

CHAPTER XXV.

General notice of the condition of England, about the middle of the sixteenth century.—Sources of information.—Population.—Parish Registers.—Capital.—Taxation.—England a lightly taxed nation in these times.—Evasions of subsidies.—Sources of revenue.—The royal household.—Military expenditure.—Military organisation.—Archery.—The Navy.—Defence of the coasts.—Civil administration.—Despotism of the government.—Bribery.—Small salaries of officers.—Parliaments.—Their subserviency.—The Nobility and Gentry.—Justices of the Peace.—Merchants become landed men.—Commercial spirit entering into rural affairs.—Aspect of the country districts.—Inclosures.—Monastic lands let as copyholds.—New distribution of land.—Effects upon the labouring population.—Common and Several.—Inclosures defended.—The Statute of Vagabonds indicates an exceptional state of society.—Its horrible enactments.—The Statute repealed.—Offences against property.—Impostors.—Agricultural industry.—Distribution of the produce of land.—Dearth.—Rise of Rents and prices of commodities.—Attempts to keep down prices and force sales.—Debasement of the Coinage.—Effects upon prices at home and upon exchange abroad.—Sufferings of the labourers.

BEFORE we proceed in our narrative of the historical events of the reign of Edward VI., we propose to offer a general notice of the condition of England at the close of the long reign of Henry VIII.; including some aspects of society of which the features had become more distinct a few years later.

Between this state of social existence and our only possible point of view, the veil of three hundred years is interposed. Those whose lives were contemporary with the middle, or even with the close of the sixteenth century, might have beheld some things under a stronger light than we do; but even they saw only a part, and that part very indistinctly. If there had been no great social movement at that period, they might have formed a clearer judgment of many circumstances of which they have left us a confused opinion. So the task of the historian would be more defined, if he could now look upon "each change of many-coloured life," and even upon the external face of nature in wilds and solitudes, without being disturbed by rapid transitions, which, like a shifting object in a photographic camera, preclude a distinct image. As it is, he is compelled, out of the most fragmentary and ill-assorted materials, to piece out a rough and imperfect picture, having the want of proportion and harmony which essentially belongs to such mosaic work.

That was an age in which the foundations of all statistical inquiries was laid by the establishment of parish registers; but many generations had left in those books the brief records of their comings and their goings, before the larger uses of Registration were discovered. It was an age when Statutes contained long preambles, out of which we may draw conclusions as uncertain as those derived from some modern Parliamentary Reports; but in the Statutes themselves are to be found the best materials for a correct though limited account of life in England, from the peer to the beggar. Proclamations, Minutes of Council, Letters of Ministers—furnish incidental glimpses of society beyond the verge of chambers of state. The Chroniclers have their occasional value in addition to that of political annalists; but it is not from them that we must principally seek to trace the course of industry or the tone of morals. The foreign visitors, who note what seemed to them remarkable, too often deal in generalities; but they sometimes give minute touches which are of lasting interest. Our ambassadors to foreign courts present us contrasts with the state of their own country. The poets of manners were not as yet; for the drama, properly so called, had not risen into its office of a mirror of nature. Yet we may discover the routine life of the husbandman in one homely poet, who had the rare merit of describing what he knew. With a Diary or two, equally trustworthy whether the journal of a king or of a funeral-furnisher—with Wills, Trials—last, but not least valuable, Sermons—we may farther obtain facts or suggestions. With these aids, then, let us pick our way through somewhat difficult ground, and endeavour to leave some review of our footsteps, not wholly without accuracy. We can pretend to no completeness.

We have stated that at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Population was estimated, upon very uncertain data, at four millions.* We have no distinct materials for any such guess in the middle of that century; but twenty-five years later we have a precise statement, which enables us to form some judgment. Harrison records that, in the muster of able men for service in 1574 and 1575, the number amounted to 1,172,674.† Taking the able men as a fourth of the entire population, we have a total of upwards of four millions and a half. In the Injunctions of Cromwell to the Clergy, a Book, or Register, was directed to be kept by every parson, vicar, or curate, for every church; in which, on each succeeding Sunday, the clergyman should enter the partic

* *Ante*, p. 247.

† "Description of England," book ii. c. 16.

ulars of the weddings, christenings, and burials made the whole week before. This injunction was evidently neglected; for in the reigns of Edward VI. and of Elizabeth, the injunction was repeated. On the first attempt to enforce this most salutary measure, the people were "in great fear and mistrust," as Sir Piers Edgecombe wrote to Cromwell. "Their mistrust is," he says, "that some charges, more than hath been in times past, shall grow to them by this occasion of registering these things."* It was the same fear which excited hostility to the census of 1801. The Parish Registers, of inestimable value as local and family records, were never regarded as the foundation of national statistics; and it was not till the Registration Act of 1836 was brought into full exercise by the most skilful organisation, and its deductions made available for the general benefit by scientific analysis, that we could ascertain the amount of one of the great elements of progress, the increase of population; and form a right judgment of the causes by which such increase was accelerated or retarded. As we proceed in our view of the condition of the people in the middle of the sixteenth century, we shall meet with constant complaints of the decrease of population. These are founded upon the most extravagant estimates of the number of the more ancient inhabitants; and an equally blind confidence in an alleged decrease "by laying house to house and land to land, whereby many men's occupancies were converted into one, and the breed of people not a little thereby diminished."† Henry VIII., we are thus informed, "lamented oft that he was constrained to hire foreign aid, for want of competent store of soldiers here at home. . . . He would oft marvel in private talk, how that, when seven or eight princes ruled here at once, one of them could lead thirty or forty thousand men to the field against another, or two of them a hundred thousand against a third, and these taken out only of their own dominions."‡ It might have occurred to the king, if he had been less engrossed with matters beyond reason, to have also marvelled how such vast armies subsisted in the Saxon land of woods and morasses; especially when we find him in his own days of improved cultivation, forbidding the Scottish king to pass with his train from France through the north of England, as "his highness could not have there victuals and other necessaries, for the furniture of his own train when he should repair into those parts."§

* State Papers, vol. i. p. 612.

† Harrison, book ii. c. 19.

‡ *Ibid.*

§ State Papers, vol. i. p. 536.

The direct taxation of a people will always, to some extent, enable us to form a notion of their available Capital. The rate of subsidy in the time of Henry VIII. will show at how low an estimate the government fixed the power of the saving classes to contribute. By the "Act for the Subsidy of the Temporality" in 1542-3,* a grant payable in three years was made upon personalties. Upon subjects not worth more than five pounds, in coin, plate, stock, merchandise, corn in store, household stuff, and other moveable goods, and money owing above just debts, four pence in the pound was to be paid; with a rising scale of eight pence, sixteen pence, and two shillings, to twenty pounds and upwards. There was a double rate upon aliens. On real estates of one pound to five pounds annual value, eight pence in the pound was levied; from five pounds to ten pounds, sixteen pence; from ten pounds to twenty pounds, two shillings; above twenty pounds, three shillings. In 1545, there was another subsidy of two whole fifteenths and tenths, levied in the same manner. And yet this income and property tax, going as low as the persons who had only accumulated five pounds beyond their average earnings, produced a sum so inconsiderable, when compared with our modern experience of the extent of taxation, that we might wonder where the accumulation existed to enable the industry of the country regularly to go forward in a course of improvement. Wriothesley, the chancellor, writes to the council in 1545, "You see the king's majesty hath, this year and the last year, spent 1,300,000*l.* or thereabouts; and his subsidy and benevolence ministering scant 300,000*l.* thereof, I muse sometime, where the rest, being so great a sum, hath been gotten."† Having regard to the altered value of money, partly by the influx of silver into Europe, and partly by the debasement of the coin, we can scarcely reckon this three hundred thousand pounds at more than three millions. And yet that is a large revenue from taxation during two years. It is especially to be considered large when compared with the amount annually raised by taxes in the time of Charles II., which did not much exceed a million and a quarter, when the difference in the value of money was much less than at a hundred years previous.‡ Compared with other countries England was always a lightly-taxed nation, even up to the days of Sir Robert Walpole. With the exception of these occasional subsidies, and the duties upon goods exported and imported, the revenue

* 34 & 35 Hen. VIII. c. 27.

† State Papers, vol. i. p. 831.

‡ See Macaulay, vol. i. p. 287.

was wholly derived from resources which Henry VIII. constantly asserted were his private possessions, but which the parliament as constantly took care should be applied, as far as possible, to public uses. The Venetian ambassador, Micheli, in a luminous description of England in 1557, addressed to his Senate, says, "The liberty of this country is really singular and wonderful; indeed, there is no other country, in my opinion, less burthened and more free. For they have not only no taxes of any kind, but they are not even thought of: no tax on salt, wine, beer, flour, meat, cloth and other necessaries of life, which, in all parts of Italy especially, and in Flanders, are the more productive the greater is the number of inhabitants which consume them."* It was this absence of taxation upon the necessaries of life, and upon the materials of industry, which enabled England to go so rapidly in advance of other nations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She still went forward, but with comparative slowness, in the eighteenth; and it was not till the nineteenth century had far advanced that the great obstacles to national prosperity were cast off, and we saw the wisdom of making the producer work under a lighter load, and the consumer enjoy at a diminished cost. The problem of reduced individual taxation and increased national revenue was only solved three hundred years after the times of which we are writing.

The amount produced by a subsidy will scarcely enable us to form any estimate of the available Capital of the country. The one divine of the age who boldly assails every moral delinquency, tells us that a fraudulent return of property was a customary sin: "When the parliament, the high court of this realm, is gathered together, and there it is determined that every man shall pay a fifteenth part of his goods to the king, then commissions come forth, and he that in sight of men, in his cattle, corn, sheep, and other goods, is worth an hundred marks, or an hundred pound, will set himself at ten pound; he will be worth no more to the king but after ten pound. Tell me, now, whether this be theft or no?" † "He will marry his daughter," says the preacher, "and give with her four or five hundred marks, and yet at the valuation he will be a twenty pound man." The salve for the conscience, probably, was the general belief that the king was very well supplied with money without entrenching upon a daughter's marriage-portion. Henry VIII. had told his people that when he had driven the idle and luxurious monks from their possessions, he would apply their rev-

* Ellis, 2nd Series, vol. ii.

† Latimer, "Sermon at Stamford."

enues to great public uses. He had absorbed those revenues. He was richer than any king of England before his time. His ordinary income,—from the guardianship of Wards, of whose property while they were minors the crown had the usufruct; from Livery, or one year's income upon their succession, of those who held lands under the crown; from Reliefs, or sums paid on the renewal of military fiefs; from the Duchy of Lancaster; from the First-fruits of bishoprics; and from various other ancient sources,—amounted to about 150,000*l.* per annum. The seizure of church property was held to have doubled this permanent income. And yet we may wonder, with the prudent chancellor, how the king contrived to spend 1,300,000*l.* in two years; if we did not know that the crown was always in debt, and that it sometimes applied the sponge to its debts. Edward VI. was overwhelmed with debt, upon which he paid fourteen per cent. interest.* We shall have to notice, hereafter, some of the effects of one of the notable expedients of his reign, and of that of his father, for diminishing the debt by debasement of the coin—an expedient which, in the strictest sense of the image, could do nothing but commend the ingredients of the poisoned chalice to their own lips.

The household expenditure of the second Tudor sovereign was upon a larger scale than that of any of his predecessors. The Venetian ambassador says, "There is no nation which in its manner of living and ordinary expenditure is more extravagant than the English; because they keep more servants, with a greater distinction of offices and degrees in which such servants are placed. In this manner, to mention only one particular, in order to give an idea of other expenses of greater moment, the expense of the court in the mere article of living, that is, of eating and drinking, and of what solely relates to the table, amounts to from fifty-four to fifty six thousand pounds sterling a-year." He is speaking of the time of Queen Mary, and says that not the fourth part was then expended as in the time of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. The cost of national defence, of ambassadors, judges, and other public servants, he holds to be small in comparison with the enormous household expenditure. † We may judge from later times of the cost of the great officers about the royal person—the lord steward, lord treasurer, lord great chamberlain, earl marshal, lord chamberlain, treasurer of the household, comptroller of the household, vice-chamberlain, cofferer, master of the horse. But we can form no idea from

* King Edward's Journal, in Burnet, p. 51, ed. 1683.

† Ellis, 2nd Series, vol. ii.

modern experience of the array of inferior officers. We know that Burke, in his great speech on economical reform, said that every attempt to regulate the civil list had failed, because the turn-spit in the king's kitchen was a member of parliament. A statute of Henry VIII., which clearly bears the mark of his own master mind, regulates, with a tragi-comic attention to parade, the execution of a sentence by the lord steward upon an offender convicted on the verdict of a jury of the household for striking within the precincts of the palace. The offender is to lose his hand. The chief surgeon is to be present, to sear the stump when the hand is stricken off. The serjeant of the pantry is to give bread to the maimed man. The serjeant of the cellar is to be ready, with the same tenderness, with a pot of red wine. The serjeant of the ewry is to bring linen for the surgeon. The yeoman of the chandry is to bring seared cloths. The master cook is to be present with a dressing-knife, which he is to deliver to the serjeant of the larder, who is to hold the knife till execution be done. The serjeant of the poultry is to be ready with a cock for the surgeon to wrap about the stump. The yeoman of the scullery is to prepare a fire of coals, and the searing irons. The chief farrier is to heat the searing irons. The groom of the salcery is to bring vinegar. The serjeant of the woodyard is to provide the fatal block and beetle. * We may judge from this terrible array of household potentates, to give solemnity to the maiming of an unhappy offender against the sanctity of the king's palace, what an army of deputies there must have been to do the real work of the kitchen and the larder.

The parliament, in enacting the subsidy of 1545, for the prosecution of the war against France and Scotland, employ the most humble language in presenting the grant to the king, beseeching him to accept their gift, even "as it pleased the great king Alexander to receive thankfully a cup of water of a poor man by the highway side." Wars did not touch the people of England, they justly say, as other nations not so happily situated. They were not afflicted with "spoils, burnings, and depopulations." "We," they declare, "so live out of all fear and danger as if there were no war at all; even as the small fishes of the sea in the most tempestuous and stormy weather do lie quietly under the rock or bank-side, and are not moved with the surges of the water, nor stirred out of their quiet place, howsoever the wind bloweth." † This flowery language expresses a great practical truth. To her wall of the silver sea,

* 33 Hen. VIII. c. 12. clause iii.

† 37 Hen. VIII. c. 25, Preamble.

England owed her security from "the hand of war," during the five hundred years which had preceded the Tudor rule; and to this, more than to any other of her happy conditions, we are indebted for the constant progress of her industry, and the comparative lightness of her burthens. But, nevertheless, the cost of her defence, and her foreign armaments, was not inconsiderable, in the years when her government was not restrained by poverty or prudence from rushing into war. In the State Paper Office there is "a brief declaration of the whole military and naval expenses incurred by Henry VIII. and Edward VI. during their wars with France and Scotland." This abstract also includes the cost of suppressing the insurrection of 1549, and the charges of castles and garrisons. The total amount from September 1542 to September 1552, is 3,491,471*l.* * This gives an annual military expenditure of 350,900*l.* The government was always embarrassed during these seasons of hostility. "The poor labourers,"—says Latimer, preaching before Edward VI. in 1550—"gun-makers, powdermen, bow-makers, arrow-makers, smiths, carpenters, soldiers, and other crafts, cry out for their dues. They be unpaid, some of them, three or four months; yea, some of them, half a year; yea, some of them put up bills this time twelve months for their money, and cannot be paid yet." There was a large cost, and there were heavy arrears, although England had no standing army.

The military organization of the sixteenth century did not materially differ from that of the fifteenth. † The nobles were still called upon, each to bring his quota of armed men into the field, when the king demanded their services. Cromwell was showing his private armoury to the Marshal de Castillon; and, when the marshal wondered at the store of harness and weapons, Cromwell said, "there were other particular armouries of the lords and gentlemen of this realm, more than the number of twenty, as well or better furnished than mine was." ‡ Micheli conjectured that, in the time of Mary, twenty-five thousand troops could be raised, all provided with cuirasses and polished arms. But in all cases of apprehended danger, or for foreign service, the muster-roll was taken in every county and in every city. England then possessed an armed population. Perlin, a French physician who came to England at the time of queen Mary's accession, says, "The labourer,

* "Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series," 1547-1580. Edited by Robert Lemon, p. 44. Published by authority, 1856.

† See *ante* p. 104.

‡ Letter in Cotton Library; quoted in Ellis, 2nd Series, vol. ii.

when he cultivates the land, leaves in a corner of the field his backler and sword, and sometimes his bow; for in this country it is as if all the world carried arms.* There may be some exaggeration in this; but, without doubt, the bow, if not the sword and shield, was amongst the possessions of every man who had a recognised station in the commonwealth. In all emergencies the crown summoned the national force to its assistance. In 1549 king Edward, being with Somerset at Windsor, when the lords were seeking to drive the Protector from his sway, sends to the bailiff and constables of Uxbridge, "to levy all the force in their power, especially archers, and to bring them well victualled to Windsor Castle." † Archery was the national sport; and all other games were forbidden by the statute. ‡ Complaining of the decay of archery, Latimer says, "In my time my poor father was as diligent to teach me to shoot, as to learn me any other thing; and so I think other men did their children. He taught me how to draw, how to lay my body in my bow, and not to draw with strength of arms, as other nations do." The good bishop exclaims with the enthusiasm of a patriot,—"It is a gift of God that he hath given us to excel all other nations withal: it hath been God's instrument, whereby he hath given us many victories against our enemies." It was not the weapon alone that made the English formidable. Micheli, speaking of the means of defence possessed by us, says,— "The ardour in fighting would be shared by all, the veterans as well as the raw levies; because, as everybody knows, there is not a nation in the world that esteems danger and death more lightly than the English." Roger Ascham, writing from the Continent, declares that "England need fear no outward enemies. The lusty lads verily be in England. I have seen on a Sunday more likely men walking in St. Paul's Church than I ever yet saw in Augsburg, where lieth an emperor with a garrison." The lusty lads held to the bow. The arquebuss came very slowly into use in England. To discharge the original hand-gun the match was held in the hand. The arquebuss had a trigger conveying the match to the priming. The musket was an improved arquebuss. Somerset had his musqueteers; but they were foreigners. Nor was our cavalry of so great importance as the vast body who could be called into the field at a day's notice, with the light skull-cap and the quilted jacket, the long bow and the pike. There was a general

* "Description des Royaumes d'Angleterre et d'Escoce," Paris, 1558. Reprint, p. 29.
 † Calendar of State Papers, p. 24.
 ‡ 33 Hen. VIII. c. 9.

assessment in time of war for providing light horsemen and demi-lances; but, if we are to rely upon the intelligent Venetian, who presents such clear statistics of this period, the horses of England, though produced in greater number than in any other country of Europe, were "weak and of bad wind." They were fed merely on grass, he says. Horses fit for heavy cavalry, he adds, were not bred in England, but were imported from Flanders. The navy of this period has been noticed in the last chapter. The constant expense of keeping ships afloat was a bar to our early maritime efficiency. The hundred ships of Henry VIII. were dwindled to forty in the reign of Mary. But there were merchant vessels in every port, which could easily be armed in time of need. The royal ships were larger than those of other nations. When Philip of Spain came to wed Mary, the English admiral affronted the Spaniards by calling their ships mussel-shells.* The English shores were never unguarded. On every eminence there was a beacon and a flag-staff. If an enemy approached in the daytime, the signal fluttered from hill to hill. If in the night, a thousand watch-fires were ready to spread the alarm from the North Foreland to the Lizard, from the Naze to the Tyne. The people gathered at the point of danger from town and village. The noble and the esquire were at the head of their tenants. The portly alderman led forth his stout burghers and his nimble apprentices. Whatever was the discontent at home, Englishmen would fight to the death against the foreign enemy. The foreigner knew this; and left us to decide our quarrels amongst ourselves.

The ambassador of the Venetian Senate regarded the government of the Tudors as a despotism. The kings, he says, are absolute lords and masters. They govern through a Council, as the Grand Turk governs through the Bashaws. The Council, composed of the great household officers, and of other persons of rank, follow the king's person wherever he goes. Their mandates are obeyed as though they proceeded from the king himself. The State Papers of the reign of Henry VIII. show, however, how constantly the king himself attended to the administration of affairs. Undoubtedly Henry was a sovereign of great industry; of considerable talent; of various knowledge. But his inordinate self-love; his desire for personal display; his jealousy of every servant who was not a slave to his will, in the most unlimited abnegation of a free judgment,—these qualities, as he advanced in life,

* Tyler, "Original Letters," vol. i. p. 414.

drove him into the most heartless and cruel despotism. By the force of terror, or the avidity for gain, every civil officer, whatever his rank,—a Cromwell or a Cranmer, a Norfolk or a Russell,—was a crouching menial. The ecclesiastics who filled civil offices were amongst the most abject, with the sole exception of Wolsey, who, by the extraordinary power of his intellect, held a divided sway with his master. That position Wolsey reached as the supereminent churchman as much as the accomplished statesman. After the domination of the Romish church had been destroyed, the bishops who discharged civil functions were little more than ambitious sycophants. Latimer has given a striking picture of “unpreaching prelates” holding civil offices,—“placed in palaces, couched in courts, burthened with ambassages,”—lords of parliament, presidents, comptrollers of mints. The bold bishop says, “I would fain know who controlleth the devil at home in his parish, while he [the priest] controlleth the mint.”* The comptroller of the mint was usually a jobber of the rankest character. But all the civil officers were underpaid in their salaries. They all looked to grants and leases for their reward; and they all lived upon something even better than expectancy, for they all were bribed. The secondary offices were openly bought. There was small pay, but large peculation. It was in vain that Latimer cried out to the young king Edward, “Such as be meet to bear office, seek them out; hire them; give them competent and liberal fees, that they shall not need to take any bribes.”† In the letters of ambassadors we constantly find them complaining of the insufficiency of their pay. If they could bide their time, they received some place in which they might pillage without offence. The high places of the law were those in which the bribe was most regularly administered. When Bacon fell, in the next half century, for receiving bribes, he followed the most approved precedents, according to which chancellors and chief justices before him maintained their state and ennobled their posterity. The system went much lower. The bribery of juries was so common, that a man-killer with rich friends could escape for a crown properly administered to each quest-monger; for so the vendor of a verdict was called.

The later history of the reign of Henry VIII. is the history of the subserviency of Parliaments. The degradation of this great bulwark of English liberty in earlier times was now manifest to foreign observers. “In the beginning, and, indeed, many years

* Sermon of the Plough.

† Fifth Sermon before Edward VI.

after the introduction of parliaments, the liberty and security of those three estates [clergy, nobles, and commons] were such that even the lowest person of them might, without any danger, were it even against the king's person, give free utterance to any expressions calculated for the public good, or dictated by zeal for his country; the kings in those times being looked upon rather as political and civil chiefs than as lords and masters, or monarchs, as they are at the present day.” The Venetian who writes thus, had accurately read English history. But he adds, with an equally accurate observation of matters of his own day, that the kings could keep out or bring in whoever they pleased as representatives. “They are at this time become so formidable and powerful that they may do even as they please; nor can anybody, whether, it be in parliament or out of it, impunely, and, indeed, without utter ruin to himself, venture to stand up in opposition, or even to make the least show of resistance, to their pleasure. In short, servants they enter parliament, and servile are their proceedings therein.”* The addition of thirty-one members to the House of Commons, in 1536, by the legislative incorporation of Wales with England, though a measure of justice and of ultimate national benefit, necessarily secured a larger number of subservient representatives. The influence of the crown in the principality had been so long predominant, that few Welsh members could have entered St. Stephen's chapel—for there, about the middle of this century, did the Commons sit—with any disposition to assert an independence which they did not find amongst their English fellows. By a special statute the knights of the Welsh counties were to be paid wages of four shillings a day, and the burgesses two shillings during the continuance of the parliament, and during their journeys to and from the place of sitting. These were the wages of the English members, and they were levied by the sheriffs and mayors; but it appears from this act for Wales that the assessment and the payment had in some cases been neglected.† The wages were a just payment for the loss of time in public service. The wages were not the cause of the general corruption. The crown was supreme, because the king's displeasure was death, and the king's smile promised a golden harvest.

The nobility and gentry for the most part dwelt in their respective counties. The more ambitious hovered about the court, and had then houses in London and Westminster. “There be some

* Micheli, Ellis, 2nd Series, vol. ii.

† 35 Hen. VIII. c. 11.

gentlemen in England," says Latimer, "which think themselves born to nothing else but to have good cheer in this world; to go a hawking and hunting."* There were public duties for all of them to perform, besides offices of hospitality and charity to their tenants and poor neighbours. The times were changed, when there was only one of the high-born in a wide parish, who was the absolute lord of the district. In that curious paper ascribed to Edward VI., entitled "A Discourse about the reformation of my abuses," he says, "The grazier, the farmer, the merchant, become landed men, and call themselves gentlemen, though they be churls. **** The artificer will leave the town, and, for his more pastime, will live in the country; yea, and more than that, will be a justice of peace, and will think scorn to have it denied him."† The great nobles knew the potency of that industrial strength that was quietly laying new foundations of civil liberty and equality of rights, even under a government that was destroying the old. The proud admiral, lord Seymour, said to the marquis of Dorset, "I advise you to make much of the head yeomen and franklins of the country, specially those that be the ringleaders, for they be men that be best able to persuade the multitude, and may best bring the number; and therefore I will wish you to make much of them, and to go to their houses, now to one, now to another, carrying with you a flagon or two of wine and a pasty of venison, and to use a familiarity with them, for so shall you cause them to love you."‡ The artificer wanted to be a justice of the peace. He saw the commonly exercising judicial functions in towns—mayors, aldermen, sheriffs—and why not in the country? He had his desire when he gained the money-qualification. The office of justice of the peace was originally one of high dignity and power. The regular administration of the law by the judges in circuit abated the local authority which was often abused. An attempt was made by the government of Henry VIII., to extend the functions of the justices of the peace beyond their ancient courts of Quarter Sessions by allowing them to divide themselves into districts, two at least in each district, and hold Petty Sessions. The statute of 1541-2, which gave this power, indicates how wide a field was presented to the local magistracy, for honest and intelligent or dishonest and ignorant action. They were to put in execution the laws against vagabonds; against retainers and giving liveries; they were to

* Sermon on the Beatitudes.

† Burnet, "Records," vol. ii. p. 71.

‡ Taylor, "Original Letters," vol. i. p. 140.

enforce archery and put down other games, called unlawful; they were to proceed against forestallers and regrators; all matters concerning victuallers and inn-holders came within their province. It was soon discovered that magisterial vigilance in excess might be as great an evil as magisterial supineness. In 1545 the six-weeks' sessions were abolished by statute, and the functions of the justices were again confined to their ancient Quarter Sessions; "as the king's most loving subjects are much travailed and other wise encumbered by the keeping of the said six-weeks' session."*

"The merchants become landed men. The artificer will leave the town." If we assign their due import to these words of Edward VI., we may be enabled, with the aid of some illustrative facts, to understand the material condition of England at this period. M. Guizot has indicated one of the great principles out of which a new state of things had arisen: "In the course of the sixteenth century, the commercial prosperity of England had increased with extreme rapidity; and in the same period territorial wealth, landed property, had in great measure changed hands. This progress of the division of land in England during the sixteenth century, through the ruin of the feudal aristocracy and other causes, is a fact to which sufficient attention has scarcely been given. All documents of that period show us the number of landed proprietors prodigiously increasing; and great part of the lands passing into the possession of the gentry, or lesser nobility [petite noblesse], and of the citizens [des bourgeois]."† What had taken place at an earlier period in the towns, was now taking place in the country districts. As the feudal tenants who had clustered round the baronial castle were now grown into independent burgesses, so the villains, having substituted rent for service, had grown into farmers and graziers, and so on to landed proprietors. Those of the towns, who had saved money as artificers or dealers, came to share the advantages which they saw were derived from the judicious occupation of land. There were some of the richest soils in the kingdom ready for occupation. There were some of the abbey lands to be sold or let, where flocks and herds had cropped the richest pastures, and the barns had been filled with the finest wheat. There were vast unenclosed grounds, which the manorial lords would gladly grant as copyhold to the provident burgess who had been dealing in broad-cloth, and now wanted to become richer by raising the great material for its pro-

* 37 Hen. VIII. c. 7.

† "Civilisation in Europe," Leçon xiii.

duction. Rents were everywhere rising, which circumstance encouraged the diligent man who had saved money to invest it in land for profit. The commercial spirit had deeply penetrated into the whole system of rural affairs; and the old iron bond of feudal protection and dependence was changed for the lighter link of mutual interest. Let us endeavour to form some notion of the aspect of rural England at this epoch.

The French physician who came to look upon England, and abuse it, in the time of queen Mary, describes the country as enclosed with all sorts of trees, "so that you might think in passing along that you were in a perpetual wood."* The foot-people, he says, can get into the foot-paths in the grounds [sentiers] by climbing up ladders [escaliers]; but horsemen must keep on the highway. A messenger of Cecil, travelling post to Stamford, in 1548, describes how he was caught in a storm; and by way of a shorter cut, made a hole to squeeze through my Lord Privy Seal's hedge at Thornhaws.† But there were vast tracts of marsh-land in every county and not only in the fenny countries. These were abandoned to the crane and the bustard, the bittern, the heron, the shovelard, and the mallard. A statute of 1543-4, laments that there were formerly within the realm great plenty of wild-fowl, whereby the king's household, and those of noblemen and prelates, were furnished, and markets abundantly supplied; and it forbids the use of nets, and the taking of eggs at certain seasons. Ducks, mallards, widgeon, teal, and wild-geese, are herein enumerated, in addition to those birds above recited, now almost unknown. In the last century, the crane had forsaken the island. In the time of Henry VIII., the eggs of the larger and smaller wild-fowl were not only destroyed, and the birds taken in unlawful nets, but the breeding-places had been partially obliterated by the progress of cultivation. When the marshes were made profitable in the neighbourhood of towns, the floors of houses ceased to be strewn with rushes. Still, there were thousands of acres of marsh land, and thousands of acres of heath. The statutes indicate the advance of man in subjecting the land to his use. One act of parliament encourages roads to be made through the Weald of Kent.‡ Another provides for the inclosure of 4293 acres of Hounslow Heath, extending not only over the districts that in recent times comprised Hounslow Heath, but to the parishes of Brentford, Isleworth,

* Perlin, p. 25.

† Tytler, "Letters," vol. i. p. 118.

‡ 14 & 15 Hen. VII. c. 6.

Twickenham, and Teddington. The barrenness and infertility thereof are ascribed to the want of diligence and industry of men.* In the inclosure of Hounslow Heath, commissioners were appointed to view the ground, and to allot certain portions of the same to the inhabitants of the various parishes, to be held in severalty as copyholds, and to be converted into tillage and pasture. What the king could do with Hounslow Heath, was done by the lords of manors throughout the country. There was in many cases a similar division of the lands of the suppressed monasteries. "A Bill concerning the houses, tenements, and lands lying in Walsingham, to be letten by Copy, which late were belonging to the Priory," recites that the town, formerly "populous, wealthy, and beautifully builded, is at the present time, by great decay, and by the withdrawing of the trades of merchandise there, and by divers other sundry occasions of late happened, like to fall to utter ruin, and to be barren, desolate, and unpeopled." The act therefore provides that all the lands and granges shall be declared Copyhold, and granted by the stewards of the manors to any persons, who would pay the rents, heriots, and fines prescribed.† The town of Walsingham had fallen into decay, "by sundry occasions of late happened," when no pilgrims resorted thither; when the monks ceased to employ artisans about their house, labourers to dig, retailers to provide many comforts and luxuries, servants to wait upon them. The like process of inclosure of waste lands, and division of large feudal property, had been going on throughout the kingdom, from the time of Henry VII.; but the system proceeded much more rapidly and universally after the dissolution of the monasteries. So entire a revolution in the distribution of property never before occurred in England, and has never occurred since. That it was ultimately productive of incalculable benefit cannot be doubted; but it was also the cause of enormous misery, for a season, to the humblest classes of society. The attempts of the state to remedy or even control this inevitable evil were always futile; and it was aggravated by proceedings of the government, of which few saw the consequences, and which fewer dared to expose.

The complaint against the conversion of arable land into pasture for the breeding of sheep, forty years before this period, has been fully noticed in a previous chapter.‡ As the process went on, more land was demanded. The capital of the country sought employment in an extension of cultivation; and the extension

* 17 Hen. VIII. c. 2. † 35 Henry VIII. c. 13. ‡ *Ante*, p. 235.

came through the system of Inclosures. The general desire to invest capital in land and rural occupations, and the facilities now opened for its investment, also led to the quickest profitable employment of capital. The increasing population demanding increased clothing, and one of the greatest exports of native produce being wool, immense flocks of sheep were kept upon the newly inclosed lands, and upon many of the farms where the old cottier tenants had given place to a farmer or grazier who conducted his business upon a larger scale. The monastic houses had been invariably surrounded by small holders of church lands; and their own wants had required that they should have a due proportion of grass land and corn land. At the dissolution of Fountains' Abbey, an inventory of their effects showed that the monks possessed 2356 horned cattle, 1326 sheep, 86 horses, 79 swine, 391 quarters of wheat, oats, rye, barley and malt, and 392 loads of hay. To conduct their various farming operations a large number of labourers were necessarily required. When the tenure of these great properties was wholly changed; when the monastic domains fell into the hands of those who only sought to obtain the best rents; there was a disturbance of the labouring population, of which we have ample evidence in the undoubted increase of pauperism and vagabondage. The effect of the dissolution of the abbeys upon this increase of misery, clamouring for aid, has been usually limited to the supposed absence of the relief which those houses afforded to the local poor, by doles out of their abundance. Upon this it has been argued that the monasteries encouraged idle and improvident habits; and that their suppression was a real benefit to the labourers. This was only true in part. There was many a small town and village that fell into decay, besides the town of Walsingham, when these large revenues were wholly diverted to other channels, and were applied, however in accordance with sound commercial principles, to the support of other modes of industry than those which had become habitual to many generations of herdsmen and earth-tillers. But in some cases the change was even more complete, and the results more grievous to the poor. Sir Arthur Darcy writes to Cromwell that he was present at the suppression of Jervaulx Abbey, and looked upon its fair meadows, and great demesne, and surrounding granges. Let the king, he says, take possession, and send his studs of mares here, to occupy the large and high grounds in the summer, and the woods and low grounds in the winter. The breed of men was to give place to the

brood-mares.* It was not with the lands of all monastic houses, deserted by the ancient employers and servants, that the same sensible system was pursued as with the rich fields and substantial granges of Walsingham. The grantees of the abbey lands did not in general divide them amongst small copyholders. The lordly mansion often grew up, very commonly near the spot where the chapel and the cloister were soon mouldering into shapeless ruin—a ruin not then made beautiful by time. The sober refectory, with carved roof and lancet windows, was transformed into the tapestried banquetting hall. The pastures and the plough land were thrown together, and became the vast deer-park. The monks wandered about the country, asking the alms which they formerly bestowed. Their servants and labourers swelled the number of the roving population. Thus the system which was raising the middle class into "landed men," and adding largely to the possessions of the higher proprietors, went inexorably forward to embarrass the man who had no possession but his power of labour. The course of industry was changed, with serious damage to the living generation. The effects became more alarming when the growing system of inclosures dispossessed the irregular labourer of his hovel and his patch of waste; and flocks of sheep fed, where his half-starved cow had browsed upon the heath, and his scanty crop of cabbages and parsnips had eked out his miserable existence.† But the squatter upon the commons clung to this life of penury and freedom. When the system of inclosures forcibly applied the land to more profitable uses he became a vagabond and a thief.

The miserable labourers who eked out a scanty subsistence upon a barren heath were not the only people who were necessarily hostile to inclosures. The ancient race of small farmers had a deep interest in the preservation of unallotted land. Latimer, who was perfectly acquainted with country affairs, tells us of the old time, in a well-known passage;—"My father was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own, only he had a farm of three or four pound by year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half a dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep; and my mother milked thirty kine."‡ The kine and the sheep fed on the common pasture-land. In another passage he describes how a ploughman must have sheep to manure the ground. The turnip

* "Suppression," p. 158.

† See Harrison, in Holinshed, p. 193.

‡ First Sermon before Edward VI.