in the house with him. His married daughter, whose child this was, lived 'next door' in a similar two-roomed hovel. This woman, with her husband and the remaining six children, slept in their one bedroom!

Yet another cottage in the same village deserves description. There were five rooms, and three of them bedrooms, but tiny chambers they were, for, had they been rolled into one, they would have made but a small room—one of them being in fact only an enlarged landing-place at the top of the stairs. The rent was four pounds annually—high, no doubt, on account of the number of rooms! The family occupying it were a man, his wife, and five children, aged respectively eleven, ten, eight, and five years, and twenty months. The rain came in, we were told, and, indeed, we could easily see, up stairs and down. The ground floor consisted of one living room and a small scullery—the floor being of uneven stone. The roof was of thatch, from one part of which was growing, we noticed, a luxuriant crop of nettles and wheat! The garden contained twenty 'lug,' and was planted with potatoes.

Just outside the door, looking on the garden, was a hole or excavation in the ground filled with vegetable and other refuse, and the general receptacle apparently of everything thrown away—highly suggestive of typhoid fever. The medical officer of health of the 'rural sanitary authority' could scarcely have been doing his duty.

These cottages were, we believe, amongst the worst in Avebury. There were better ones, but as far as we could ascertain the latter were not occupied by farm labourers. The village, indeed, had a very evil reputation for its peasant homes.

At the village of Oare the cottages generally are very bad and much overcrowded. We visited one, where a man, his wife, and six children occupied the two rooms of the dwelling—this family having but one 'general,' and one sleeping, apartment. In another however which we inspected, we found three rooms, including two bedrooms and one good-sized sitting-room. In the village of Upavon, too, there are many cottages with but two rooms, the single bedrooms having to accommodate sometimes families of eight persons—father, mother, and six children.

But at Nether Avon a very different state of things prevails, for the landlord, a well-known

Member of Parliament, has built a number of new and excellent cottages: and the old cottages in the village have also, as the poor people express it, been 'tackled up.' Here dwellings of four or five rooms—including each three bedrooms, one living-room, and a scullery—are the rule instead of the exception, and we could hear no complaints of want of sufficient accommodation or of discomfort of any kind.

From other parts of Wiltshire than those we visited we have varying, but on the whole favourable, accounts of the dwellings of the peasantry, and of their surroundings. One correspondent —a clergyman—writes to us:—'In sanitary matters I doubt whether the county be quite up to—it certainly is not ahead of—the factory districts of the north. On some noblemen's estates—notably on that of the Marquis of Bath—the cottages and farmhouses will compare favourably for health and neatness, and perhaps for convenience, with the working-men's houses of Sir Titus Salt of Saltaire. The same may be said of the estates of the late Mr. C. P. Phipps of Chalcote. Yet, in many places, the cottages of the peasantry are wretched—ill-drained, ill-roofed, and ill-ventilated. The wind comes in at the doors of many, not by crevices, but by

apertures through which the hand can be thrust. The bedroom windows, many of them, will not open at all, and contain no fireplace or chimney, and no means of ventilation except the door. The water used for drinking and cooking is drawn, in many cases, from stagnant ponds, or from streams polluted by sewage, or by the factory dye-houses. This is the case for instance at Heywood and Hawkeridge, two villages with 500 inhabitants, of which I have the charge at present. In a few cottages only one of the landlords provides filters; while the borough town of Westbury itself, which is lit up with gas by subscription, is only surface-drained, and while clear spring water is very sparingly laid on or supplied from springs, sewage and factory-polluted water runs in drains hardly six inches below the streets. In some places the drains are open, and occasionally overflow the footway on their course to meadows which are irrigated by them a little to the north of the town, and to villages where their water is drunk! Yet the place is said to be "healthy," in spite of this abundant provision for fevers; and when—having refused a drink of water offered to me in a village, one day, because the liquid was not clear —the woman tendering it to me remarked "That

is nothing to what it is sometimes, Sir," it struck me that, like the old lady in the fens, who, when asked her opinion of the water laid on from the newly-opened "works," exclaimed in disgust, "Call ye that water! why it has neither taste nor smell!" so here they might in some villages have the same idea—for their drinking-water possesses both these qualities. Though in some villages the springs, especially in chalky districts, give excellent water, yet much needs to be done to give better water, better drainage, better houses and more elevating recreations to the people.'

From another—an important and representative district of Wiltshire—a correspondent writes:—'The cottage accommodation is generally very good. Recently a great number of new cottages have been erected, and I think if the artisans and even some of those who consider themselves much "higher up" socially could see some of the compact, commodious, and convenient dwellings which we have in this neighbourhood, their envy would be excited. The new cottages are, I think, everything that could be desired. They are built in most healthy situations, have each, in most cases, two good rooms on the ground floor, and three bedrooms up stairs, and are well

provided with every convenience. Each cottage has a garden attached to it of some ten "lug" of ground, and the rent is only one shilling per week. But the occupier is also entitled to, and gets, from ten to twenty "lug"—there are a hundred and sixty "lug" to the acre—of potato ground.'

This correspondent had on the occasion of our visit to Wiltshire, described to us an inhabited hovel, which some little time previously he had seen himself at the village of Newton, two miles and a half distant from Wilton. It was situated in a field by the roadside. The floor of the one down-stair room of this hovel was covered with straw and hurdles. The use of the latter will be understood when it is stated that into this 'living-room' water soaked from outside, and sometimes stood five inches high! Of other dilapidated cottages, however, to which the same correspondent called our personal attention at the time of our visit he informs us that 'They have since been put into good repair'—one more indication of the spirit of reform which seems to be abroad. Our correspondent adds:—'It seems to be the design of landed proprietors to have as few people as possible on their estates. Time was when the

farms were small, and rented by a class of plain hard-working farmers; but during the last quarter of a century the small farms have been massed together, and the large farms thus made are rented by gentlemen farmers, living in quite palatial residences. Manual labour is being put off the land by machinery. Standing on an eminence and taking a survey of the surrounding country, one is pained to note how few cottages and homesteads the eye encounters, while our towns are growing to a great, and I fear dangerous, extent. The evil tendency of this system will be that there will be no middle class in the country between the gentleman farmer and the peasant.'

The general result of our personal examination of the peasant homes of Dorsetshire is a conviction of improvement—the good cottages in the various villages through which we passed greatly predominating over the bad ones. The following may, we think, fairly be taken as typical instances.

At Melbury Abbas, a little village two miles beyond Shaftesbury, we came, on the hilly rise of our road, upon two cottages prettily vine-clad. Each, we found, had three bedrooms and one living-room. The occupants of one, into

whose circumstances we inquired, were a peasant, his wife, and six children. There were good gardens attached to these cottages. The rent paid was four pounds per annum each. There was one serious drawback—the closet of one cottage was next the front door; and of this evil the poor tenants greatly complained, though in other respects these dwellings were healthily and pleasantly situated.

In the adjoining village of Compton Abbas we were glad to find that there was no complaint either as to the condition or the number of peasant cottages.

At Fontnill Magnus, in Dorsetshire, a good-sized village, there are many excellent peasant dwellings, well and strongly stone-built, and of pretty design—the majority of them having two or three bedrooms. Similarly at Iwerne Courtney, a good part of which is the property of a nobleman who lately was an active and prominent member of the House of Commons, the cottages generally are good—many of them all that can be desired. When we visited the village, building operations on rather an extensive scale were proceeding, the evident intention being to provide the maximum of good cottage accommodation for the peasantry of the district.

The cottages of Milbourne Saint Andrews—a large village somewhat famous in the Dorsetshire annals of the agricultural labourer's movement—are generally good—as we ascertained during our tour of inquiry.

Near Dorchester, at Puddleton, however, good and bad peasant dwellings are mingled, but the good in greater proportion to the bad. The old thatched cottages or hovels still exist there, at rents which range from fifteen to eighteenpence per week. But new ones have been built during recent years, and others are in course of erection. The rents of these, however, are high, for farm labourers, ranging from five guineas to seven and even eight pounds per annum. Yet some of these are taken by the most prosperous of the peasantry of the district.

The rector of a parish near Dorchester, writing to us concerning his knowledge of the cottage accommodation in the county, says:—'Where cottages are not "found" they may be rented for about five pounds a year; but they are still in some places very unfit for human habitation—lacking a suitable number of rooms, and other accommodation. The sanitary laws, so objectionable to farmers and agricultural members of boards of guardians, have done much to enforce

a supply of water, and to enforce cleanliness. Still there is much to be done, though it must be allowed that cottages are vastly improved throughout the county.'

Our correspondent adds, however :—'In my own parish the cottage accommodation is very bad, and there is a bad supply of water. The dwellings are small, with few rooms, and they are dearly rented. They belong to a medical man who, it might be supposed, would, at least, look to the sanitary arrangements. But no! so badly constructed are some of his cottages that, when a poor woman died some time since, the only way to get the corpse out of the house was by knocking down the iron crow and passing the coffin through. Though there is a scarcity of good *drinking* water a stream runs close to the cottages, and in the winter I see springs bubbling up close to the hearths.' Our informant concludes ;—'I have long made it a great point to hold up the *injustice* and *folly* of bad cottage accommodation. The present agricultural depression will do good if it serves to induce farmers to take only farms upon which are the best buildings for *man* and beast.'

Picturesqueness is pre-eminently the external

characteristic of the cottages of Devon, into which quality the red cob of the walls enters largely. But the old red cob dwellings of the Devonshire peasantry are passing away, and are giving place to buildings whose external aspect is very various. The variety, however, is increased by the existence of the cob-built houses, which, though they are disappearing, are going slowly. Slate roofs spotted with yellow lichen —from which stand up red-brick chimneys— sometimes surmount white or yellowish-white walls; or the roof may be of bright red tiles surmounting walls of yellowish-white; and though the chimney be also red in colour, a curl of blue smoke will perhaps afford the necessary contrast. The old-fashioned thatch roof still surmounts various descriptions of buildings— sometimes bare brick walls, the red of which is set off, when the dwelling is new, by the interlineation of white mortar; or the thatch may surmount white-washed or yellow-washed cob, or plastered brick, and be plain in style, or crown, neatly and prettily, the gabled projections of the building. Green moss, and yellow-blossoming 'stone-crop' will often add external prettiness to the roof, but they are suggestive of dampness and discomfort within; and though trailing

plants add a charm to external walls, they take from the too-limited light of the small windows. Cottages in Devonshire, as elsewhere throughout the West of England, are, on the whole, improving; and are better than they were eight years ago, though there is still too much of the old and evil state of things existing. Evidence to the same effect has reached us from various parts of the county, and tends to confirm our own impressions. A correspondent from the north-eastern district of Devonshire, in writing to us, states that though many of the old cottages are still not what they ought to be, 'all the new residences are great improvements, both in reference to the size and number of the rooms;' and he thinks that 'the landed proprietors as a class are well disposed at the present time to promote improvement in the construction of the labourers' cottages.' Describing the cob cottages—made of clay and pebbles, and said to be very warm, dry, and durable—in villages in the district around Exeter, a correspondent states that 'as a rule they contain two or three rooms, neither large nor lofty,' and that their windows are evidently 'designed to keep out as much light as possible.' 'The pebbled floor, too,' he adds, 'is rather a novelty,

but does not add to the appearance of comfort in the place. In a few instances the floors are made entirely of clay, which, in time, becomes almost as hard as brick. Of course drainage of any kind is out of the question, but the abundance of pure air does to a certain extent counteract the evil effects of bad drainage, or rather of the absence of that hygienic necessity. A small kitchen garden is attached to each cottage for growing a few vegetables. The rents average about three pounds per annum. Many writers of romance have described the Devonshire cottages as amongst the sweetest and loveliest spots on earth, but I am afraid if they were compelled to reside in one of them for twelve months very little romance would be left in them at the end of that time. It is scarcely necessary to say that the descriptions of such writers are incorrect.'

Of the cottages of the South Hams of Devonshire, a correspondent states that they have generally gardens attached, varying in size from a few yards to a quarter of an acre. Rents vary, he says, from fifty shillings to four pounds per annum. 'These cottages,' he continues, 'in too many instances admit of great improvement, as the majority of them are old and dilapidated

—often overcrowded—and generally they are not creditable to the owners of the soil. Years ago—before the alteration of the poor law respecting common charges—large owners of land, in many instances, allowed their cottages to go to ruin. By so doing—and this was the object—they drove the labourers into the large villages or small towns in their neighbourhood, for these places, in the event of the peasantry becoming pauperised, would have to bear the burden of their maintenance. I have, myself, known instances of labourers having to walk three and four miles daily to their work, and the same distance on returning—solely owing to the want of cottage accommodation. There is now some improvement in this respect. But still the cotter, as a rule, has too far to walk to his labour. Farms of any size should have cottages enough upon them to house all the labourers which they employ, as the men would then always be near their work, and ready to assist in any emergency. In many instances the cottager lives rent free, but then he generally has to look after certain cattle early in the morning or late in the evening, or to perform some other extra work.'

From the extreme western parts of Devon,

including the districts around Holsworthy, a correspondent, thoroughly conversant with the subject, sends us the following communication: —'The cottages are here and there picturesquely situated, and are made to look pretty by the plants which climb upon their porches, and by some attempts at window-gardening. But the generality do not possess these features, and are of the same type of ugliness, consisting of mud walls covered with thatch. Except when these cottages are attached to farms, they are rented at about five pounds per annum.'

Our correspondent goes on to say:—'Probably the cottages in this district are as bad as, if not worse than, those in many other parts of England; that is to say, they are generally damp, deficient in room, ill-ventilated, without drainage, closet accommodation, or good water supply; and they are, for the most part, in a state of dilapidation. Many of them are literally hovels of mud, which, in the present day, most gentlemen would consider unfit for even the housing of cattle. In this neighbourhood we labour under the disadvantage of non-resident owners, and many of these cannot be aware of the actual condition of the cottages on their properties, or they would surely provide

structures in which at least it may be possible to observe the decencies of family life. Overcrowding is necessarily frequent, and the promiscuous mingling of the sexes common. It is not unfrequent to find one sleeping apartment in which are huddled by night, husband, wife, and a family of three, four, five, or six children. What wonder that unchastity amongst the girls is so rife? Health and decency are defied by such arrangements, and comfort is not to be thought of. Degradation and want of self-respect are inevitable.'

Dr. Linnington Ash, in one of his annual reports as Medical Officer of Health for this district of Devonshire, says :—'The people belonging to the lower orders of society live in the midst of conditions greatly prejudicial to health, and of abuses alike shocking to morals and decency. The evils to be met with still are, hovels, old, dilapidated, and neglected, with floors cold and damp, with pig-stye and manure heap closely adjacent to the kitchens—water-supply scanty and polluted, and closet accommodation deficient or absent altogether. The decencies of family life are hardly possible, for the rooms being deficient in size, a promiscuous huddling together of the sexes takes place with

the attendant evils of over-crowding and unchastity.'

Of the same district, Dr. Ash says:—'The male population are extremely liable to the chronic forms of rheumatism. This is due rather to the dampness and coldness of the district than to the use of cider, to which it has commonly been attributed. The soil is very retentive of moisture, the rainfall is heavy, and the men work day after day with only rough fustian or canvas next their skin—for the use of flannel is quite ignored.'

Taking Somersetshire throughout, there is also evidence of improvement in the cottage accommodation of its peasant labourers. We will give illustrations of what we believe are amongst the worst types of dwellings in this county, from notes taken during our own tour of investigation; and then proceed to refer to the evidence of our correspondents. Our first specimen contained one living-room and two small bedrooms, and was occupied by a labourer, his wife, and six children. Specimen number two: one living and two bedrooms, with a ladder for stairs—walls and roof of the bedrooms patched—floors rotten. In one room the damp came in all over the ceiling, and to such an extent at the part of the ceiling

immediately next the window that fungi were hanging down into the room and giving evidence of a thriving and vigorous existence! Third specimen: A cottage of two rooms, each about twelve feet square by six feet four inches high—the single bedroom occupied by three people, mother, daughter, and daughter's child—no 'ceiling' in the room, the roof of the chamber being the rafters and thatch, through which the rain came in badly. Rent, one shilling a week—cottage, one of two, each like the other. Fourth specimen: A cottage with two bedrooms and one sitting-room—no ceiling between the bedrooms and the thatch. In the living-room, paved with rough stones, were two small windows, so high above the floor that the occupants could not look out of doors, and they complained, and with good reason, that the room was very cheerless and 'dismal,' especially in winter. Specimen number five: A cottage with two bedrooms and one living-room—the floor of the latter being constructed of irregular pieces of stone, or stone worn into irregularity by long wear—occupants, a man with five motherless children, the eldest of whom, a girl, was the 'caretaker' of the family. Sixth specimen: A cottage of three rooms, one living and two bed-

rooms—the floor of the living-room of unequal stones—the two bedrooms containing, between them, five bedsteads to accommodate a family of eleven persons—father, mother, and nine children, boys and girls, ranging in age from twenty years down to eight months!

From one district of Somersetshire a correspondent writes:—'Cottages are far from what they should be. But we have some new ones, though there are many—a disgrace—still remaining of the old type.'

The vicar of Burrington, referring to the bad cottages and defective state of drainage of the village of Wrington, to which we had called attention in the first edition of this work, states that 'This state of things has now been rectified at considerable cost; and I understand the health of the inhabitants has proportionately improved. It is somewhat of a grievance, however,' adds the vicar, 'that the cottagers in the district of Redhill, two miles away, are rated for a benefit which in no way touches them, but is confined only to the village, and not to the extensive parish of Wrington. Several houses have, within the last four or five years, been built. But these, instead of being a benefit to the village, have seriously injured it. By a strange oversight, the land for

these cottages was allowed to be purchased by a manufacturer, who, regarding only his own interests, has erected cheap and unsightly cottages at the west entrance to the village, and close to, and obstructing the view of, the beautiful church. These are occupied principally, not by agricultural labourers, but by journeymen shoemakers brought from Bristol. The houses are dirty-looking, and already present a dilapidated appearance. If there be any connection between the dwelling and its moral influence, these abodes will, in time, prove anything but a blessing to the neighbourhood.'

From the isolated agricultural district in the extreme western part of Somersetshire, especially referred to in Part III. of this volume, we have information that the course of reform in cottage accommodation has not left the locality unaffected by its beneficial influence. Of the cottages we have the following information from the vicar of Wootton Courtney, who says :—' The houses vary much, but a general improvement has undoubtedly taken place, especially in the case of estates owned by resident landlords, and of those who take an interest in the welfare of the labourers. The worst houses are those let on lives. These houses, not being in the hands of the landlords, and the

tenants being, as a rule, unable and unwilling to do anything to them, are in most cases very bad, and the accommodation quite unfit for families. In fact, there are some very good and some very bad houses, and there is still great room for improvement in this matter.' Yet another correspondent, writing from a large agricultural district in the Vale of Taunton, says :—' The cottages, so far as I know, are all in a fair state of repair, and generally consist of a roomy kitchen and wash-house, or back kitchen on the ground floor, and always two, and frequently three, fair-sized bedrooms on the first floor. Most of these cottages, having small flower gardens in front, present a neat and comfortable appearance, whilst their interiors, at least down stairs, are generally fully furnished with necessary articles for daily use, and there is often some attempt at ornament —the flower-pot being a noticeable feature, as well as picture-frames, either for prints or for family portraits. Overcrowding is of rare occurrence (at least overcrowding in the usual form), and I know of but one or two attempts to overcrowd cottages ; and these have been speedily checked by the relieving officer of the district. Indeed, only in one family have persistent attempts been made to lodge too many people.'

6.

A MODEL VILLAGE.

No subject has attracted more attention during recent years, in connection with English peasant life, than that of the 'cottage.' The housing of our field labourers has formed just grounds for reproach of those who have been responsible for the existence, in our agricultural districts, of so many of the ill-built, ill-ventilated, damp, and miserable dwellings, to which no better name than 'hovels' could be justly applied. But, as we have shown in the preceding chapter, the spirit of improvement is abroad, and its influence has already been manifested in a degree more or less marked in each of the counties through which we have conducted our investigations, in this current year of 1880. We have, however, also shown that the 'hovel,' though disappearing from the country side—and, we believe, disappearing fast—still lingers in places where good

and bad dwellings coexist. When we remember that social reforms are ordinarily slow in their operation, and that the process of superseding the bad by the good is a gradual one in the majority of cases, it is especially pleasant to find an instance of good which is spoilt by no admixture of evil. Such, at any rate, was our experience, during our recent tour through Wiltshire, when we came upon a small agricultural community which fully deserves the appellation we have given it of 'a model village.'

The external aspect of the little village of Wilcote would instantly impress any chance passer-by. The pretty cottages of which it consists do not number more than about fifty or sixty. Some are thatched, with thatch-work that is veritably a work of art, so neatly and admirably has it been done. Others are slate-roofed, and all are either brick or stone built, after simple but elegant designs—the walls being pierced by red-latticed windows that give abundance of light to the interiors.

No cottage in Wilcote has less than two bedrooms, and the majority have three, in addition to which, each has two rooms below—sitting-room and kitchen, or pantry. Pretty porches—creeper and rose-entwined—rustic summer-houses

and box-edged gardens are noticeable features in the aspect of the peasant dwellings of this little village—and over all there is an air of brightness and freshness, and there is especially an absence of the sort of 'soiled' appearance which too frequently is noticeable in workmen's dwellings which have been inhabited a few years. All the gardens in their season grow such fruit as apples, plums, and gooseberries, and such vegetables as potatoes, beans—'broad' and 'kidney'—parsnips, etc., whilst portions of them are devoted to the brightest of flowers.

The rents of these excellent cottages—whose interiors in the matters of dryness, room, and comfort, are everything that could be desired—are no more than fifty-two shillings per annum, and eightpence per annum in addition for two chimney sweepings each year. The chimney-sweeping of the whole village is done by contract, by order of the cottage owner—all belong to one landlord—so that it may be regularly and properly done, and not left to the possibility of neglect by the tenants.

Against overcrowding the utmost care is taken—'lodgers' being strictly forbidden; and arrangements are made, when necessary, to shift occupiers from one house to another—for there

is variation in size and accommodation—to suit the necessities from time to time of families.

It will be readily believed that the cottages of Wilcote are in great demand—so admirable are the dwellings and so low the rents. But 'conduct' is the key to admission. If any member of a family occupying a Wilcote cottage is known to be 'drunk,' notice to quit is forthwith served upon that individual. Similarly if the daughter of a labourer proves to be 'unfortunate' on returning from service or otherwise, the family to which she belongs are also required—on the circumstance becoming known—to leave the house they occupy. This last-named regulation may be considered a harsh one, and the reply to the contention is that its effect upon the morality of the village is remarkable. So anxious are the peasants to get these model cottages that they willingly comply with the strict regulations of the cottage owner, and serious misconduct is unknown in Wilcote. There is one inn in the village; but this institution never opens on Sundays—not because Sunday opening is forbidden by the inn owner, who is also the owner of the cottages, but because there is no 'demand' for Sunday trade on the part of the inhabitants.

We had the good fortune to meet the singularly intelligent policeman of the district, and we had a long conversation with him. We gathered from him that his services were never required in Wilcote, and he contrasted the 'Saturday nights' at this village with those at a large adjoining village, where the overcrowded peasant hovel still exists in fine condition, and inns abound. 'Go whenever you will, Sir,' said our informant, 'to Wilcote, you will never see a man, or woman either, the worse for liquor. Just a few people perhaps,' he added, 'will be sitting in the bar parlour of the inn there, sipping their beer; but never any noise or disturbance! But,' he continued, 'what is the case at O—— where I live? The "publics" are full on Saturday nights, and it is seldom a Saturday passes without a "row" or a fight in the street.'

Surely this simple statement speaks volumes for the moral effect of a decent dwelling, and of the thoughtful and constant supervision of an excellent landlord. Not only does the latter insist upon strict attention to everything which concerns the healthfulness, comfort, and convenience of his peasant cottages, but he lets it be understood that he admires neatness and

tastefulness in the cottage surroundings—well-kept gardens, neat and well-trimmed borders, and the display of flowers. And the cottagers take the hint—for rarely have we seen such admirably laid-out garden enclosures as those of this model Wiltshire village.

7.

'POTATO GROUND.'

It may fairly be said that amongst the greatest of the few 'pleasures' of our English peasantry are the keeping of pigs, and the tilling of allotments or 'potato ground.' Indeed, 'potato ground' is a kind of farm labourer's Arcadia—that is to say when it is his own, and either given or let at a moderate and fair rental. All the odd half hours he can spare from his toilsome work 'for the master' he spends delightedly in turning and dressing, planting and hoeing his potato ground. We give it this one designation, because the familiar, wholesome and nutritious tuber is the staple article which the peasant cultivates. But other vegetables frequently share the tiny space which is allotted or let to the small cultivator, whose happiness is probably at its maximum when, on Sundays,

he wanders across, with his hands in his pockets, to see 'how things are growing' in his little bit of ground.

It is to be regretted that a rent far too high is too frequently charged to the farm labourer for his small piece of allotment ground. On the other hand the land is sometimes allotted rent free, and at other times it is given at a fair rental. Although it might be fairly contended in an ordinary commercial transaction, that the small purchaser, or the sub-renter, should expect to pay a high rate for what he buys or rents a small portion of than the wholesale buyer or renter, the circumstances are widely different in the case of a farm labourer, who becomes the small sub-tenant of the larger tenant, his employer the farmer; and, at least, no more than the rent paid by the latter to his landlord should be charged to the peasant, although it be only the eighth of an acre that the latter can afford to rent. Yet we have found many instances, during our recent tour of inquiry through the West of England, in which twice, three times, and even four times the rent paid by the farmer has been charged to the labourer. When the land for allotments is let direct to the peasant by the landowner, we have usually found that a rent is

charged not more than, and sometimes even less than, the rent paid by the tenant farmer.

From various correspondents throughout the western counties we have received some interesting communications on the allotment system. From these we must give one extract. A Wiltshire correspondent writes:—'Most of the labourers here rent an allotment—a piece of ground containing twenty 'lug'—for which they pay seven and sixpence each allotment, or three pounds an acre—rather a heavy rent! These allotments are made remarkably productive by the labour and manure which the men put into them; and this fact is, I think, a good argument in favour of small farms. The incessant grumbling and discontent of the large farmer are notorious. The pleasure and profit which the poor labourer derives from his small plot of ground—in spite of the heavy rent he pays—are equally well known. These plots of ground are mostly planted with potatoes which, with bread and bacon, constitute the food of the peasantry.' 'Another strong argument,' continues our correspondent, 'in favour of small farms, is the curious but telling fact, that a farmer when some field has got pretty well stocked with weeds through neglect, often sub-lets it in small plots, at from sixpence to one

shilling a "lug," by which means he gets from four to eight pounds per acre for his land, and gets it cleared of weeds into the bargain. I know of an instance of such sub-letting—in this neighbourhood—of a part of a field in which docks and thistles were so thick, a few years ago, that I saw men actually mowing them down with scythes. This land was sub-let at sixpence a "lug," last year, and, I think, a shilling a lug is to be charged this year for the same ground.'

In Dorsetshire, Somerset, and Devon, the terms of letting ground in allotments to the peasantry are very similar. Sometimes the ground — usually the eighth of an acre, but occasionally more—is given rent free. In other cases a fair and moderate rent is charged, no more than equal to, and sometimes less than, the rent which the farmer pays for the land, of which the allotment is a portion. Then there are the hard cases in which much more is charged by the farmer than he pays himself.

Very much really depends upon the generous or stingy disposition of the employer, or upon his conception of what is fair. A liberal master will occasionally not only give the ground, or let it at a nominal rent, but will 'throw in' advantages in the shape of manure, free of charge, the loan,

where necessary, of horse and plough, or other implement needed to put the land into proper condition for seed sowing or planting — and perhaps, in addition, time in which to do the required work. Such concessions, however, are, we believe,—judging from a great number of inquiries which we have made on the subject—quite the exceptions to a general rule; but we mention them in our anxiety to be fair to the farmer as well as to the peasant; though we are convinced that in making such concessions as we have indicated, the employer is really consulting his best interests, and is making an investment which will certainly be amply returned to him in the increased stimulus it must always afford to the peasant's service.

8.

DRESS OF THE PERIOD.

The expectation of those unacquainted with our English peasants, that the dress of this class of labourers might furnish an interesting subject for descriptive writing, is, unfortunately, doomed to disappointment. The costume of our field workers is seldom picturesque, for the reason, chiefly, that their condition of life has made them for so long a period dependent for nearly everything, except the plainest and most necessary articles of food, upon chance benevolence; and has thus prevented them from preserving anything like uniformity in their dress. For men the old 'smock-frock' and the corduroy trousers are still in use in a few localities of the western counties, as in other parts of the agricultural districts of England. But the smock-frock has long been 'out of fashion,' and seems to be fast disappearing. It is, however, most

commonly, worn by shepherds, though this class of labourers appears to be discarding it more and more each year. Coats and waistcoats of fustian or corduroy and trousers of the last-named material are still very common, and might be described as the especial dress of the peasantry, were it not that it is so largely used by all classes of labourers in this country. Indeed, fustian and corduroy are more used by general labourers than by peasants. The reason for this is, as we have already intimated, that the peasant has been obliged for a long period to don the miscellaneous, 'left-off' clothes of his employer's family, or those of others of the well-to-do inhabitants of the country village. Hence the reason for the absence of any characteristic costume.

When the peasant buys clothes for himself or his wife or family, the purchases are invariably made from the second-hand clothes shops. But such dress is of a miscellaneous kind, and of all shapes and colours, and it may, in fact, be put in the same descriptive category as the clothes which fall to the lot of the labourer by the benevolence of private persons.

Yet it must not be supposed that the English agricultural labourer never has new clothes; for

he manages, at least once or twice during his lifetime, either with his own unaided means, or by the assistance rendered to him and his family by the village 'clothing-club,' to obtain new garments. The 'Sunday best' of the peasant and his family, are ordinarily new; and it has often been a subject of surprise, and even wonder, that these 'best clothes' are made to last so long as they usually do. The secret of this durability is the really extraordinary care that is taken of them. It is the fact that one good black suit, worn only on Sundays, and occasionally on holidays, will sometimes last a farm labourer nearly a lifetime. This is especially likely to be the case if his wife be a woman neat and careful in her habits, and quick and clever at her needle. Those, indeed, who have observed the ordinary demeanour of the peasant on Sundays—his quiet manners, the slow, careful way in which he walks, and his evident pride in wearing well-brushed clothes and hat, a spotless shirt-front, a clean tie, and brightly-polished boots, will scarcely be surprised to learn how long these articles of dress last.

As with the men, so with the women—dress is of a miscellaneous kind—brown linsey, prints and various stuffs form the staple of their

clothing, which is sometimes picturesquely set off by a coloured sun-bonnet or print apron. But the rising generation of farm labourers of both sexes display greater ambition in the matter of their dress than their seniors, and evince a fondness for smart and showy rather than good and useful clothes.

Correspondents from various parts of the West of England have sent us some interesting statements and comments upon the subject of this chapter. One, writing from Wiltshire, says:—'The dress of the farm labourers has undergone a great change of late years. You will seldom, or never, except in the case of very old men, see the smock-frock. That has been discarded in these days of "cheap fustian," for a corduroy jacket in the winter and a short cotton slop in the summer. Our peasantry are pretty well clad on week-days, and if you were to visit our neighbourhood on Sunday, you would be greatly surprised at the very respectable appearance, with regard to dress, which the men and their wives and children present—the men in suits of cloth neither threadbare nor patched, and the women and children the very pink of neatness and cleanliness. The Sunday clothing is taken great care of, and is very rarely worn on

week-days. There is nothing in the work of a peasant to cause him to doff his working habiliments after his day's toil. Breathing pure air all the day, and browned by exposure to the sun, he always has a cheery, healthy, and clean look, which is quite independent of the tailor.'

'The women are helped in the matter of obtaining clothing for themselves and children,' continues our correspondent, 'by the institution, common I believe to all our villages, and known by the name of "the clothing club," over which the clergyman's wife ordinarily presides. Those who take advantage of this institution—and most of the women do—pay into that lady's keeping a weekly subscription of from one penny to sixpence, to which one penny weekly is added out of the fund subscribed by the benevolent persons of the parish. At the year's end each member of this club receives a ticket representing the sum due to her, which ticket she takes to the draper's and makes her purchases. I believe it is the rule of these clubs that all purchases shall be submitted to the manager for her approval. This rule serves as a precaution against the money being expended on light, useless finery; but it is not offensively carried out. We have,' adds our correspondent, 'in this small

agricultural town, what is termed a "Lying-in charity," which gives twenty-five shillings each to fifty poor women for the purchase of substantial clothing on the special occasion the nature of which the name of the charity indicates. Then there is here the "Blanket Loan Club." A blanket is lent to any poor woman who likes to apply for one from November to June, year by year, for six years, at the expiration of which period the blanket becomes her property; but she has to pay sixpence a year for the first two years and fourpence each year afterwards, during the remainder of the six. Amongst other minor benevolent institutions is the "Marriage Portion Charity," which, every year, gives ten pounds each to three or four young women on the point of being married. This charity is dispensed at Easter.'

From Dorsetshire the incumbent of an agricultural parish writes to us:—'If finery indicates an improvement in dress, then there is an advance, but it may be questioned whether too much does not go on the back—as much as, expended on an improved bill of fare, might do real good to a whole family. But with the example set by the "upper ten," what else can be expected than what is now visible everywhere?'

A South Devon correspondent says:—'The everyday, ordinary dress of the Devonshire peasant has nothing to commend it to a romantic mind, even the "smock frock" being now to a large extent conspicuous by its absence. I must not, however, forget to mention the suit of black cloth, worn on Sundays, holidays and special occasions. It is made the object of the greatest care by the labourer, who will carefully lock it up during the six days of the week; and if his wife be a good, thrifty woman, the one suit of black will last a lifetime.' Another Devonshire correspondent writes to us:—'The present dress of the peasant is certainly in great contrast to what it used to be. But whether the present style be more conducive to comfort and adaptability to labour than was that of the past—I mean the style of the fathers and mothers of the present generation of farm labourers—is, I think, questionable. The "tally system," under which so much per week is paid towards an article of dress or cheap jewellery, too often unsuitable and unbecoming, has engendered a taste for finery in the wives and especially in the daughters of our labourers—a taste that, in its results, is sometimes almost grotesque.'

Three correspondents have written to us from

Somersetshire on the subject of dress. One tersely and with excellent brevity simply says that 'it has partaken of the spirit of the age,' and he adds, 'It is not for me to say whether the peasant's expenditure on dress is in excess of his income.' Another, from the same county, writes :—'Dress shows no distinctive feature, and usually consists of cord trousers, and cloth coats and vests which have completed their Sunday duty. The useful and durable smock-frock is here a thing of the past. For Sundays the men generally have a very good suit of clothes, the children are neat and tidy, and the women are sufficiently well clothed to make a respectable appearance at church or chapel when they choose to go.'

The vicar of a Somersetshire parish states that the 'clothing club' in his district is in a flourishing condition, and 'does much to improve the social position of the children.' He adds :—'A lady not long ago congratulated me on the fine day we had for our school treat. "We have not had one," I replied. "I certainly thought you had," rejoined the lady, "because I saw your children all standing in order before the school house, with their Sunday clothes on." I took some time,' continues this clergyman, 'to make the lady

understand that this was their ordinary apparel. It may be taken for granted that when school children are well dressed their parents are not frequenters of the public house. This is the case in my district, for happily the inducement to drink is removed, since there is not a beerhouse in the parish.'

9

LIVING AND 'CREDIT.'

The cost of living must always be, to the wage-earning classes, a matter for serious consideration, and an increase in wages carries no benefit if there be at the same time a corresponding augmentation in the cost of the necessaries of life. This is a well understood principle of political economy. As therefore the real value of money is determined not by its nominal amount but by its purchasing power, it will be impossible to ascertain the advantage which has accrued to our agricultural labourers by the increase in their wages during the last few years until we have learnt what is the present cost of living.

That the cost of living has considerably increased during recent years has been recognised by every one with a limited income. But the

burden of this increase is naturally felt most by the lowest of the wage-earning classes; and it would unquestionably have been the occasion of widespread suffering on the part of English peasants had not the augmentation of their expenditure been met by increased means. Their means however have happily increased at a greater rate than their outlay, and they are really better off in every way at the present moment than they were a few years since.

In his interesting and invaluable work—*The Landed Interest and the Supply of Food*—Mr. James Caird publishes a table which he has carefully compiled from authentic sources and parliamentary returns, and in which he shows the rent of cultivated land, the price of provisions, the wages of the agricultural labourer, and the rent of cottages in three periods during the last hundred and ten years in England. The three selected periods are the years 1770, 1850, and 1878. From thirteen shillings per acre in 1770, land had risen in value to twenty-seven shillings per acre in 1850, and to thirty shillings per acre in 1878.

The rent of the peasant's cottage in 1770 was, taking an average throughout the country, eight-pence as compared with seventeen-pence in 1850,

and two shillings in 1878. The price of bread, the staple article of his food, was sixpence the four-pound loaf in 1770, fivepence, for the same quantity, in 1850, and sixpence in 1878. Meat, however, had risen from threepence farthing per pound in 1770 to fivepence in 1850, and to ninepence in 1878, and butter from sixpence per pound in the earliest period to which this comparison refers to one shilling in 1850, and to twenty pence in 1878. But in the same period there has been a very considerable augmentation of wages, which have risen from seven shillings and threepence per week in 1770 to nine shillings and sevenpence in 1850, and to fourteen shillings in 1878. Since the year 1770, too, there has undoubtedly been—owing to the introduction of machinery and to other causes—an improvement in farming; and this improvement, so far as general husbandry is concerned, had continued until within the last few years. But in this respect there has, of late, been a great falling off.

It may be assumed that very little change has taken place in the relative position of the foregoing figures since 1878. The prices of bread, butter, and meat remain about the same—for the falling off in the supply of agricultural

produce since 1878, owing to the period of 'depression' that has occurred, a falling off which in an ordinary way would have caused a rise of prices, has been counterbalanced by largely increased supplies of food from abroad. Corn and butcher's meat, poultry, fish, and other tinned articles of consumption have been pouring into this country, of late years—chiefly from the United States of America—in rapidly increasing quantities; and prices would have fallen lower than they have fallen of late but for an increased and increasing consumption, stimulated by the recent and continuing revival of trade.

The money earnings of the peasantry have fallen somewhat, since 1878, from the general average given for that year. But the fall is, doubtless, only a temporary one, and wages are certain to recover the rate prevailing in 1878 under the influence of the good harvest of the present year of 1880.

The average money earnings of the west country peasantry are, of course, below the general average; but the cost of the items of living, other than bread, is also somewhat below the rates which we have mentioned as prevailing at the latest of the three periods we have referred to. The price of bread is tolerably uniform throughout

the country. But butter in the western counties, of the quality consumed by the peasantry, can always be obtained for a shilling the pound, and the price of meat, as well as the rate of cottage rent, is somewhat lower there than elsewhere.

It will be seen, therefore, that, though the cost of living has increased, wages have increased in greater proportion, and the result is that the west-country labourer not only lives better now than he did a few years since, but that he lives better than he ever did before, although his prosperity is not nearly equal, in degree, to that of the landed proprietor, whose incomings—whatever his outgoings might have been—had doubled between 1770 and 1850, and have been rapidly augmenting in value from 1850 to the present time.

On the subject of the present diet of the peasantry of the west of England some interesting communications have been sent to us by several correspondents. That very little animal food can be afforded, even in these improved times, by peasants who have large families to support, is shown by one of our Wiltshire correspondents, who says:—'You may be sure that very little bacon finds its way to the house of

the poor toiler who has a family of seven or eight children, or perhaps ten or a dozen, especially when it has to be purchased at the shop, which is often the case, as some farmers will not allow their men to keep pigs lest their grain might be stolen to feed these animals; and certainly when a family is so numerous as to require nearly all the wages for bread and clothes and schooling, the temptation to pilfer a little grain to feed the pig is somewhat strong.'

A Dorsetshire clergyman writes to us:—'The Dorsetshire labourer decidedly lives better than he did, for he "sees," "smells," and "tastes" meat regularly, instead of once a week as formerly. A slice of fat bacon no longer satisfies, and extra fat has no superabundant charms in these days.'

From Devonshire a correspondent writes:—'Devon is, of course, noted for its "clotted" cream and for its "junkets"; but both these are far beyond the reach of the peasantry, who, for breakfast, have what is called 'broth' made of fat, bread, and water; for the mid-day meal perhaps a little bread and cheese, or potatoes and pork—sometimes for a change a little dried fish instead of pork; for the evening meal a cup of tea

with dry bread. Pies and pasties are the great features of the Cornish diet. The ordinary pasty of the Cornish labourer is handy, clean, wholesome, and nutritious, and the Devonshire labourer might with advantage adopt the same kind of diet. When a pig is kept by the Devon peasant and is fat enough to kill, half of it is salted for the use of himself and family for the greater portion of the year; the remainder is usually sold to the butcher. The salted portion of the pig thus forms the whole, or nearly so, of the animal diet of the peasantry in this district.'

A retired farmer to whom a long residence in the 'South Hams' of Devonshire has given considerable experience of the condition and mode of life of the peasantry of that delightful and singularly fertile region, has sent us the following statement:—'The peasant certainly lives very much better than his father did. Living, during the last generation, consisted chiefly of barley bread and broth for breakfast with a little skimmed 'country' cheese. For dinner he had barley dumpling with a very small piece of bacon in the middle—and barley bread with a little salt fish or bacon for his supper. But when potatoes were good, plentiful, and

cheap, this diet was often varied by large quantities of potatoes being used. Many an old labourer, however, has told me that he could not work on a potato diet as well as he could on a barley one. If the peasant then tasted meat it was generally bacon—beef or mutton being, as a rule, a treat. Wheat was sometimes mixed with the barley to make loaves, and the peasant's wife then always made and baked the family bread at home under an iron kettle on the hearth. By this method the labourers were sure of one thing, namely, that the bread they manufactured was pure and unadulterated. To show how little wheat was then used in large, poor families, an old labourer of mine has told me that, when a boy, his mother used to hold out to him as an inducement to be "good" that "they would have a peck of wheat at *Christmas* next"—and this promise was often given to the children in *January!* But the peasant eats very little, if any, barley now. His wife generally buys wheaten bread ready made, and baked by the small town or village baker who delivers it at the labourers' doors: and most rural districts have their butchers who deliver meat in the same way. The small shops, too, of most villages and hamlets, now keep in stock almost every necessary

that the peasantry require—not forgetting the luxury of tobacco, which is very largely indulged in by the peasant of to-day.'

On the subject of tobacco it may be mentioned that in times past the chewing of the well known 'weed' has been often resorted to by the west-country peasants to allay the natural craving for food when nature has cried out for the support which the poor labourer's terribly straitened 'means' have denied him. Possibly a similar use is still sometimes found for tobacco by the farm labourer.

Whilst contrasting diet now with what it used to be, we must refer to a brief note of one of our Somersetshire correspondents who says :—'I often hear farm labourers remark on the difference between their food now and what it used to be in their younger days, when horse-beans were the sole provision after a hard day's work! This year, however, in this district, a very splendid potato crop is being dug.'

We must here mention one instance—brought to our recollection by the reference to 'potatoes'—of the capacity for consumption of these excellent vegetables exhibited by a stalwart peasant whom we knew in the West of England some twenty years ago. This man was a 'piece-

worker' of rare powers, which made him quite independent of any one employer. He was, in fact, fairly a champion worker, for no man in his district could approach him in capacity for getting through work, when he chose to work; and he could consequently earn, even at that time, half-a-crown a day and cider in addition. Having only himself to support, he could give the rein to his fancy in the matter of diet; and his *grande passion* was for potatoes. On summer mornings he would rise to his work at three, and immediately break his fast by eating a large frying-pan full of potatoes, which he cooked for himself. Proceeding then to his work, he would return at eight, with appetite undiminished, to what, with innocent forgetfulness of his previous 'refresher,' he called his 'breakfast.' But this man's power for work was truly herculean, and in singular contrast to that of the under-fed men around him.

Speaking of the food of the Somersetshire peasant, at the present time, in his own district, a large employer of agricultural and other labour writes to us:—'The peasant's food usually consists of a breakfast (before seven A.M.) of bread and bacon, or dripping, with fried potatoes; a lunch at about ten or eleven of bread and

cheese and cider; dinner, if taken in the fields, of bread and cold bacon or other cold meat, washed down with cider, or, if near enough to home, of a dish of hot vegetables with a little meat. Further, the peasant has a slight meal of bread and cheese at about four o'clock, and a substantial supper, soon after leaving work, of hot vegetables with meat or fish of some kind, boiled or fried, and tea and bread and butter—the whole making a grand total of no inconsiderable amount, and which only fairly hard work and fresh air enable him to digest. I should say that the pig—no inconsiderable factor of the family supply—is very generally kept here, and is certainly looked upon, and justly so, as the poor man's "savings' bank." It is, indeed, a fact that but for the pig the money spent by the labourer upon his food would either be wasted by his wife in finery, or by himself at the public house. The important animal is usually purchased for about twenty shillings, and is kept on and fattened until it attains a weight of nine "score" or upwards. Then it affords a large supply of good wholesome solid meat which lasts a long time, and is, in fact, usually in stock until another pig is ready for the knife.'

It must be explained that this correspondent

has the reputation in his district of being a very liberal employer, and that he pays his farm labourers something like two shillings per week beyond the 'average' rate. This will doubtless explain why it is that their dietary—and the instances he gives are doubtless those of his own men—is so good; for it is certainly above the average in quality obtaining generally throughout the western counties. The same correspondent adds:—'Very much may yet be done to improve the food of the peasantry by systematic instruction in the rules of simple cookery. Few, if any, of the labourers' wives here know how to make the best of the plentiful supply of vegetables abundantly raised by their husbands and sons on the unusually large and good gardens attached to the cottages, or on the plots of land which can be rented at about eight shillings per annum, either of the Great Western Railway Company, who let, in allotments, the waste pieces of ground along the sides of their line, or of the vicar of the parish—plots which, under the hands of an ordinary farm labourer, produce enough vegetables (including potatoes) to supply any average family during the whole year. Unhappily, however, none of the women here seem to know how to prepare the dainty soups and other simply-

made but appetising dishes which are so well known to the peasantry of France, and which are very cheap, and, at the same time, highly nutritious.'

Intimately associated with the question of the food of the peasantry, is that of the system of 'credit,' which prevails in most of our agricultural villages, especially in the West of England. And here we must bring prominently under notice the valuable and important—we may fairly say humanising—function, if the expression may be allowed, of the small general dealer or 'huckster,' whose customers are largely and often principally—especially in these days of co-operative stores and cash purchases—found amongst the peasant labourers of rural England.

How, is often the inquiry, is the poor farm labourer able to live at all, that is to say to exist, during his 'bad times,' *his* frequently recurring seasons of 'depression,' when rain prevents work, when accident necessitates the temporary cessation of employment, or when other unforeseen calamity, such as serious illness, brings him to what appears to be the inevitable 'last straw' which threatens to stop the experiment of his trying to 'live' on next to nothing? The secret of much of the peasant's capacity to

survive these serious periods of 'depression' lies in the keeping of the village shopkeeper, who gives a large amount of 'credit' to his poor fellow parishioners, especially in those cases where he knows that there is an honest endeavour to pay on the part of the customer. 'Scores' of from five to ten pounds are run up in a considerable number of cases, and it is not by any means unusual for the amounts to reach fifteen, twenty, thirty, and even forty or fifty pounds. When the debt reaches amounts of this kind the process has invariably been a long one—the debt accruing perhaps since the time when the debtor first entered the bonds of matrimony. When the amount is a large and long-standing one, the shopkeeper expects that something, if only sixpence or a shilling from time to time, often as may be, shall be paid towards its redemption, and that all the current purchases shall be paid for in cash; and the bond is, ordinarily, of such a nature that the connection between debtor and creditor continues a close one. The result of this system of cash payments, after the accumulation of a debt by the farm labourer, is that all, or nearly all, of the weekly earnings of the latter go to the shop. Peasants are mostly very 'safe' customers so far

as any danger of 'running away' is concerned, and we are bound to say that they are rarely other than honestly intentioned and that they 'do their best,' to pay up—very much, if not all, of the 'harvest-money' and a goodly portion, in 'kind,' of the value of the fattened, slaughtered pig, where one is kept regularly, going towards payment of the 'score.'

It will thus be seen that the village shopkeeper requires to be a man of no inconsiderable capital, and of unlimited patience and trustfulness. What would become of the peasantry in most of our agricultural villages, if they were suddenly required to pay up 'old scores' under stress of distraint, we cannot say; but we know that there would be weeping and wailing in many a poor cottage. And if the old law of imprisonment for non-compliance, in such cases, were put into force, the agricultural system of this country would almost come to a full stop. Happily, however, the village tradesman is a man of rare forbearance, and so the system of 'credit' goes on, and will, doubtless, continue, until more prosperous times.

10.

HALBERTON IN 1880.

THE present chapter has been suggested by a desire to show the improvement which has taken place in the condition of the west-country peasant, by instancing the altered circumstances of one village—the scene, as the first chapter of Part II. has already explained, of Canon Girdlestone's work of peasant migration. For the subject matter of this chapter we are indebted to the statements sent to us by a correspondent resident for many years in the district, and thoroughly conversant both with the past and with the present state of things there. Our correspondent first remarks upon the effect produced in Halberton by the alteration in the times—noticing that eight or ten years ago the state of trade in Devonshire, as elsewhere, was much more prosperous than it has been of late. This statement will prove that there was no justification for the

miserable condition of the labourers as described in the earlier portion of this work, whilst the necessary and inevitable improvement in the condition of the peasantry has taken place and has been substantially maintained through and in spite of, the recent period of agricultural 'depression,' notwithstanding that the farmers of the district are mostly the same as those who held the land in the time of Canon Girdlestone.

But the condition of the peasantry of Halberton, our correspondent says, is very different from what it was eight or ten years ago; and though, during the last two or three years, there has perhaps been less work provided by the farmers—owing to the depression—than previously was the case, yet that most of the farm, and other, labourers inclined to work have had plenty to do.

The change in this Devonshire village has been so great since the time—1872—when we described its condition, that labourers who—starting with the stream of migration set in motion by the excellent clergyman who designed and persistently carried out the admirable plan of sending the half-starved population of the district to those prosperous mining and manufacturing localities where their services were in demand

—have chanced to return, have found it 'almost like a new world,' owing to the rapid alteration of things.

In place of the seven and eight shillings per week of Canon Girdlestone's time, the peasantry of Halberton are receiving eleven and twelve, and some of them more, whilst in lieu of the old allowance of cider, an extra payment, in consequence of the recent scarcity of that beverage, is made to the men, of two shillings per week. And this increase of fifty per cent. in the material resources of the farm labourers of Halberton and the North Devon districts around it, has been obtained, as we have said, in spite of the agricultural 'depression.' Not only the labourers but the village shopkeepers have benefited by the change; the prosperity of the last-named class naturally depending upon the circumstances of the first-named, but increasing in a larger measure by the general advance during recent years in the price of articles of general consumption—an advance from which the 'middle-man' has naturally secured his due share of increased profit.

The cottages of Halberton—or rather, we should say, the two-roomed hovels, some of which had to accommodate, not unfrequently, two

families—are now, our correspondent says, most of them empty. During our own recent visit to this village we noticed the tenantless hovels in question, standing yet, as mementos of the evils of the past. But now things have changed in this respect, and the poorest labourer has, at least, a roomy dwelling.

In educational matters—never neglected by Canon Girdlestone, in spite of the exceptional demands made on his time and his energy by his work of peasant migration—there has been continuous and healthy progress of late. Our correspondent says:—'The school accommodation at Halberton is greatly improved. Some years since there was only one school here—the national school, which was then only one half the size it is now, although there were, at the time I speak of, a private school or two, here and there.'

Continuing his interesting communication, our correspondent draws a striking contrast between the educational system of his early days and the present system. He says:—'I remember a very elderly lady who kept a private school, which I attended. I also quite well remember a long stick she kept—from seven to eight feet long at least—to give us a "crack on the head," now

and then, if anything went wrong. A favourite and novel punishment, whose infliction was "enjoyed" by this old lady, was to pin any of us, who chanced to offend her, to her apron. But the severest punishment of all was to be put in the dark, under the stairs, in a place we called the dark hole! Would this kind of thing be tolerated now? Certainly not. Now, as I have said, we have our National School enlarged to hold twice the number it used to hold. We have also a Board School built to hold nearly a hundred children: and both institutions are doing well and annually carrying off honours.'

Let us add, in conclusion, that our own recent visit to Halberton left a most favourable impression upon our mind. We saw nothing offensive, except the still lingering but tenantless mud hovels, whose broken glass, ruined roofs and walls, and general aspect of desolateness, were strongly suggestive of the miserable population which at one time were indecently crowded within them. There were no offensive odours from bad drainage or fever-stricken air. The whole village, in fact, had an aspect of quiet comfort: and, over it, there seemed to be brooding the spirit of that reform whose shafts have pierced, at length, the thick walls of the obdurate selfishness, which was

mainly responsible, in this district of western England, for the disease, misery, and death of its unfortunate inhabitants.

How bright in the minds of these humble toilers was the memory of 'the Canon' who so fearlessly and successfully laboured for them, in spite of local 'sneers' and of the frowns of the well-to-do, we learnt by many inquiries amongst the villagers: and we could not but feel that the noble work of the excellent clergyman who is the subject of these remarks, was enough, in its wide-reaching results, to fill a long life with honour.

11.

A PIG INSURANCE SOCIETY.

THE reader may perhaps be inclined to smile when he lights upon the heading of this chapter, having in all probability never heard of an association similar to the one whose object this novel designation indicates. We ourselves should probably, at this moment, be in ignorance of the fact that to the numerous institutions of this country, including 'assurance' companies of almost every kind, was to be added an association for the insurance of pigs, but for the chance which led to our falling in with Mr. William Conduit, the genial and stalwart smith of the village of Woodford in Wiltshire, and the originator of 'The Woodford Pig Insurance Society.'

Our chapter on 'Pigland,' to which the reader is particularly referred, will have shown how important to the English peasant is the possession of the useful, though not perhaps personally

attractive, animal which expresses its feelings by grunts; and how sad a loss it is to the poor labourer when sickness or death deprives him of the value of his 'live savings' bank' upon which he has expended not only the scraps from his table, but all the poor scrapings which it has been possible to make, by one knows not how much pinching, from his weekly wages.

Thinking over this subject one day, it occurred to Mr. Conduit that it might be possible to form a club or society which, by the collection of small subscriptions from its members, might be able to establish a fund out of which the keepers of pigs in the locality could be assured against loss by sickness or death in the stye. It was certainly a novel and a very happy idea; but, to carry it out, it was essential to fix the subscription at such an amount as to bring it within the means of men on eleven or twelve shillings a week. This object would be attained, Mr. Conduit thought, if the amount were fixed at a half-penny a week, with an entrance fee of sixpence. He accordingly unfolded his scheme to seven labourers, who at once agreed to join him, and the 'Society' started, with eight members, and a capital of five shillings and fourpence—four shillings from entrance fees, and sixteenpence

from the advanced monthly subscriptions of twopence each of the eight members; Mr. Conduit being put in the post of honour as 'Secretary.'

It is to be feared that, had a Woodford pig, at this moment, unluckily taken its departure from the world, the 'Insurance Society' would have been placed in rather an embarrassing position. But the 'porkers' in the locality were so considerate as to keep well during this critical period of the Society's existence.

Meanwhile the news of the formation of the pig club speedily travelled through the length and breadth of Woodford, and reached to the surrounding hamlets, and members came in so fast that it was not long before ninety were enrolled, and had duly paid their entrance fees, and subscriptions a month in advance. Thereupon the Society was encouraged to make 'rules,' and to look forward to the time when it would be easily able to meet a call upon its funds. The rules, indeed, provided that no member should be entitled to benefit from the funds of the Society until he had been a member for three months, by the end of which time there would be about five guineas in hand.

After preliminary regulations as to the amount of the entrance fee and subscriptions, the time of payment, etc., the rules go on to prescribe that

'any member sustaining loss by the premature death of a pig shall give notice to the Committee, or one of them, who shall give orders to the appointed valuer, who shall value the same, and obtain an order from the Committee for the amount, which shall be handed over to the sufferer, except in cases hereinafter mentioned. The person appointed shall receive one shilling for each pig valued.' The Committee of the Society consists of seven persons, including the secretary. These are appointed, in turn, from the members of the Society 'as they stand on the books.'

When a pig is taken 'ill,' the owner must give notice to one of the Committee, who is to go and see the animal, and 'endeavour to ascertain if the illness has been brought on by any neglect on the part of the owner.' If so, the committeeman is to report to that effect to his colleagues, who, if they cannot agree amongst themselves on the subject, must lay the case before 'the whole Society,' when such an award will be made as shall be decided upon by the Society, 'not being less than one half the value of the pig.' Rule seven of the Society explains all that it is essential to know further of its *modus operandi* :—'If any member shall have a valuable pig ill, not likely

to live, the Committee are empowered to have the same killed, and if the Committee are not at hand, the opinion of a butcher shall be obtained, and if it is not safe to let the pig live any longer, it shall be killed, valued, or sold for what it is worth, and the remainder made up to the owner by the Society. If it is sold at market price, nothing shall be allowed from the Society, and if it be not valued by the person appointed by the Society, nothing shall be allowed. The Committee must and shall be allowed to see the pig—alive or dead.'

It will be seen that these regulations are perfectly fair; and remove, for the small payment of a halfpenny a week, all risk of loss from the pig insurers of Woodford and the hamlets around. The 'Society' has prospered, for the secretary informs us that after meeting all the claims which have been made upon it from time to time, it remains in possession of a capital fund—invested, under rule, in the Post Office Savings Bank at Salisbury—of fifty pounds. Moreover the members have an annual dinner—and a very good dinner we are assured it is—admission to which for 'outsiders' is by five-shilling ticket; and so greatly is this entertainment appreciated, that a goodly number of persons, who are non-

possessors of pigs, pay to the Society a five-shilling subscription that qualifies them to be 'honorary members,' with right of free admission to the annual dinner, which is, moreover, attended occasionally by the Vicar, and other leading persons of this pig-insuring Wiltshire village.

12.

SUPERSTITION AND FOLK-LORE.

The great moral influence of the English Press —whose wide-reaching effectiveness has been mightily aided by the post-office and the railway —has helped to dispel much of the cloud of ignorance and superstition in which were immersed, until within comparatively recent years, the poor inhabitants of many a village of rural England: and there is good reason for believing that the generation which is rising up under the influence of the more rigid and searching educational system of the present day, will be far freer from any taint of the old faith in omens and prognostics than any preceding generation. The old beliefs, however, die slowly; and they linger for a much longer time in the outlying, or purely agricultural, districts of England, than in the neighbourhoods of our big towns, or in those of our mining and manufacturing centres.

It is a trite remark that ignorance and superstition go hand in hand. But as, until

within the last few years, the outlying labouring population of our western counties was, in intellectual progress, behind the poor inhabitants of many other of the rural districts of England, it cannot be surprising that belief in the preternatural should, there, maintain a strong hold upon the popular imagination.

Writing from Heywood (in Wiltshire), the Curate-in-charge of that parish has communicated to us some interesting facts bearing upon the subject of this chapter. He says, speaking of his district:—'In places the belief in witchcraft and fortune-telling is still strong, and if—as was recently the case at Dunmow, in Essex—an old woman who has the reputation of being a witch is not ducked or beaten, it is not because the will to do so is absent; and she will generally have a hard time of it, and is often mobbed and jeered at by young and old, or altogether avoided. Incantations,' he adds, 'are not uncommon. Some time ago an old lady, in my own parish, tried to cure a burn by repeating the following expression, and crossing the subject over the part affected :—

> "Two angels from the north;
> One brought fire, the other brought frost;
> Out fire!
> In frost!
> In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!"

'This was told to me by the schoolmistress, who gave me the doggerel, which she wrote down at the time from the old lady's lips, who added, "Well, you see it can do no harm if it does no good" — quite forgetting the import of the command, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," etc.' A similar incantation is tried for a burn in other parts of the West of England. Our Wiltshire correspondent says that traces of moon-worship still survive in some places, where he found that even the children had been taught to bow thrice and thrice repeat 'Welcome new moon!' on the first occasion of seeing the crescent of the night luminary.

Foolish and hasty vows are, this clergyman informs us, 'exceedingly common.' He says:— 'I heard of one man who said he was wrongly rebuked when a boy by a churchwarden for misconduct in church; and who vowed, in consequence, that he would never enter the church again, "or might he be struck dead;" and, though now an old man with a grown-up family, and though sometimes he has been a bearer at funerals, he has strictly kept, and strictly keeps, his rash and foolish vow in spite of all remonstrances. Another man,' states our correspondent in his interesting letter, 'wrongly

accused, in boyhood, of robbing a garden, vowed never to enter that garden again so long as he should live: and, though a married child has since lived in the house to which the garden leads, the parent has foolishly kept his word, notwithstanding that he lives within a stone's throw of the child, who once, indeed, was ill, and unvisited by the parent solely on this account—for in other respects they were friends.

'Other instances,' adds our correspondent, 'might be cited, but let these suffice. In the matter of folk-lore—the spilling of salt, seeing an owl at night near the dwelling, seeing a coffin cinder bounce from the fire—are regarded as omens of ill-luck or death, and numerous omens of good luck common elsewhere are also here believed in. Yet the people are an industrious, fairly intelligent, and religious race.'

The belief in 'charms' still lingers in parts of the West of England, and the mole—which country people will still, sometimes, call by its obsolete name of 'want'—furnishes, in Wiltshire, one 'charm' for a common ailment—the toothache. If three of the legs—the fore-legs and one hind-leg—of a mole be put into a bag, and the latter, with its contents, be worn round the neck,

toothache will, it is believed, forsake, for ever, the wearer of this singular preventive. In Somersetshire, it is believed that consumption will be cured by leading the sufferer, in the early part of the day, through a flock of sheep at the moment of their being let out into the fields. From the period when this supposed 'charm' is tried the disease will begin to take its departure, and will finally disappear altogether. Ague, it is believed, in the same county, by many of the peasantry, can be cured, by getting a large spider and putting it in a box. The ague will disappear as the spider starves, and, when it is dead, will leave the patient entirely. The myrtle in Somersetshire is believed to be possessed of a 'charm'; for it is considered 'very lucky' to have one in the house—and the luck increases when the plant flowers. To qualify it, however, for its sphere of usefulness it must, if grown in the same house from a cutting, be set in the ground whilst the planter is 'looking proud;' and if it be a woman who is planting the myrtle, she must spread out the skirt of her dress during the operation. A belief in the possibility of curing warts on the skin by the operation of a curious 'charm' is very common in parts of the West of England—notably in Somersetshire. A small

piece of raw beef must be *stolen*—this is the singular part of the process—or taken, at any rate, surreptitiously, so that no one but the taker is cognizant of the act. The warts must then be rubbed with the meat, and the latter is afterwards to be buried—secretly. As the meat rots so the warts will disappear.

Amongst the poorer classes in Devonshire there are wide-spread beliefs in the magical effect of certain mysterious processes. This county, indeed, for superstitions and folk-lore stands at the head of the western counties. It is rich in 'charms' for the cure of disease: amongst these being a knuckle bone of mutton and a bit of raw potato—either of which is a cure, so it is thought, for sciatica and some other complaints, if carried about the person. There are 'charms,' too, for the stanching of blood, for the curing of defective sight, for curing whooping-cough by carrying the children affected with it through three parishes whilst fasting, and for curing cramp by putting a cork under the pillow at night. There is also a 'charm' for boils—the boil being cured by some friend of opposite sex to the sufferer going at night, when it is quite dark, into a churchyard, and walking six times round, and three times

across, a grave in which some one has been buried the previous day.

Our notice of 'charms' must be closed by reference to the statement of a contributor to the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, quoted by the Rev. T. F. Thiselton Dyer in his interesting and valuable little book—*English Folk-lore*. The statement is to the effect that a person troubled by pinsoles, blackheads, or festers on the body, 'is to creep hands and knees under, or through, a bramble three times with the sun; that is, from east to west. The bramble must be of peculiar growth; that is, it must form an arch, rooting at both ends,' (a thing easily accomplished,) 'and if it reaches into two proprietors' lands so much the better. Thus, if a bramble grows on the hedge of one owner, and a branch, of which the end takes root, extends into the field of another, the best form for working the charm is provided.' In parts, it may be added, of the West of England, chilblains may be cured, it is said, by thrashing them with a bramble until the blood comes; but probably a good many persons would consider this remedy worse than the disease.

The malignant or beneficial influence of particular plants, the influence, for good or ill,

of the heavenly bodies—more especially of the moon—and the omens of good and evil brought by particular insects, birds, animals or other living creatures, or indicated by the particular cries of living things under certain circumstances, still remain substantial articles of faith throughout the West of England.

The belief in the luckiness or unluckiness of birth at particular seasons is one that is shared by many more than by illiterate peasants: so that it will scarcely be surprising to learn that the familiar and domesticated animal, the cat, is admitted to a connection with the folk-lore of Wiltshire, and of other parts of the West of England, and to be a sharer in the sort of ill luck which is supposed to attend a cat whose advent into the world is in the month of May. Such an unlucky animal will never, the peasants believe, catch either mice or rats, but will, on the contrary, capture, and bring into the house, various reptiles, such as slowworms and snakes.

A Dorsetshire superstition which still has a tight hold upon the popular mind, is that when there are twins in a family and one happens to die, the surviving twin will rapidly follow, should not the limbs of the deceased rigidly stiffen after death; and sometimes even the funeral is

delayed by the expectation that both may, perhaps, have to be buried together.

A correspondent of the *Times*, a guardian of the poor, writing so recently as September 20th, 1880, a letter published in that journal of the 22nd of the same month, says on the subject of Dorsetshire superstitions :—'It may interest some of the students of folk-lore to hear of a case that came before us at the Board of Guardians of the Shaftesbury Union last Thursday. A man of fifty applied for relief as unable to work. The doctor had seen him and was unable to specify any cause, though he said he was certainly incapable of labour. He himself stated the cause to be that he had been "overlooked" by his sister-in-law. His wife had been to a "wise woman" at Stalbridge, a neighbouring village, who had relieved him for a few days, but since then the spell had been too mighty, and he was as bad as ever. He declined medical aid as useless. The afflicted man is a native of the parish of Gillingham, Dorset, where there is a Board School and every appliance of education; yet even this is not enough to eradicate this most ancient of superstitions, as firmly believed in as ever. It is not long since that a "cunning man" used to hold an annual *levée* in the neighbourhood

of Stalbridge, when he sold out to crowds that thronged round him the legs torn from the bodies of living toads and placed in a bag, which was worn round the neck of the patient, and counted a sovereign remedy for scrofula and the "overlooked," etc. It was called "Toad Fair."—I may add that this application for relief was refused by us.' The superstition as to the cure for scrofula and the 'overlooked' is similar in its character to the 'charm' for toothache, previously referred to in this chapter.

We should be exceeding the limits of this chapter to enlarge further on this subject, which might easily occupy the space of a large volume. Yet it must, in fairness, be stated that many persons, very much better educated than the average west-country peasant, put faith in some of these superstitious beliefs. But there can be no doubt that the moral and intellectual forces of the day have, during the last few years, done very much to create a healthier feeling—a more wholesome public opinion concerning these relics of a bygone age; and actual *belief* in such things as we have enumerated is surely, if slowly, giving place to ideas under which they are regarded only as creations of fancy.

13.

AMUSEMENTS.

We trust the reader will not anticipate a long chapter under the subject heading of the present one; for we regret to say that there is an absolute paucity of material. The life of a labouring population whose history has been, time out of mind, little more than that of a desperate struggle for *existence*, must necessarily have little in it of an enjoyable kind. When daily needs are pressing and constant, there is little, if any, opportunity for recreation either of mind or body. The prosperity which brings leisure, and means to enjoy that leisure, alone makes amusement possible in any marked degree. Indeed, in the lowest—by which we mean the poorest—condition of life, there is little inclination for what may be called pastimes, when 'hard living' is the only possible existence, and the sense of irremediable poverty is ever present. The

human body is not in the necessary frame for enjoyment when hunger gnaws at the stomach. The man must be 'warmed and filled,' before he can think of 'sport;' and hence it is perhaps why the very few occasions in the course of a year on which the English peasant can take pleasure in fun or frolic of any kind occur only after the rare and especial entertainments, which are provided on these occasions, are over. It can scarcely be expected that, under such circumstances, the recreation in which he indulges can be of a very elevating kind.

The fact that there is, as we have indicated, very little to say on this subject, will account for the silence—on the question of the amusements of the peasantry—of a good many of our west-country correspondents; whilst the tone of those who do comment on this subject is not very encouraging. A Wiltshire clergyman, writing to us, says:—'Just now whilst many of the middle and respectable labouring classes are bent on picnics to such places as Longleat, Stourton, Tower Park, and Stonehenge, or to seaside resorts such as Weymouth, I see a bill for a "fair" to be held, July 13th, at Edington, a village of some fifteen hundred souls, and possessing, by the way, one of the finest old abbey churches in the

county. The bill sets forth prominently such intellectual recreations as donkey races, concerning which Bloomfield remarked, more than a century ago, that they were "more fit for laughter than for sport." Then come so-called "Athletic sports," which might be —but these are not—cricket, football, swimming, or rowing,—for there are meadows and a fine piece of water, near the church. The "athletic sports" are to consist of "jumping in sacks," "climbing a greasy pole," etc. The "etc." will probably include—in this last quarter of the nineteenth century—such intellectual diversions as "grinning through a collar," or running by young women for smocks.' Our correspondent goes on to say:—'It is, I believe, certain that though reading rooms and working men's clubs have been opened hereabouts, they have either failed, or are kept going with much greater difficulty than in the factory districts of Yorkshire and Lancashire. To Westbury the late member, Mr. Langton, gave a noble building as an institute for lectures, reading room, library, etc., about eight years ago. Yet hitherto it is very little used, and only four or five daily papers and as many weekly ones are taken, and not a book is to be seen on the premises; and,

except for concerts or semi-dramatic entertainments, the audience is seldom large enough to pay expenses, even for the best lectures. A mechanics' institute also, in Westbury, with an excellent library of nearly a thousand volumes, died a few years ago from sheer disuse; and I am told that many of the books are rotting in a closed room, and those who ought to use them are found, beyond all rule elsewhere, loitering at the street corners in groups, insulting by-passers with vulgar oaths or filthy slang.'

Many *towns* other than Westbury can doubtless furnish similarly idle and dissolute contingents of their populations; but such contingents are characteristic, in a greater or less degree, of towns everywhere throughout this country; and the character of towns in this respect, is certainly—so far as our experience is concerned—less marked in the western parts of England than elsewhere.

The purely rural population, on the contrary, including that section of it whose condition and mode of life form the subject of this volume, are singularly free from rowdyism of any kind; and if their pleasures are few in number, and their recreations are not of an elevating kind, it is their misfortune rather than their fault.

But the testimony given to us by another Wiltshire correspondent will prove that, in other towns, a state of things very different, from that just described, exists. Writing from the agricultural town of Wilton, the correspondent in question says :—'We have in this place a "Literary Institute" which is largely attended, chiefly by the labouring classes. The principal daily, the weekly illustrated, and the comic, papers are taken in for the reading-room of the institute, which also possesses a fairly good library. It is, moreover, provided with a bagatelle table, draughts, chess, etc., etc. The subscription is only one shilling per quarter. Reading rooms are also being established in several of the surrounding villages.' Yet another Wiltshire correspondent calls our attention to the absence of any *provision* whatever, in many small towns and rural districts, for the wholesome amusement or recreation of the working classes.

One of our Somersetshire correspondents, speaking of a large agricultural district in the Vale of Taunton, says that 'the amusements of the peasantry are very few in number, and consist of little more than an occasional, but by no means regular, gossip at the village inns.'

The amusements of the country gentleman

and the farmer are never those of the agricultural labourer ; and the only glimpse the cotter ever gets of what are called country sports—the sports of the field, fox-hunting, hare-hunting, and shooting—is that which he obtains when dogs, horses, and men suddenly burst upon his vision, as they come dashing over the hedge of the field in which he may chance to be working.

14.

POOR FARMING AND 'DEPRESSION.'

It would be beside the immediate purpose of this volume to discuss at any length the subject of the recent agricultural 'depression,' or to inquire, in detail, into the causes of that depression. But there are some points in connection with this question which have direct reference to the subject matter of the present work, and possess moreover a considerable amount of public interest.

During our tour, in July of this year, through the West of England, we made a considerable number of inquiries both of farmers and labourers, in order to endeavour to elicit what was the general opinion as to the causes of the depression. Both sides allowed that two of these causes were doubtless American competition and bad seasons: but the labourers we found everywhere laid emphasis on a third cause, which no

farmer whom we met even mentioned—namely *poor farming.*

Notwithstanding the extent to which emigration and migration from the West of England have been taking place during recent years, the farmers have made no complaint, during the last year or two, of a scarcity of labour. On the contrary, they have openly stated that there were more men than they wanted; and this statement was doubtless true—for the simple reason that so soon as the movement of the peasantry in 1872, followed by the establishment of their union organisations, had led to a general and substantial rise in wages, agriculturists immediately commenced reducing their labour staff, instead of meeting the additional call upon their 'labour fund' by an energetic application of the better-paid and more efficient labour to their land.

The adopted plan of meeting their difficulty was certainly 'a penny wise and pound foolish' policy. But the British farmer's especial characteristic is obstinacy—an excellent quality when properly applied, but a ruinously fatal one when misapplied to any object—and it is, we believe, very largely due to the unreasoning obstinacy of the English agriculturist that the late 'depression' is due.

We certainly most earnestly desire to do no injustice to the farmer: and, unquestionably, it was not fair that his shoulders alone should have been left to bear, during the first few years of the labourers' movement, the entire burden of the increase in wages which that movement brought about. Landowners, during that time, held almost entirely aloof from the controversy which so fiercely raged between farmer and peasant, and gave nothing but—good advice, or advice which thy deemed good. Without protection for his capital the farmer, practically, had not the power to act independently, and compel the owner of the soil he farmed to share with him the burden of the increase given to the labourer. If he threatened to leave his farm there were plenty of others, in most cases, to step in and take it on the landlord's terms.

The poor farmer was thus doubtless forced into a dilemma; but instead of meeting the difficulty by energetically making the best of things, he—to put the matter in plain English—'sulked,' and discharged a number of his labourers to make up for the extra pay he had to give to those whom he retained, and by whose aid he farmed as best he could—which means that he farmed very badly indeed—allowing the land

to get foul, and permitting the extensive growth of weeds.

Then came the bad seasons and the increased development of foreign competition—for at that time we were getting more than a fourth part of the whole agricultural produce which we consumed in this country from abroad—and these two unlucky incidents helped to fill to overflowing the bitter cup of the English agriculturist. There is one especial way in which English farmers can meet foreign competition, namely, by producing those articles of consumption for which there is an immense demand in this country, but which will not bear the delay of distant transport, and cannot, therefore, in the present state of inventive science, be brought from the vast agricultural lands of America. We mean such articles as fresh milk, butter, and eggs, green vegetables of various kinds, the more delicate sorts of fruit—such as strawberries and raspberries; all the articles, in fact, which are produced by the modern dairyman, poulterer, and market gardener, who are types of tradesmen quite distinct from average English farmers, and may be described as developments of enterprising townsmen.

Our towns and cities are every year growing bigger, and their consumption of the produce—

easily and quickly damageable—produced by our dairymen and poulterers, and grown by our market gardeners in greater and greater quantities, is immense, and is likely to immensely increase. Here and there a farmer may perhaps be found who is turning his attention to this subject, but, taken as a body, our farmers have, during the last few years, been 'letting things go;' and not only have they failed to recognise what was the proper direction for their capital and energy, but they have neglected, to a large extent, their own business.

We especially noted this fact, as we have already said, during our recent tour through the West of England. But there is other evidence that to the state of things we have indicated must be ascribed, in a great degree, the agricultural depression. The Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the causes of this depression has not, at the time these lines are being penned, sent in its Report, and we do not, therefore, know what are the conclusions of the Commissioners upon this subject. But at the time when, during the parliamentary session of 1879, the appointment of the Agricultural Commission was under the consideration of the Government, the Executive Committee of the

National Agricultural Labourers' Union made a request, which was addressed to the Home Secretary, that the farm labourers of England might be represented on the Commission. This request was, however, refused. Thereupon the Committee of the Union, as they expressed it, 'determined that the labourers should be heard,' and that their views should be elicited as to what they considered to be the causes of the depression in agriculture. The plan they adopted to carry out this determination was to forward circulars to about a thousand villages and agricultural towns, soliciting information on the subject from the labourers themselves. The questions put by the Committee were, amongst others, the following :— 'How many labourers were employed ten years ago and what was the amount of produce per acre then?' and 'How many labourers are employed now, and what is the produce per acre now?'

The information thus solicited was collected and published in a pamphlet under the title of 'Evidence on the Cause of the present Agricultural Depression, obtained from practical and bona-fide Farm Labourers;' and it was issued during the present year, by the authority of the Executive Committee of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union.

It is a singular circumstance that, valuable as this pamphlet is, it has—possibly owing to the fact that the Union Committee have not taken pains to circulate it—obtained no notice from any influential section of the press. To it a short preface written by Mr. Joseph Arch, is attached. Mr. Arch says:—'The answers returned are unanimous and explicit, and, given by experienced and reliable farm labourers, are entitled to thoughtful attention. Much evidence,' he remarks, 'of a similar character might have been added, but it was desired to avoid needless repetitions. Theorists may ignore it,' he concludes, 'but no men living know better the cause of the decline in our agriculture than the men who till the soil!'

From two counties only—Dorset and Wilts—of the West of England, did the Union Committee gather evidence on the subject of the depression; but they made inquiries altogether in eighteen counties throughout England, and the result is practically the same in each. We may, therefore, select Dorsetshire and Wiltshire as representative of the general statements of the pamphlet. The information appears to have been gathered by circular subsequently to September 1879, and refers therefore to the harvests of 1879 and of 1869—

'the produce per acre' meaning the produce, except when otherwise stated, of wheat and barley.

On a Dorsetshire farm of nine hundred and fifty acres, twelve men were employed in 1869, but only nine in 1879, and the produce per acre had fallen from five quarters to three and a half quarters. On another farm in that county where eleven men were employed in 1869 and only six last year, the produce had fallen from eight to five quarters per acre. On a third, where the staff had been reduced from twelve to eight men, the produce per acre had similarly fallen from eight to five quarters per acre. The two last mentioned farms are in the same parish. From a third parish in Dorsetshire a correspondent —evidently a labourer—writes to the Committee of the Union as follows :—'The farm I am on is about four hundred acres. There is a dairy of forty cows, and a carter with five poor, jaded horses just able to crawl about, and a man called a bailiff who does but little work on the farm : so of course thistles and emmet-mounds abound. The next farm is rented by the same person, and is a thousand acres with about six labourers, five carters, and three or four boys. Nothing is properly done, the corn is not weeded,

and thistles, in many places, are thicker than the corn. Another farm, with not half the labourers employed that are needed, is in a most disgraceful state, and the thistles are so thick that they look like a dead copse. There is a small farm let with it which is in such a state that it is not worth five shillings per acre, being completely covered with fern and brambles. The poor men would gladly give twenty shillings an acre for this land, and would make a good living out of it. If the landlords would let the land in smaller farms there would not be half the distress there is.'

In the letter of another correspondent of the Union Committee occur the following statements and opinions:—'I have been for many years connected with farm-work, and I believe the present depression arises mainly from the following causes: many farmers have more land than they can manage, and in some cases more than they want, or wanted even when times were better. They have no security for their capital; therefore do not care to invest their money or put their energies into farming. In many cases too much machinery is employed and not enough manual labour, and so many of the important details of farming are neglected. Many of the farms are not half cultivated and are choked up

with all sorts of weeds. A good deal more draining is needed, and less restriction as to the manner of cropping. Game destroys much of the crops and often to a ruinous extent. Rents are too high and should be reduced. Large farms need dividing and small holders need encouraging, so that more food may be grown at home to prevent so much money going out of the country to buy food.' Besides other evidence of a similar kind from Dorsetshire, the three following statements were sent to the Union Committee from three different districts.

One is to the following effect:—'Much mischief is done by the game; my master had fifty sacks of oats eaten by rabbits in one field this year! The rates and taxes press very heavily on the farmers; the land wants more labour and better cultivation, with a different system of letting.' Another runs:—'Nearly half the land in this neighbourhood is lying uncultivated, partly from the farms being too large and the capital too small, and partly from the restrictions that the farm is under. One man, who cultivates his own land, grew four quarters of wheat and five quarters of barley per acre this last season. On another farm the mowers could not tell which would make the largest stack, the corn

or the thistles; and on the same farm, two years ago, a man cut, with one fair sweep of the scythe, twenty-seven docks!'

The third and last statement sent to the Union Committee from Dorsetshire is the following:—'One farm here of eight hundred acres has only eleven labourers; one of five hundred acres has three labourers; another of three hundred acres has only one man at work on it; and another farm of a hundred and fifty acres has but two men. Much of the depression arises from the use of reaping machines—owing to the horses being used in cutting when they should be employed in clearing the fallow land; and from the foul state of the land, which is choked with weeds, through insufficiency of labour. The farms used to be in smaller holdings and then more men were employed. Then, however, the average crop was ten or twelve sacks per acre, now it is not half that quantity.'

Very similar evidence was furnished to the Union Committee from Wiltshire, showing, in every instance, a considerable reduction in the farming staff employed—frequently a reduction to half of the number employed ten years previously to 1879—and a very considerable falling off in the produce of the crops. Two

of the examples given are the following :—First, 'A farm of two hundred and ninety acres has had thirty to forty acres of it with nothing on them but weeds for the last three years, and it is some of the best land in the village, if properly cultivated. There are several more farms of from fifty to sixty acres, on none of which is a regular day labourer employed!' Next :—'A farm of five hundred acres employs only two men, and the yield is only half what it was ten years ago. Another of four hundred acres with two men grew thirteen sacks to the acre ten years ago, but now only six; whilst another of four hundred acres, now employing one man, grew twelve sacks to the acre ten years ago, but now only five.'

We do not forget, when quoting these comparisons, that whilst 1869 was an average, 1879 was an exceptionally bad year. But we also remember that it has become the custom amongst agriculturists to lay all the badness of bad seasons, of late years, to the account of 'the weather.' There is a saying that 'a bad workman always complains of his tools.' We think it may, with equal justice, be said, that 'a bad farmer always complains of the weather.'

We have referred to the labourers' statements and suggestions on this subject, because we deem them worthy of attention : and we are bound to add that our own recent inquiries have produced evidence which strongly tends to corroborate them. Almost everywhere there will always be exceptions to a rule. Throughout the West of England we found that reductions had been made in the staff of men employed upon the farms ; the result being—after due allowance had been made for the labour-saving process, which had increased, and is still increasing, of turning arable into pasture—that there was a prevalence of bad and insufficient cultivation ; weeds, the great enemy of the agriculturist, though not of the lover of nature, being universally abundant.

The present *system* of agriculture in this country—a system which urgently calls for reform—is we believe responsible for more than half of the evils of which agriculturists so loudly complain : and if that system be altered by legislative or other changes, and a proper amount of energy be applied to the work of putting a sufficient amount of capital into the soil—by which means its productiveness may be increased by at least one-third—we shall

have no repetition of recent agricultural difficulties; for it is, we believe, neither the increase of wages given to the poor farm-labourer, nor 'foreign competition,' nor even the much-abused 'weather,' but *poor farming* which is mainly responsible for the 'depression.'

15.

DEPOPULATION.

A FACT of great importance and of significant interest has been for some time past, and is at this moment, staring this country in the face. It is that the population of nearly every one of its agricultural or purely rural districts has been, and is, steadly and persistently decreasing! This decline of the rural population of England was especially noticed of the period between 1861 and 1871, and the decline was most marked in the western counties. In 1801 the South-Western Registration District, which included the counties of Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wilts, and Cornwall, contained the largest population of all the ten registration districts of England; but, in 1871, this district had fallen in point of numbers to the sixth place. In 1801 the five counties named contained 1,100,000 inhabitants. The number, according to the Census of 1871, was

but 1,870,000, showing an average annual increase of only 11,000; or 770,000 for the full period of seventy years. If for the sake of restricting the comparision we compare one of these counties with one of the counties in the district which had outstripped the south-western division, the representative difference between them will be shown in a very marked manner.

The population of Somersetshire in 1801 was 273,577, whilst, in 1871, it was no more than 463,483, showing an increase, in seventy years, of nearly 189,906 persons. Comparing this county with Lancashire, in order to show the extraordinary contrast in the matter of increase in population presented by two important English districts, the one representing agriculture only, the other representing a mixed system but chiefly manufactures, we find that, in 1801, the population of Lancashire was 673,476, whilst by 1871 it had considerably more than quadrupled, having, in the seventy years, advanced from 673,476, to no less than 2,818,904. But although Somersetshire had shown an increase in its population, that increase was due to the augmentation of its town populations, whilst in its rural districts there was an actual falling off. The depopulation of the rural districts

of the county was, however, most marked in the period between 1861 and 1871. In 1861 according to the census of that year, Somersetshire contained 444,873 people; that is, in its cities, towns, villages, and hamlets. In 1871, as we have already shown, the population of Somersetshire had advanced to 463,483. These figures show, in the ten years, an increase of only 18,610 persons—an increase entirely due to the growth of two or three of its cities and towns—for, taking the purely agricultural portions of the county, it was found that, in no less than six Unions, containing 280 parishes, there has been, between 1861 and 1871, a considerable decrease in the population!

The same process of depopulation of the rural districts of the West of England had, during the period already indicated, been going on throughout the other counties which are the subject of this volume; and the forthcoming census of 1881 will, there is every reason to believe, so far as facts which have recently come to our notice enable us to form an opinion, show a much greater decline than any that has yet been noticed in the agricultural population of the western counties! That the exodus of the rural population has been mainly due to the miserable

condition, in the past, of the peasantry, there can be no doubt—a state of things which has induced them to leave their hovels in the west for better pay, better houses, kinder treatment and brighter prospects generally, such as they have been able to secure not only abroad, but in the northern counties, in the midlands, and in some other parts of England.

A Wiltshire clergyman, writing to us on this subject says:—'The number of empty houses in some of our country districts, and notably in and around Westbury—in one district, Heywood, amounting to fifteen per cent. of the whole number—proves that many of the industrial classes have either migrated to larger towns or emigrated to new colonies or to other distant countries.' Another Wiltshire correspondent states that there has been of late a rather considerable exodus from the rural parishes of labourers who have fulfilled the duties of Methodist 'local preachers,' and that the Methodist cause is thereby greatly suffering.

Writing of the western part of Devon a medical man informs us that the peasant population of that district 'is decadent owing to emigration and the drifting off to large towns of both sexes as they attain adult age. It is partly

owing also to the extended use of machinery in agricultural operations, by which a less amount of manual labour is required. Foreign competition, too, has had its effect upon the peasant population, by causing corn to be less grown, and the breeding of cattle to be increased.'

With the population the trade of rural districts is going from them. Another Devonshire correspondent writes to us :—'Trade, as we all know, is gradually gliding away from small villages, and finding its way to large towns. This village at one time could boast of having wheelwrights, blacksmiths, machinists' shops, and a stay factory ; and numbers of waggons, carts, ploughs, harrows, and other implements were made here. But all this is changed now, and the work which these things represented is gone to other places, and to larger firms than any that ever plied their callings here—a state of things that tends to make village life dull, though no doubt the decrease of the rural population will be better for the future of the labourer—for it is to be hoped it will make him wiser, better, more useful and more prosperous.'

The fact that, in the face of the depopulation of the rural districts of the West of England,

farmers, in those districts, aver that they have no difficulty in obtaining as many men as they want, is no disproof of what has been stated, for the reason that almost every farm is undermanned. If agriculture secured its due attention at this moment in the West of England there would be, we are convinced, a serious dearth of labour! That such a crisis will arise, ere long, we have little doubt. But, then, it may be found impossible to induce the population—which have, so to speak, been divorced from the soil—to return to it. They will not, at any rate, in such a case, return until the former conditions of their existence have been radically changed.

16.

MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROGRESS.

We have made it the subject of the most careful and painstaking inquiry to ascertain what improvement, if any, has been made during recent years in the moral and intellectual, as well as in the material, condition of the peasantry of the western counties. The result of this inquiry is very encouraging, and, though the progress which has been made is not everything that could be desired, it is very marked, and affords proof of an unequivocal advance from the position occupied by the peasant even eight years ago. We propose to give first the statements and opinions of our correspondents, and we shall then proceed to record our own impressions.

Speaking of a district of South Wiltshire, one correspondent writes to us :—'I am happy to say that a drunken agricultural labourer is now rarely to be seen. Temperance principles are

very strong among the rural population of this district. There are flourishing temperance societies in connection with almost every religious body, and I think the general morals of the people would bear favourable comparison with those of the same class in any part of the country. The religious feeling, too, is strong, if the attendance at the various places of public worship be any criterion, though there is too little of it, here, as elsewhere. As regards the question of education, I think a fair proportion of the labourers are able to read well enough to enjoy the perusal of the newspaper. I know that a great number of newspapers are weekly sold by our one bookseller here.' Another correspondent, a clergyman, speaks to us of the difficulty of ensuring, in his district, regularity of attendance at school of the children amenable to the provisions of the agricultural children's act; and this difficulty has somewhat retarded the progress of education in his district. He adds:—'In morals, while bastardy is far too common, the "social evil" is less prevalent than in more populous places. Drunkenness is also less prevalent, but not so petty larceny, police cases being frequent.'

A surveyor of highways, in the north of

Wilts, who controls the employment of a large number of labourers, engaged on stone-breaking and other highway work, has sent us an interesting communication, touching his knowledge of the educational status of the men he employs. It must be presumed that the class of labourers in question are, ordinarily, drawn from the lowest kind of agricultural labourers—those who, either from age or incapacity, are least valuable to the farmers, and who are consequently content to receive the small pay given by parishes for highway work. Our correspondent says:—'My highway district consists of twenty-eight parishes, including over three hundred miles of highway. I employ, except in harvest, about a hundred labourers—digging, breaking, and laying stones. From October to March I probably employ as many as a hundred and fifty, including many youths from fourteen to twenty years of age, who are stone-breakers, only working by the yard or road. These earn, on an average, from five to ten shillings per week. Amongst our stone-breakers are a lot of old men, from fifty to eighty years of age. Most of these are broken-down men, who have been improvident, and probably addicted to drunkenness, and can only earn from five to eight

shillings per week. Of these, not one in twenty can read or write. Many of them, doubtless, could do both in early life, but have neglected those acquirements, either owing to family cares, want of opportunity, or, as in some cases, utter indifference. One old man, to whom I gave a pen, last year, to make a cross as a receipt to a paper, attempted to make the cross with the wrong end of the pen, without using any ink. This I believe was due to absolute ignorance, the man never having handled a pen before. The highway acts require men to put their marks, when they cannot write their names, upon all receipts for payments for labour; but many of the labourers have a peculiar and inexplicable reluctance to touch a pen. It must be remembered that in these agricultural districts we generally get the worst of the labourers—old and crippled men—for road work. This work indeed has been, and still is to a certain extent, looked upon as the last place of work before the Union workhouse. But the system is now, I am glad to say, changing; for under the old system, good labourers object to be seen engaged in road work.'

'As a proof of how many can write their names, amongst the class of men we commonly

employ,' continues our correspondent, 'the following statement may be instanced. We keep a separate wages-book for each parish. In only one book out of twenty-eight have I signatures without crosses, and that is in a small parish where there has never been a public-house. As a contrast to this, in another large parish, where public-houses abound, and where last year at various times I employed more than twenty hands, only one man signed his name. In the majority of parishes I have never been able to get signatures. Many of the labourers we employ deplore their want of education, and I often hear one say: "I am no scholar, for when I was young there was no chance to learn, as there is now." Farmers, I find, are generally opposed to education, although some amongst them, it must in fairness be said, look hopefully for better labourers with better education. I find,' adds this correspondent, 'that amongst the lowest order of agricultural labourers there is a dislike of compulsory education, the law regulating such being regarded as oppressive. The principal luxury of the peasant is beer and tobacco, and it is a curious, though an acknowledged fact, that you can get more work done for a quart of beer than you can for a shilling.'

A Dorsetshire vicar tells us that he believes the moral condition of the peasant depends much upon cottage accommodation. Left to themselves, many families would be quite content to occupy one sleeping room, and it is often found necessary to send 'the inspector' before overcrowding can be stopped.

'Saturday night,' continues this clergyman, 'is *the* time selected for excessive drinking, and perhaps nothing has conduced more to check this great evil than the early closing of public-houses. I do not think that the Dorsetshire labourer is more anxious to benefit by the increased opportunities of educating his family than formerly, but the Agricultural Children's Education Act, even though there be no machinery for strictly enforcing its provisions, has done much good when held over the heads of refractory parents.'

Of the effects of that disgraceful relic of a bygone age, the Statute, or 'hiring,' Fair, still held at Dorchester, the same correspondent gives us some interesting particulars, describing it as 'the curse of the county.' He says, 'there is not that improvement in the Dorsetshire labourer which might be expected, taking into consideration his higher rate of wages, his educational

advantages, and his better cottage accommodation;' and this he largely ascribes to the influence of the 'fair.' In many towns the statute fair has ceased to exist, but this annual institution lingers at Dorchester. Men and women, lads and young girls, flock in from all the country round to the fair, where they assemble to be looked at and hired by would-be employers. But it is the expectation of a 'spree' which is the great inducement to attend this fair, and when the market is over, the rest of the day and the evening are given up to revelry. The public-houses of the town are filled, and the usual results follow. Then there is the return home, later on, and dissipation is continued at many a wayside inn. 'Cheap papers, and the means of advertising,' our correspondent remarks, 'have, by lessening the attendance at the fair, lessened its evil effects, as the best farm servants are, by this means, found and agreed with before the fair day, and so the temptation is avoided on the part of each peasant to spend as much in dissipation upon himself as might furnish food for the whole of his family.'

A Devonshire correspondent, writing to us of his experience of a large and important agricultural district, in the vale of Exeter says :—'With

regard to the question of education, there is some difficulty in forming a correct opinion. One of the first farmers I visited in order to elicit opinions on this subject, informed me that every man on his farm can read and write. In other places I find a different state of things in existence, and, although the majority of the peasantry are able to read and write a little, the rest are totally unable either to read or write. In fact it may, I think, be safely asserted, that quite one-third of the old men and women know nothing whatever of either reading or writing. The whole of the farmers complain bitterly of the attempt to provide better education for the agricultural class, and attribute their difficulty in obtaining good labourers from amongst the younger ones to the better state of education. One farmer complained that not one of his men could be persuaded to put his sons to work on the farm. One of them, for instance, had three sons serving at sea, on a man-of-war; another had apprenticed his boy to a shoemaker, and so on. The farmer further said it was much the same as regarded the daughters of his men; for they preferred to learn dress-making, or to go out to service in any capacity other than that of a farm

servant. Perhaps the cause of the disinclination of the peasant to allow his offspring to work on the farm is not far to seek. What is more natural than that he should wish his children to be saved from the experiences through which he himself has gone; from a life, in short, of incessant toil, deprived of the luxuries, and of many of the necessaries of existence.'

On the subject of religion this correspondent remarks:—'It is very rare to find an infidel peasant. Not that agricultural labourers are enthusiastic in their devotions: for some, doubtless, never attend a place of worship. The great bulk, however, of the peasantry are pretty regular attendants at "church" or "chapel." I think the peasants in this district prefer to go to "church." A few are chapel-goers; but the large majority are church-folk.'

'Cases of immorality,' continues our correspondent, 'are exceedingly uncommon in this neighbourhood. At any rate I have failed to discover, after diligent inquiry, more than two or three bad cases. On the whole, I consider the peasantry are, at the present time, a good sample of morality. At the same time, I think it is a great blessing to the agricultural labourer that he is so far removed from temptation. In the

agricultural districts remote from the public-house the labourer is fairly temperate. It is only when he removes nearer to a town that he yields to the habit of excess in drinking; and it is evident that, just in proportion as he is far from or near to places abounding with temptation, and with facilities for obtaining drink, he keeps from or inclines to excessive drinking. And when he fairly gives himself up to the habit, I have known cases in which he will spend as much out of his wages of twelve shillings, as three-and-sixpence in one week in the purchase of beer or cider.'

Another Devonshire correspondent, whilst believing that there is room still for great improvement in the education of the peasant, remarks:—'A great mistake is, I think, commonly made in representing the peasant as a poor ignorant soul who hardly knows his right hand from his left. After fifty years of experience among them, I can say I have found them quite equal to their class in towns, and equally well able to take care of "number one." I have, indeed, often been amused at bright sallies of wit from them when I did not expect them.'

From Somersetshire the statements and opinions we have received on the subject of

education and morals are especially interesting and encouraging. Though there, as elsewhere, the evidence points to shadows as well as lights, the lights certainly predominate. The rector of a remote agricultural parish in the western division of that county writes to us:—'As regards education, recent legislation has tended to a great advance, and few boys are now at work who cannot read and write fairly well; and as time goes on, the careful enforcement of the provisions of the Education Acts must tell more and more. It is evident that the work must be gradual; the chief difficulty being the desire of parents to get the benefit of their children's earnings as soon as possible, and the impossibility of making clear to them the advantages their children derive from remaining regularly at school till the required standard is passed. In many cases the hardship is not slight to parents deprived of their children's earnings, and perhaps it is this that makes the attendance committees and magistrates enforce the Act rather leniently. With regard to the present state of morals of the people, I can only speak of this parish: but, of it, most highly, thanks, chiefly, to the care of the late rector and his curate. I believe,' concludes our correspondent, 'that

though drunkenness is not regarded as the disgrace and sin it should be, the agricultural labourers generally would not appear to a disadvantage as compared with other classes of working men. One thing I can say, that intoxication amongst women is a thing unknown to me here; and the formation of temperance societies is certainly—though perhaps slowly—doing good.'

From another part of Somersetshire a correspondent writes: 'Few villages have been more neglected than ours, but now we have efficient schools, fairly attended.'

'Though education,' writes a correspondent from the vale of Taunton, 'is at a comparatively low ebb, most of the men and women can, and do, read; but many of these cannot write a word. The weekly penny newspaper is taken in almost every house in the village, and an intelligent interest is felt in almost every leading event of the day, showing a marked progress from the rude indifference and ignorance which ruled in the earlier period of my acquaintance with this district.'

'The state of morals,' continues our correspondent, 'is about the same as I believe it to be in most country villages—neither very bad

nor very exemplary. Brawls and exhibitions of drunkenness are certainly rare, as also is the open kind of petty theft which before the introduction of the rural constabulary was so frequent in this neighbourhood, and which is now to some extent committed, but on a smaller and more systematic scale, and in such a manner as almost to defy detection and prevent conviction. The species of petty theft I refer to consists generally of pilferings of eggs, of firewood in small quantities, and of pocketfuls of corn, etc., for the pigs—intercepted from the supply which should go to the employer's horses. Lumber, also, convenient for the erection of pigstyes is taken, as well as other small items of property, with a prosecution for the taking of which most employers would shrink from connecting their names. Were they to prosecute in such cases, they would only bring contempt upon themselves. Yet, in the course of a year, articles purloined, in the way indicated, make in the aggregate a not unimportant total.'

'There is a quiet unspoken advance on the part of the agricultural labourer,' writes another Somersetshire correspondent—'an advance partly due to education and its many attendants. There is especially more common sense as to

drink and domestic economy. Not a little of this advance is due to the gradual awakening to sanitary reform, by which the old content with any hovel is giving place to more civilised ideas, and more ambition for a proper home.'

'Thews and sinews will, I think,' this correspodent goes on to say, 'soon demand a high price.' 'I suppose,' he adds, 'it must finally come out of the landlord, as the farmers are already in terrible perplexity, and as far as any profits at present rentals go, they leave no margin for a rise of wages to the workman.'

We had occasion, in 1872, to write in strong condemnation of the state of things prevailing in the village of Wrington, where the peasantry, at the time of our visit to the district, in that year, were in sad plight. Defective drainage and overcrowded cottages were decimating the underfed population of this village: and, in a volume published in 1874,* we stated that, twelve months after our first visit to it, the local sanitary officer reported (June 1873) to the Axbridge Board of Guardians, that the sanitary condition of Wrington was so bad, that he had discovered nineteen cases of fever in fourteen houses; and he further reported that no less than twenty-six

* *The English Peasantry.*

children suffering from fever, were absent from the village school at one and the same time!

Now, however, the moral and intellectual as well as the material atmosphere of this village has improved. There is good and efficient education, which has been extended to the adjoining chapelry of Redhill. A handsome school building has been erected, and is daily filled with children who had been before neglected, and the reports upon their progress made by the government and by the diocesan inspectors are uniformly favourable.

In the village of Burrington, in the same Mendip valley, the admirable system of education—to which attention is especially called in the fourth chapter of Part I. of this volume—is still persistently carried on under the energetic superintendence of the vicar—the Rev. Prebendary de Moleyns. In an interesting communication, which has been forwarded to us by this excellent clergyman, he says:—'You stated that our school, in 1873, was declared the most proficient for religious knowledge in the archdeaconry of Bath. Every year since that time—that is to say, for seven years consecutively—the school has maintained the highest place, not in the archdeaconry only, but in the diocese at large.

Printed papers of questions, opened and sealed again in the presence of inspectors, are annually issued to each competing school (there were a hundred and sixty-nine, in all, last year), and out of a maximum of two hundred marks, the average of a hundred and seventy-three has been attained by the children in this village, a number of marks which is twenty-five more than the second best school in the diocese. This result has not been obtained at the expense of secular education, for the latest report, under the last named head of instruction, was as follows: —"This school is in very good order; it is taught with care and intelligence, and is making satisfactory progress in attainments." The contributions towards the school, from the children, you mentioned, in 1873, as amounting, during one year, to forty pounds. Since then they have reached seventy pounds, whilst the government grant has exceeded a hundred pounds.'

Although there is no inn at Burrington for the sale of alcoholic beverages, there is, the vicar informs us, 'a public-house of the best character in the shape of a coffee-room. This room' he adds, 'situated in a central part of the village, has been erected and furnished at the

cost of Mr. and Mrs. Llewellyn of Langford Court. On the table are spread, not only local papers, but copies of the London papers—daily, weekly, illustrated and comic—and of the monthly magazines, etc. Here are no worthless books, the "weedings" of gentlemen's libraries, but new, well-bound volumes, pleasant to the eye, so far as their exteriors are concerned, and good for mental food. Such an institution supplies the want which educated children must feel when they are accustomed to attend a good school. The boys and girls of my school who are properly qualified, can still, as of yore, obtain situations, and I have been able to assist a good many of them to become established in shops, railway-offices, and counting-houses. Lads whose brains are of better fibre than their muscles, and who would never earn much with spade or plough, are thus provided for, out of the village, and relieve, by that means, the local labour market. Those who inveigh against what they term "over education" should consider that rail, steam, and telegraph, have opened out, during recent years, new spheres for intelligent labour, and that, as the country constantly feeds the town, so country schools should provide the material which the town needs, and send

intelligent children where their acquirements are sure to find a market.'

Prominence here, as in a preceding chapter, has been given to the admirable system of teaching maintained by Mr. de Moleyns, because it shows how much good can be accomplished by the earnest and untiring effort of one individual, especially if that individual happens to hold the important post of minister of the gospel with the responsible charge of a whole parish.

We have, similarly, shown in an earlier chapter what a great and good work was performed by one man in the person of Canon Girdlestone, who, single-handed, fought against the inertia—nay against the meanness, the immorality, the disease, and the misery of a whole district; and, single-handed also, rubbed off, in that district, the social rust which had been accumulating during many a decade—opening up by noble courage and unflinching persistence, stimulated by a profound sense of DUTY, the liberal resources of a wider world than any they had ever dreamed of, to poor, half-starved, ignorant, and miserable tillers of the soil. It is such forces, indeed, which move the world.

From the evidence which we ourselves collected during our tour, in the present year,

through the western counties, on the subject of the intellectual progress of the peasantry, we may instance the following, which are fairly representative cases. 1. A family of seven: the father cannot write, but can read a little, and is very intelligent: the mother can both read and write a little. Four of the five children—the youngest being a baby in arms—go to a British School, paying sixpence a week, twopence for the two eldest, and a penny each for the others. The eldest girl is eleven, and can read and write prettily. The next, ten, can write very well. 2. A family of six: the father can read and write well, but the mother can only read a little. A son of fifteen can read but not write, but four younger children can both read and write. 3. A man and his wife: the latter can neither read nor write, but the former can do both, well. 4. A family of six: the father and the mother can read; the mother can only write a little, but is otherwise very intelligent and well spoken. The acquirements of the children increase in inverse proportion to their ages; the eldest son, twenty, but a breadwinner for the family, can only read; the next two, fifteen and thirteen, also breadwinners, can read better and can also write; but the youngest, a girl

of nine, still at school, is the 'scholar' of the family, and proficient beyond the average of children of her age. The fifth and sixth instances we shall give are typical of whole districts, and are striking ones. The first of these cases illustrates the intellectual condition of a population where hovels and overcrowding abound, and public-houses are plentiful, and where the children largely evade the Education Acts. Here the adult inhabitants are almost entirely uneducated. In a hamlet of this village, two years ago, an inquest was held, and the jurors were drawn from this specimen district. Eleven of the twelve were agricultural labourers, and not one of these could write; the twelfth man, a farm bailiff, was able to write. The other of these two cases is that of a village where the money earnings are above the general average of the county, where there are excellent cottages and no overcrowding, and where not only is education for the children insisted upon, but good schools and a public library and reading-room are provided. Here it is the exception to find labourers who cannot at least read; and the intellectual condition of the children is considerably above the educational average of surrounding villages.

In estimating, in conclusion, the moral, intellectual, and material progress made within the last few years by the peasantry of the western counties, it is not sufficient merely to take account of external signs. The diminution of drunkenness, the more general ability to read and write, and the increase of money earnings, for instance, must not alone be judged by visible degrees. The prominent and actual indications of a kind to admit of being reduced to visible proofs, do not convey all that there is to be told. There is sufficient, if not tangible, indication of a great, unspoken advance. The rapid development of our railways; the extension of the telegraphic system of this country; the increase of postal facilities; and beyond and above all the widely-extended power of THE PRESS, have exerted an educating influence, which has been mighty in its effects upon what was, not long since, the poorest, and most ignorant population of England—a population which had been too long left uncared for and forgotten. Scattered over the land in remote and outlying districts, away from the hum of busy city life, this population had lived and toiled almost, as it were, in a world apart, and under a system which was nothing better than a relic of feudal

times. The English peasant was the victim of this system. Ignorant, isolated, helpless, he would never probably, unaided, have ventured to lift up his head. Generation after generation were born to the same life of cheerless toil, alternated by no warm ray of hope or ambition. Children of tender years were sent out into the fields to earn a few pence, to help to keep the hungry wolf, whose name is STARVATION, from the squalid 'cottage,' that, damp and unhealthy though it was, served with its mud walls and its mockingly 'picturesque' exterior, to hide from the passer-by the terrible poverty and suffering that were borne with so touchingly patient an endurance by its inmates. Helpless ignorance, social and physical degradation, wretchedness and squalor—such were the results of our agricultural system, so far as the labourer was concerned.

But times, happily, have changed. Substantial advance has been made beyond the barrier which at one time seemed to shut up the English peasant in a state of hopeless misery: and he now looks out upon the expanse of a larger world, with bright hopes of further progress from the point he has already reached. Burning lights have searched the dark corners

of our island, and industry and commerce from other fields have offered a helping-hand to the tiller of the soil. In the western counties the peasant's frame is still enfeebled, and his movements are slow, from the effect of years of semi-starvation. But this is a constitutional condition, which will disappear when better wages have induced a larger consumption of animal food. The rising generation will be freer from this taint—the taint of misery; and each succeeding race—under brighter circumstances—will be stronger and better than its forerunners.

Agriculture, in this country, has by no means reached its maximum limit of excellence. There is room for a great advance. It is natural to suppose that the inertia, which affected the labourer a few years since, should have also affected the farmer. The peasant has shaken himself, to a great extent, free from the influence of this inertia, and his emancipation has given a shock to the agriculturist from which the latter has not even yet recovered, and the effect of which has had very much, we believe, to do with the recent 'depression.' So much for the material phase of the peasant's condition.

Education, as we all recognise, does not consist in mere 'book knowledge.' But whilst the present generation of peasant children have secured, and are continuing to secure, more of this species of acquirement than any previous generation, their parents, though in some cases unable to read, are nevertheless better instructed, both socially and politically, than their predecessors.

There is, doubtless, still room for great improvement in the condition of our peasantry; but it is pleasant to know that, in the comparatively short period of eight years, this section of our labouring population gives unquestionable evidence of moral, intellectual, and material PROGRESS.

INDEX.

A

ACCIDENTS to children, 41
Across country, 224—5
Advance, an unspoken, 378
Agricultural changes, 24
  Commission of 1867, 8, 10
  Commission of 1879, 350—1
Alfred, King, 159
Allotments, 52—3, 55, 112—13, 121, 136, 147-51, 164, 174, 289—93
Amalgamation of farms, 209
'American cheddar,' 20
  competition, 306
Amesbury, earnings at, 241
Among the peasantry in 1873, 191—216
Amusements, 340—5
Animal food, 136, 161—2
Appeal for help, an, 86—7
Apples, 122
Apprenticeship, parish, 63, 248, 250
Ash, Dr. Linnington, 277—8
Athelney, 159—62
  peasant, the, 159—62
Athletic sports, 342
Avebury, cottages at, 261—3
  earnings at, 236—7
Avon valleys, 16
Axe, the, 22

B

'BACK RENT,' the, 202
Bad seasons, 349
Banwell, 106
Bastardy, 367
Bath, 19
Beer, allowances of, 53, 55
  shop, the, 42
  truck, 236
Benefit clubs, 144—6, 255—6
Benevolence, 162, 178—80, 211
  wages and, 142—6
Bere Regis, cottages at, 34
Berries for food, 100
Blackdown Hills, wages on, 165
Blanket Loan Club, a, 299
'Bloody Assize,' the, 154—5
Bideford, earnings around, 248—50
Body and soul, 183
Boy labour, 39—40, 43, 48—9, 231

Boyle's Reports, Mr., 37
Bread and cheese, 182
Bread, price of, 135, 162
in 1770, price of, 305
in 1850, price of, 305
in 1878, price of, 305
Breakfast, a peasant's, 182
a Devon peasant's, 79
Bremhill, overcrowding at, 29
Bridgwater, wages at, 142, 251
Brighter side, the, 111
Bristol, 19
'Bristol-super-Mare,' 166
Bryanston, overcrowding at, 33
Burrington, 115—16, 380—3
wages at, 109—10, 252
Butcher's meat, 80, 135, 183, 213, 229—30, 238, 308
Butchery of peasants, 154—5
Butcombe, cottages at, 37
Butter in 1770, price of, 305
in 1830, price of, 305
in 1878, price of, 305

C

CABBAGE and bacon fat, 182
Caird, Mr. James, 304
Cannington, wages at, 143—6, 251
Cattle of Devon, 22
Chalcote, cottages at, 264
'Chalky waves' of Wilts, 17
Charminster, cottages at, 34
'Charms,' 333—7
'Cheddar, American,' 20
cheese, 20, 105—6
Children, agricultural, 222—4
'locked in,' 41
Children, neglect of, 40—2
Chillington, cottages at, 37
Chippenham, 16
Church Taunton, wages at, 165
Cider counties, the, 123
'Cider country,' a great, 152
Cider, manufacture of, 124—5
sour, 182
supposed effect of, 278
truck, 51, 122—6, 152, 171, 214, 247, 251, 253
Clayhidon, wages at, 165
Clothes, second-hand, 295
Clothing clubs, 144—6, 296, 298, 301
Coal clubs, 144—6
Cob cottages, 109, 272—3
Compton Abbas, cottages in, 269
wages at, 245
Cookery, ignorance of, 314—15
Corduroy, 232, 294—5
Corn growing of Dorset, 18
of Wilts, 17
Cost of living, 215
'Cottage homes,' 191—99
Cottage or pigsty? 182
Cottages and sanitation, 259—82
in 1843, 26—33
in 1868-9, 33—7
Cowherds, modern, 159—65
Cow, keeping a, 257
Cranbourne, cottages at, 34
Cream of Devon, 22
'Credit,' 202—3, 315—17
'Crippled up,' 80, 136, 183
Crops extraordinary, 139—40
Cruel treatment 82—4, 101—2
'Cunning man,' a, 338—9

D

DAIRY farming of Devon, 22
 of Dorset, 18
 of Somerset, 20
Dame schools, 231, 321—2
Damp cottages, 111
Darkness, sitting in, 168
Dartmoor, 22
Depopulation, 209, 360—5
'Depression' in 1850, 9, 57
 in 1879—80, 220, 223, 306
 poor farming and, 346—59
Deterioration of work, 247—8, 250
Devon and Somerset Railway, 213
Devon, area of, 215
 cottages, 30, 35—6, 272—8
 cultivated area of, 215
 description of, 21—2
 peasants, North, 182—3
 privileges in, 256—7
 produce of, 22
 village, a, 73—4
 wages in, 183, 245—50
Diet, a barley, 310
 a potato, 310
 of Wilts peasant in 1850, 57—8
Doctors in rural districts, 168
Dorchester, cottages near, 270—1
Dorset, area of, 17
 cottages of, 30—4, 268—70
 description of, 17, 18
 privileges in, 256
 produce of, 18
 soil of, 17
 wages in, 244—5
Drainage, 113, 274, 276
Drainage of cottages, 30—1
Dress, a peasant woman's, 230
 in 1842-3, 53—4
 in 1868-9, 61
 change in, 297
 of the period, 294—302
Drink in 1842—3, 53
 in 1850, 55, 58
 in 1868-9, 61
Drinking-water and drainage, 81
Drunkenness, 366—68, 375, 377, 386
Dunster Castle, 171
 to Wootton Courtney, 171
Dwellings, 26—37

E

EARNINGS in 1770, 58—61
 in 1842—3, 49—52
 in 1850, 54—61
 in 1868—9, 61
 in 1880, 234—54
Early labour, 40, 44, 65, 99, 195
Education, 222—4, 230—1, 388—9
 an incentive to, 115—21
 in 1842—3, 63—6
 in 1868—9, 68
 and morals, 62—9
Empty houses, 363
English Agriculture, Caird's, 8—10
English peasantry, The, 7, 10
English peasants of to-day, 219—389
Exeter, vale of, 22
 wages near, 246
Exe, the, 22

Exford, 208—11
wages at, 210
Exmoor, 19, 22, 169, 207—16
forest, 207—8

F

Fairs, statute, 69
Family of twelve, a, 166—8
Farmers, liberal, 156—7
Farms, small, 291—2
Fertile tract, a, 143
Finery, 299
Fire-wood, 256—7
Five shillings a week, 108, 183
Folk-lore, superstition and, 330 9
Fontmell Magnus, cottages at, 269
wages at, 245
Food, 229—30, 233, 238, 291, 307—15
of Devon peasant, 79, 80
drink and dress in 1842—3, 53—4
in 1850, 57—8
in 1868—9, 61
Fordington, cottages at, 34
Foreign competition, 349, 364
'Forenoons,' 79
Fortune-telling, 331
Four shillings a week, 101, 183
Fox, on wages, Mr. C. H. 164—5
Fuel, 174—6, 256
of Devon peasant, 78
Fustian, 295
Fyfield, cottages at, 260
wages at, 235—6

G

Game, destruction by, 355
Garden, the cottage, 149
Geology and agriculture, 15, 16, 24
Girdlestone, Canon, 181—3, 215, 318—23, 383
and migration, 173—97
and the farmers, 82—6, 89—92
Girls, earnings of, 52
work of, 39, 49
Glance at the past, a, 15—69
Gloving, 129—30, 133, 136, 249, 252
'Granny,' a poor old, 195—7
'Grist corn,' 50—1, 56, 76—7, 100, 176—7, 246—7, 255
Group, a picturesque, 239—40
'Grubbing up' hedges, 182
Guardians and sanitary government, 81—2

H

'Halcyon days,' 243
Halberton, cottages at, 36, 320—1
in 1866, 75—85
in 1880, 318—23
overcrowding at, 36
Harvest wages, 50, 55, 168, 177—8, 242—5, 247
of 1880, 234, 306
Hatch Beauchamp, cottages at, 163
wages at, 163

Hemans, Mrs. 193
Hemyock, wages at, 165
Holsworthy, cottages at, 276—8
  wages at, 250
'Home' and the dwelling, 26
Honiton, earnings near, 246
Horse-beans for food, 311
Hours of labour, 47—9, 77—8, 101, 167—8, 205, 229, 231, 237
Hovels, 84, 107—8, 136—7, 172—3, 206, 261—2, 267, 276, 320—1
  disappearing, 283
Huckster, the village, 315—17

I

IGNORANCE of common things, 64
Ill-luck, 337
Illegitimacy and cottages, 30
Improved cottages, 259—60, 264, 266—70, 273, 278, 280—2
Incantations, 331—2
Incentive to education, an, 115—21
Inertia in farming, 210
Infant 'caretakers,' 41—2
Insurance Society, a Pig, 324—9
Intellectual progress, moral and, 366—89
Introduction to peasant life, 1—11
'Isles,' 243
Isolated community, an, 208—11
Iwerne Courtnay, cottages in, 269
  wages at, 245

J

JEFFREYS, Judge, 154

K

KENNET, 236
  cottages at, 260—1
  overcrowding at, 260—1
  valleys, 16
Kinglake on allotments, Mr. R. A., 147—8
Kingsbridge, earnings near, 246—8

L

LABOURERS and vestry meetings, 81
'Lambing' season, the, 241
Lancashire in 1801, population of, 361
  in 1871, population of, 361
Landed Interest, The, 304
Land, rent of, 139—40, 150
  in 1770, rent of, 304
  in 1850, rent of, 304
  in 1878, rent of, 304
Large farms, increase of, 268
Life histories, two, 226—33
Life history of the peasant labourer, 11
Lights and shadows, 219—26
Living and 'credit,' 303—17
'Lodgers,' 285
Luck, 337
'Lump' worker, a, 237
Luxuries, 230, 311, 370
Lying-in charity, a, 299

M

Manningford, wages at, 239
Market-gardening, 349—50
Marks for names, 369—70
Marlborough, 221
  wages near, 235—6, 251
Meat in 1770, price of, 305
  in 1850, price of, 305
  in 1878, price of, 305
Medical opinion of women labour, 48
Melbury Abbas, cottages at, 268
  wages at, 244
Mendip Hills, the, 19—20, 104, 166
  valley, wages in the, 252
Migration, peasant, 86—96, 214—15
Milbourne St. Andrew, cottages at, 270
  wages at, 245
Milk diet, 113—14, 179, 212
Milverton, wages near, 251
Minehead, wages near, 194—6
  to Porlock, 191—9, 205—6
Mining works, 180
Misery and want, 137—8, 141
  in cities, 3—4
  the taint of, 388
Misogamists, 208—9
Mitchell, George, 98—104
'Model cottages,' 37
Model village, a, 283—8
Money earnings, present, 234—54
Monmouth's rebellion, 152—5
Montacute, 99, 129
  cottages at, 133—8
  wages at, 132—7
Moon-worship, 332
Moor farmers, 208—10
'Mop' fairs, 69
Moral and intellectual progress, 366—89
Morals in 1842—3, 66—7
  in 1868—9, 69
Mud hovels, 163

N

Needlework, teaching 117
Nether Avon, cottages at, 264
  wages at, 240—1
Newspaper, the penny, 377
Norman's reports, Mr. 34—5
North-country peasants, 58—61
North Curry, cottages at, 163
  wages at, 163
  Devon peasants, 76—85
  Molton, 213—4
Norton Fitzwarren, wages at, 155 252—3
No 'Squire,' 211

O

Oare, cottages at, 238, 263
  wages at, 237—8
Offal, butchers', 196
Omens, 333, 337—8
Onions and bread, 182
Orchards, west-country, 122
Osborne, Rev. S. G. 32—4, 66—7
Otter, the, 22
Overcrowding in 1842—3, 26—33, 66—7, 69
'Overlooked,' people, 338—9

P

PARRETT, the, 142, 160
Pawlett Hams, 143
Peasant cider, 124—6
 life in 1872, 73—188
 migration, 363—4
Peat, 174—6
Pebbles and clay floor, 273—4
Phelips family, the, 132
Physical power, food and, 56
'Piece-work,' 131, 236—7, 243—4
Pig Insurance Society, a, 324—9
Pigland, 200—3
Pig story, a, 155
Pigsty or cottage? 163
Pigstyes and cottages, 31
Plough to prosperity, from the, 98—104
Plymouth Sound, 22
Poets and peasant life, the, 5—6
Poor farming, 209—10
 and 'depression,' 346—59
Poor Law Commissioners' reports of 1842—3, 8
'Poor living and sour cider,' 183
Poor rates and low wages, 81—2
Porlock, hovels at, 206
 wages at, 206
 Weir, 206
Port of Bristol, 21
Post-office, the, 386
'Potato ground,' 52—3, 55, 109, 131, 173—4, 182, 194, 238, 257, 289—93
 supper, 182
Poultry, 257
Poverty and riches, 127—41
Present money earnings, 234—54
Press, the, 386
Privileges, 50—2, 145, 169—80, 194, 249, 255—8
Progress, 234—5, 366—89
Prosperous farmers, 138—41
Puddleton, privileges at, 256
 wages at, 245

Q

QUANTOCKS, the, 19—20

R

RABBITS, destruction by, 355
Rack-rented allotments, 149—51, 164, 182, 238, 290—2
Railway, the, 386
 works, 180
Rainfall of western peninsula, 16
'Rakings,' 176—7
Rates and taxes, 195, 355
Rates in aid, 183
Reading and writing, 369, 373, 384—5, 389
Red Hill, cottages at, 280
Reduction of labour staff, 358
Religious feeling, the, 367, 374
Rent-free cottages, 235, 238, 249, 251, 254, 275
Rent in 1770, cottage, 304
 in 1850, cottage, 304
 in 1878, cottage, 305
Rents, cottage, 112, 130—1, 133—4, 143—4, 161, 164, 172, 194, 233, 236—7, 253—4, 285
 high, 112

Rheumatism, 80, 183
'*Romance' of peasant life, The*, 7
Rose cottage, a, 194—9

S

SALISBURY PLAIN, 17
Sanatorium, West of England, 184—8
Sanitation, cottages and, 259—82
'Saturday nights,' 287, 370
School at Burrington, 115—20
 at Halberton, 96
 at Wootton Courtney, 179
'Schooling,' 231
Schools, 65, 321—2
'Scores,' 178, 243—4, 316—17
Sedgemoor, battle of, 153—4
Sermon against farmers, a, 85
Seven shillings a week, 206, 210—11
Sewage as a beverage, 81, 113, 265—6
Sheep-farming of Devon, 22
 of Dorset, 18
 of Wilts, 17
Shopkeeper, the village, 315—17
Short story of peasant life, a, 181—3
Sickness, 182
Sid, the, 22
Situations for peasant children, 119—20
Six shillings a week, 172
Smock-frock, the, 232, 294—5, 297, 300—1
Snails for food, 99, 100
'Social evil,' the, 367
Somerset, cottages in, 30, 36—7 280—2
 description of, 18—21
 in 1801, population of, 361
 in 1861, population of, 362
 in 1871, population of, 361
 present wages in, 251—4
 privileges in, 258
 produce of, 18—21
 East, 166—7
 wages in, 167
 Mid, 166
 West, 169—80
South-country peasants, 58—61
South Devon, wages in, 248
'South Hams,' the, 22
 cottages in the, 274—5
 wages in the, 246—8
South Molton, 213—4
Stanhope's reports, Mr., 34
Statute fairs, 69, 371—2
Stoke St. Gregory, cottages at 163
 wages at, 163
Stoke-sub-Hamdon, 129—31
 cottages at, 130—1
 wages at, 131, 252
Stourpain, overcrowding at, 27—31
'Strappers,' 243
Straw for pigs, 257
'Strike' in Warwickshire, 107
 of peasantry, first, 7
Studley, overcrowding at, 29, 30
'Summing' breeds cunning, 233
'Sunday best,' 296, 300
Superstition and folk-lore, 330—9

Supper, Devon peasant's, 79—80
Supply and demand, 165
Sunday with Canon Girdlestone, a, 73—97
Swindon, 16

T

'Takin' notes,' 170
'Tally' system, the, 300
Taunton, cottages near, 282
 wages at, 155—6
Taunton Deane, Vale of, 20
Taunton, the Vale of, 152—8
Taw, the, 22
'Teakettle broth,' 79, 182, 308
Teignmouth, wages around, 246
Teign, the, 22
Telegraph, the, 386
Temperance societies, 367
Ten persons in one bedroom, 260—61
Theft, petty, 378
Thornycombe, wages at, 245
Timberscombe, wages at, 211
Times, letters to the, 9
'Toad Fair,' 339
Tone, the, 160
Torbay, 22
Torridge, the, 22
Totnes, wages around, 248
Trade, decline of rural, 364
Truck system, 122—6
'Turf,' 174—6
 ashes, 176
'Tutworth,' 243—4
Typhus fever, 32

U

Union and the 'Depression,' Labourers', 354—1
Upavon, wages at, 239—40

V

'Vegetation' of the peasant, 183
Village, a Devonshire, 73—4
Vows, foolish, 332—3

W

Wages and benevolence, 142—6
 in 1770, 305
 in 1850, 305
 in 1878, 305
 in 1880, 234—54, 307
Warriors, peasant, 153—5
Warwickshire movement, 3, 6—7
Water with taste and smell, 266
Weeds growing apace, 354—6, 358
Wellesbourne, 'strike' at, 7
Wellington, wages at, 164—5
Westbury, 265
 wages near, 242
Western counties in 1801, population of, 360
 in 1871, population of, 360—1
West-country peasant, the, 24—5
Western country, the, 15—23
 garden of England, the, 22

Weston-super-Mare, 106, 166—7, 184—5
Wet clothes, 183
'Wet through,' 111
'White Hart' at Taunton, the, 155
Whortleberry harvest, 178
  pies, 178
Wife and children, the peasant's, 38—44
Wilcote, village of, 283—8
  wages at, 239
Williton to Dunster, 170—1
Willow stripping, 161
Wilton, wages near, 243
Wilts, area of, 16
  cottages in, 30, 34—35, 260—8, 283—8
  description of, 16, 17
  privileges in, 255—6
  produce of, 17
  wages in, 235—44
  North, 221
'Windfalls' and cider, 123
Winfrith, cottages at, 34
'Wise woman,' a, 338
Witchcraft, 331
Withypoole, 211—3
  cottages at, 212
Withypoole, education at, 212
  wages at, 212
  to North Molton, 213
Women at the plough, 47, 229
  earnings of, 52, 55, 205—6
  labour, 39—44, 46—47, 78, 228—31, 236—7, 242—3, 245
Wootton Courtney, 171—80, 281—82
  overcrowding at, 173
  wages at, 254
Work and earnings in 1842, 44—52
  in 1850, 54—61
  in 1868—9, 61
'Wringing, the second,' 124
Wrington, cottages at, 110, 280—82
  in 1880, 380
  overcrowding at, 112
  wages at, 109—10
  the Vale of, 105—14
Writing and reading, 369, 373, 384—5, 389

Y

Young's tours, Arthur, 9, 58—61

THE END.

LONDON: R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS.

9
706

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY