

husbandry was then undreamt of. He must have hogs, and horses, and kine for milk and cheese. "These cattle must have pasture, which pasture if they lack the rest must needs fail them. And pasture they cannot have if the land be taken in, and inclosed from them."\* There is a proposal for a tax on sheep, in 1551, in which it is estimated that a million and a half are kept in the commons, and a million and a half in inclosed pastures. The extension of these inclosed pastures irritated the people. The protector Somerset appointed a commission in 1548, to inquire into the decay of tillage, and the excessive inclosure of land for pasturage; which system it is alleged has brought the land to a marvellous desolation. In the same year the government was issuing proclamations "against the assembling of lewd persons to pull down inclosures."† In 1549, the people of Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Dorset, Norfolk, and other counties were in rebellion for redress of this their grievance. But even then there was a sensible farmer who saw the evil of these common-lands, and the benefits of the improved cultivation which belonged to inclosures. Look at Essex and Suffolk, says Tusser, where inclosure is most. There, is most abundance; most work for the labourer; there, are the fewest beggars. The champion,—that is, the dweller on commons, he says, robbeth by night and prowleth and filcheth by day. He is indignant at the outcry against inclosures from those who will not "live by their work," and are banded together to do lawless acts without fear. He stands up boldly for the profit of "pastures in several;" of the superior comfort of the poor man who has even two acres of inclosed land, as compared with the "commoner."‡ Tusser was no doubt a better economist than Somerset or Latimer. But the statesman and the preacher had witnessed a terrible social convulsion, which manifested itself in a way which bewildered legislators, and which they attempted to control by one of the most savage laws that ever disgraced our statute book. The Statute of Vagabonds, of the first year of Edward VI., opens to our view a picture of society in England which was certainly an exceptional state, but was also a natural result of the momentous changes of that period of transition.

We have already pointed to the significant fact, that the laws against beggars and vagabonds had been written in letters of blood, after the fifteenth century. During the hundred and forty

\* Last Sermon before Edward VI.

† Calendar of State Papers, p. 18.

‡ "Champion and Several."

seven years which had elapsed from the seventh year of Richard II. (1381), to the twenty-second year of Henry VIII. (1531), vagabonds were put in the stocks. Then the whip was added to the stocks. In 1536, the whip was a mild punishment; to which mutilation and death were supplemented.\* But even the cart's tail, the butcher's knife, and the hangman's noose, inspired no adequate dread; and were regarded by the government as feeble remedies when Edward VI. came to the throne. The system of terror had wholly failed; and so it was to be carried as much farther as the cruelty of man could devise. In 1548, one who was going about amongst the rural population says, "The people confess themselves most bound to God that he hath sent them such a king, in whose so tender age so much good is intended towards them; and have a great hope that the Iron world is now at an end, and the Golden is returning again."† Certainly those who a few years later had acquired the name of "the thriftless poor"—those who ran "to and fro over all the realm, chiefly keeping the champain soils in summer to avoid the scorching heat, and the woodland grounds in winter to eschew the blustering winds,"‡—certainly this class could not think that the golden world was come for them. The king of "so tender age" was taught to consider these unhappy people as weeds to be rooted out. He speaks of them as the "filth" of the body politic. "The vagabonds ought clearly to be banished."§ And so in 1547, there is no hesitation in passing "An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds," of which the following are the chief provisions:—

All the former Acts against vagabonds and sturdy beggars being repealed, it is provided that every man or woman, not being prevented from working by old age, lameness, or disease, who shall be found loitering or wandering, and not seeking work, during three days, or who shall leave work when engaged, may be lawfully apprehended, and brought before two justices of the peace; who, upon confession, or on the proof of two witnesses, "shall immediately cause the said loiterer to be marked, with a hot iron in the breast, the mark of V, and adjudge the said person, living so idly, to his presentor, to be his Slave." The presentor, as he is called, is to have and hold the Slave for two years; and, only giving him bread and water and refuse food, to "cause the said Slave to work, by beating, chaining, or otherwise, in such work and la-

\* Ante, p. 339.

† Harrison, chap. x. p. 182.

‡ John Hales to Somerset, Tytler, vol. i. p. 114.  
§ Burnet, "Records," vol. ii. p. 70.

bour, how vile soever it be, as he shall put him unto.' If the Slave, during the two years, shall run away, he is to be pursued; and any person detaining him is to be liable to a penalty of ten pounds. Convicted of running away, the justices shall cause such Slave to be marked on the forehead or ball of the cheek with a hot iron, with the sign of S.; and then adjudged to his master as a Slave for ever. If he run away a second time, he is to suffer death as a felon. The person to whom the Slave is adjudged, may put a ring of iron about his neck or on his limbs. If there is no man found who will take the loiterer as his Slave, he is to be sent to the place where he was born, to be kept in slavery on the public roads; or he may be let or sold to any private person who will chain, starve, and beat, according to the tenour of this statute. There is an especial provision for committing Clerks convict—Clergymen convicted of offences—to limited periods of slavery. Infant beggars may be bound to the service of any person who will take them, to use their services till the males be twenty-four years of age, and the females twenty; and if they run away, they are to be brought back, and receive the discipline of slavery.

This Statute of Vagabonds, in which the very revival of a name that had wholly fallen into disuse in England is sufficient proof of a most extraordinary condition of society, was repealed in little more than two years after its enactment. The insurrections of 1549 probably forced the government into the acknowledgment that "the extremity" of the penalties had prevented their execution. The legislature then went back to the comparatively mild provisions of the act of 1532; passing over the heavier inflictions contemplated by that of 1536. Of all these statutes it has been most truly observed that "each gradation in the scale of punishment was tried, abandoned, re-established with added stringency, and again abandoned, with a lingering pertinacity which can only be accounted for by the struggle between experience and preconceived notions."\* The parishes were called upon to relieve the sick and aged; and the justices to punish strong beggars, according to the regulations of the first statute of Henry VIII. The time was approaching when a compulsory provision for the poor would place this great and difficult question upon the basis of all subsequent legislation; but for years vagabondage was the great evil of English society. The constant cry was against the "covetous man," who daily made beggars by "wiping many out of their occupyings, to turn the same

\* Sir G. Nicholls, "History of the English Poor-law," vol. i. p. 201.

into his private gains."\* The extraordinary provisions of the first statute of Edward VI., for making Slaves of unwilling labourers, offers a distinct proof that there was a demand for labour; but that the lowest of the rural population, who had been long accustomed to an unsettled and irregular industry, which had about it a sort of wild independence, would not work for the masters who pulled down their hovels, and made the waste lands profitable. It appears that "the wise and better-minded of these emigrated, and sought to live in other countries, as France, Germany, Barbary, India, Muscovy, and very Calicut; complaining of no room to be left for them at home."† The extension of that commercial principle which drove these poor people to distant countries has provided profitable labour for five times the amount of the population that then derived a meagre subsistence from the land. It was the horrible fate of those who held to what they called their "liberty,"—to wander about, "under the terror of the whip," or "to continue stark thieves, till the gallows do eat them up."‡ In 1545, we can trace in a very remarkable statute, how the disposition to destroy private possessions, like the rick-burnings of our own times, manifested the feeling of the labourers that they were suffering under injustice. The statute recites that malicious and envious persons "have of late invented and practised a new damnable kind of vice," which consisted in various offences against person and property. † "Cutting off the ears of the king's subjects" appears to have been a dire revenge for the legal severities of the statute against vagabonds of 1436. "The secret burning of frames of timber, prepared and made by the owners thereof, ready to be set up and edified for houses," was the malicious assertion of the imaginary rights of the squatters upon waste lands to hold to their own hovels of sticks and dirt. Such, also, was the war against civilisation of those who cut the heads of ponds and conduits; burnt carts laden with charcoal; set fire to heaps of felled wood; barked apple and pear trees; and cut out the tongues of cattle. It was the war of the savage against the settler—a war which always contains some rude principle of imaginary right, but which must be repressed with heavy penalties, unless a barrier is to be set up against human progress.

The generally accepted statement that during the reign of Henry VIII. there were seventy-two thousand thieves and vagabonds hanged, appears to have been founded upon the loose

\* Harrison, chap. x.

† *Ibid.* /

‡ 37 Hen. VIII. c. 6.

estimate that about two thousand were hanged in each year of that reign. During the latter years of this king the army of robbers and cheats seems to have acquired something of a professional organisation. In Thomas Harman's "Caveat for Cursetors," first printed in 1566, we are informed that "their language, which they term Pedlers' French, or Canting, began but within these thirty years, or little about."\* This historian of Vagabonds, dignified with the name of Cursetors, shows the long continuance of the fraternity, by describing, upon the report of an aged man, a burial of a man of worship in Kent, in 1521, "where there was such a number of beggars, besides poor householders dwelling thereabouts, that scarcely they might lie or stand about the house;" and for these was prepared a great barn; a fat ox was served out, with drink; and a dole of twopence was given to each. When these habits of feudal hospitality were fast passing away, the beggars lost what is called "their bousing and belly cheer," and took to helping themselves. The world was being re-modelled; and there was no place for the vast numbers that were shifting about on the outskirts of civilisation. Edward VI. writes, "For idle persons, there were never, I think, more than be now." And yet it was quite impossible that cultivation should have been improved, manufactures developed, and commerce extended, without producing a larger permanent demand for profitable labour. But, at the same time, there were no facilities for helping those who were obliged to seek a change of occupation, to turn from irregular employments,—to a certain extent predatory employments,—to become diligent and trustworthy servants. The exclusive system under which the artificers of the town had grown up in casts, under the most rigid conditions of apprenticeships and guilds, forbade the wanderer obtaining a living in trading communities. If he approached the porch of the farmer, who had his homestead amidst his ploughland and his meadows, the door would be doubly barred and the band-dog let loose. The farmer had his own hereditary in-door labourers, each in his appointed station—frugally but abundantly fed upon salted fish and salted beef; with veal and bacon, grass-beef and pease, roast meat on Sundays, and on Thursdays at night:

"With sometimes fish, and sometimes fast,  
That household store may longer last." †

The farmer's year was one of unvarying routine: his people had many occupations that demanded more skill than usually belong

\* Reprint, 1814, p. 5.

† Tusser.

to the agricultural labourer under the modern division of employments. To plough, to fence, to sow, to reap, to thrash, to tend cattle and sheep, to gather up mast for the hogs: these were common services. But the farmers of the sixteenth century pursued many trades in his little homestead. He had eels in his stew, and bees in his garden. He grew his own hops and made his own malt. Many of his rough implements were of his own construction. He raised his own hemp, and twisted his own cart-ropes. His flax was cleaned and spun at home. Some of his wool he sold to the "webster," and some kept the spindles moving on his kitchen floor. He sawed out his own timber. He made his own mud-walls round his cattle-yard. He was his own farrier. He killed his sheep or his calf without the aid of the butcher. He made his own candles, and burnt his own wood into charcoal. He cultivated herbs for physic, which his wife dried or distilled. His cheese was manufactured in his own press. His corn-crops were varied by the culture of saffron and mustard seed.\* The scientific cultivator of our days may smile at these simple employments, whose success depended upon traditionary observation and unwearied thrift. The honest farmer laboured on contentedly, in the assured belief that his success depended upon the All-giver—

"Man taketh pain, God giveth gain,  
Man doth his best, God doth the rest."

Having, thus, so many various resources for the maintenance of his family, it might be supposed that the agriculturist of this age would grow rich out of the produce of his arable land. Tusser divides his corn-harvest into ten parts—one for rent, one for seed, one for tithe, two for implements, one for teams, one for wages, one for the food of his house, one for needful things for his wife, and one for himself. The tenfold produce which this passage indicates shows that husbandry was greatly improving. The complaint so often repeated, that pasture was driving out tillage, does not seem to be sustained by the fact that the emperor Charles V., in August 1542, writes to Henry VIII. to request that he would permit corn from England to be exported to Spain, where the crop had failed through the dryness of the season.† The ancient regulations under which the tenant could only grind at the lord's mill

\* These, and many other minute operations may be traced in "Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry."

† State Papers, vol. ix. p. 125.

were necessarily relaxed, as the produce of the country increased. A statute of 1543 gives permission to erect a windmill upon waste ground at Poole, and sets forth that the inhabitants, time out of mind, had been compelled to carry and re-carry their corn to mills four miles distant.\* The produce generally, whether of corn or cattle, was, we may believe in spite of many complaints, comparatively abundant. Roger Ascham, writing from the Netherlands, in 1550, says,—“This know, there is no country here to be compared for all things with England. Beef is little, lean, tough and dear. Mutton likewise.”† And yet about the end of the first half of the sixteenth century, we are constantly led to reflect upon the perpetual occurrence, in letters and other sources of information, of the word Dearth. We must, however, accept this word in its sense of dearness, rather than of scarcity, although the meaning is often confounded in these contemporary authorities. Latimer complains of Rents being more than doubled. “Of this, too much cometh [that] this monstrous and portentous dearth is made by man; notwithstanding God doth send us plentifully the fruits of the earth.

Poor men, which live of their labour, cannot with the sweat of their face have a living, all kind of victuals is so dear; pigs, geese, capons, chickens, eggs.”‡ Bishop Hooper, in 1551, writes to Cecil, from Gloucester,—“For the love and tender mercy of God, persuade and cause some order to be taken upon the price of things, or else the ire of God will shortly punish. All things be here so dear, that the most part of people lacketh, and yet more will lack, necessary food.”§ The Council, at the end of 1549, commanded the justices to search all barns for corn; to compel a supply to be brought to market; and to apprehend all regrators and forestallers. || In November, 1550, special commissioners were appointed in each county to enforce the same commands. We are told, that in these happy times the “laws of supply and demand, which we are now taught to regard as immutable ordinances of nature, were absorbed or superseded by a higher code.”¶ A higher code! There was a statesman of that day, who had learnt no system of political economy from books, but who derived his notions from the dictates of common sense. Sir John Mason, one of the most sagacious of diplomatists, wrote thus to Secretary Cecil, from France, on the 4th of December, 1550, as to the efforts of the

\* 34 & 35 Hen. VIII. c. 25.

† First Sermon before Edward VI.

‡ Calendar of State Papers, p. 26.

§ Tytler, vol. ii. p. 128.

¶ Tytler, vol. i. p. 365.

¶ Froude, vol. i. p. 79.

Council, to “cause some order to be taken about the price of things:” “I have seen so many experiences of such ordinances; and ever the end is dearth, and lack of the thing that we seek to make good cheap. Nature will have her course, etiam si furcâ expellatur;\* and never shall you drive her to consent that a pennyworth of new [produce] shall be sold for a farthing. . . . For who will keep a cow that may not sell the milk for so much as the merchant and he can agree upon?” † There were perhaps others in the Council, who saw the tendency of such proceedings to check the supply of commodities, and thus to raise the price, as clearly as Sir John Mason did; for on the 6th of December, 1550, the proclamation relative to grain, butter, and cheese, was revoked, and the matter left to the discretion of buyers and sellers.‡ Nature had been driven out; but she was stronger than the ignorance of lawgivers.

In addition to the natural causes that affected the market-value of the necessaries of life, there was a cause, not to be overcome by proclamation and threat of fine or imprisonment, that kept the corn in the barn of every man who was not pressed to sell by the direst necessity. The value of money was so debased at this especial period, that an excessive rise in the prices of all commodities was inevitable; and the great body of consumers, the labourers and artificers, not receiving a proportionate advance of wages, all the ordinary relations of supply and demand were disturbed to a fearful extent. This abominable process for the relief of the king's necessities had been going on for a long period; but Henry VIII. carried it to a disgraceful excess. He introduced copper into his gold and silver coin, not as a necessary alloy, but as a fraudulent diminution of its intrinsic value. He began, in 1543, with two ounces of alloy to ten ounces of silver; in 1545, he made his so-called silver pieces half of pure metal and half of alloy; and in 1546, had eight ounces of alloy to four ounces of silver. He not only perpetrated this deceit; but he coined the pound of mixed metal, first into 540 pennies, and then into 576 pennies, instead of 450 as had been the proportion from the time of Edward IV. But the first years of the reign of Edward VI. saw the alloy increased to the proportion of nine ounces of base metal to three ounces of silver; and this pound of mixed metal was coined into

\* “Naturam expelles furcâ, tamen usque recurret.” You may with a fork [with violence] expel Nature, but she will come back.—Horace.

† Tytler, vol. i. p. 341.

‡ Calendar of State Papers, p. 31.

864 pennies. The young king records these proceedings in his Journal, with the most perfect unconsciousness of the evil that his counsellors were perpetrating. "It was appointed," he writes in April, 1550, "to make 20,000 pound weight, for necessity, somewhat baser, to get gains 16,000*l.* clear." In June it was found that they were going a little too fast: "Whereas before, commandment was given that 160,000*l.* should be coined of three ounces in the pound fine, for discharge of debts, and to get some treasure, to be able to alter all;—now was it stopped, saving only 80,000*l.* to discharge my debts."\* Latimer, preaching before Edward in 1549, has a sentence of the bitterest sarcasm: "We have now a pretty little shilling indeed, a very pretty one. I have but one, I think, in my purse; and the last day I had put it away almost for an old groat; and so, I trust, some will take them. The fineness of the silver I cannot see; but therein is printed a fine sentence, that is '*Timor Domini fons vitæ vel sapientiæ*'" (the fear of the Lord is the fountain of life or wisdom). The sturdy bishop fell into some trouble about his "merry word of the new shilling;" he was accused of speaking seditiously. The Council, however, tried to retrace their steps, by what was termed "calling down the money." The base shilling was issued for twelve pence, and the groat for four pence. They were, in 1551, called down to threepence and ninepence. But this was useless. The government could not remedy the artificial high prices of home produce, nor preserve a due rate of foreign exchange, till they became honest. Sir Thomas Chamberlayne, our ambassador, writes from Brussels to the Council, in June 1551, that where formerly the English pound was exchanged for thirty shillings of the money there, it would now only obtain fourteen shillings. He warns the government, that whilst the money was "called down" by little and little, large sums, forged and counterfeited in foreign parts, would be carried into the realm. He says, that the true value of English goods could never be ascertained, "until such time as the money were called down to the very value in sterling silver which is in each piece thereof."† Such were the inconsistent proceedings of a government which was endeavouring to force sales at low prices, when its long-continued acts of fraud had been the main cause of the excessive rise of prices. We are required to believe "the penny, in terms of a labourer's necessities, to have been equal in the reign of Henry VIII. to the present shilling." But what was the labourer's pos-

\* "Remains," in Burnet, vol. ii. p. 27.

† Tytler, vol. i. p. 380.

tion when the three pennies a day which he was to receive under the Act for Wages of 1515, were so debased in real value, that they would only be equal to three halfpence in 1545, and to three farthings in 1550. The sufferings of the people from the consequent rise of prices were attributed to inclosures, to the increase of pasture, to higher rents;—few saw the inevitable effects of the debasement of the coin. The advance of all vendible things was unequal. The advance of wages, which could not depend upon the price of food or other necessities, was necessarily disproportionate. The wretched workmen,—clothiers of the west and agriculturists of the east,—rushed into insurrections, and were slaughtered by thousands. It has been usual to attribute the rise of rents and of the price of commodities at this period, to the influx of silver from the American mines. But the effect of that increase of the metallic currency of Europe was undoubtedly much more gradual. The evil course of the governments of Henry VIII. and Edward VI. was remedied under that of Elizabeth, upon whose tomb was inscribed, as one of the glories of her reign, "*Moneta in justum valorem reducta.*"\*

\* See Sir R. Peel's speech on Resumption of Cash Payments, Hansard, vol. xi. p. 691.