

## CHAPTER II

### RURAL LIFE AND ORGANIZATION

8. **The Mediæval Village.**— In the Middle Ages in the greater part of England all country life was village life. The farmhouses were not isolated or separated from one another by surrounding fields, as they are so generally in modern times, but were gathered into villages. Each village was surrounded by arable lands, meadows, pastures, and woods which spread away till they reached the confines of the similar fields of the next adjacent village. Such an agricultural village with its population and its surrounding lands is usually spoken of as a "vill." The word "manor" is also applied to it, though this word is also used in other senses, and has differed in meaning at different periods. The word "hamlet" means a smaller group of houses separated from but forming in some respects a part of a vill or manor.

The village consisted of a group of houses ranging in number from ten or twelve to as many as fifty or perhaps even more, grouped around what in later times would be called a "village green," or along two or three intersecting lanes. The houses were small, thatch-roofed, and one-roomed, and doubtless very miserable. Such buildings as existed for the protection of cattle or the preservation of crops were closely connected with the dwelling portions of the houses. In many cases they were under the same roof. Each vill possessed its church, which was generally, though by no means always, close to the houses of the village. There was usually a manor house, which varied in size from an actual castle to a building of a character scarcely distinguishable from the primitive houses of the villagers. This