

The land was held mainly in large blocks by the landlords; on these large holdings the peasants had certain rights. Each family was allowed to work a definite acreage, paying for this privilege a certain quantity of produce. When a family grew too large for its allotted holding, the sons became labourers or craftsmen on the manorial estate. In 1348-9 came the Black Death, which killed between one-third and one-half of the entire population. This led to a great scarcity of labour and it became necessary to pay cash for labour instead of the former practice of considering the labour as a part of the service due the particular landlord. Many landlords were compelled to lease portions of the land as it was impossible for them to work them owing to the scarcity of labour and the depletion of labour-tenants due to the Plague.

Laws had been passed by Parliament prohibiting the export of grains; this naturally led to very low prices as any surplus could not be sent out of the country. Imported grain was taxed heavily and with the eventual growth of population the demand increased to such an extent that prices became very high. This policy of stringent protection was beneficial in several ways; it led to investment in land and assured producers of a good return on their labour. The enactment of laws such as the Corn Laws was possible because the control of the country was entirely in the hands of the landholding class, politically, socially, and economically.

During the eighteenth century very drastic changes occurred which seriously affected the agricultural portion of the population. At this time the bulk of the people were dependent on agriculture for their existence so that any factor affecting them was of prime importance to the country as a whole. Mechanical inventions and the consequent growth of the factory system led to the springing up of large towns. From these centres of industry came a demand for food. Many small farms were consolidated and utilized for the production of foodstuffs, chiefly grains and meat, for sale in the towns. Smallholders and agricultural labourers moved to the towns in order to work

for definite wages in the factories; in addition many emigrated to America. Development of agriculture was slow during this century, due in a large measure to the terrible state of the roads. As a journey of any distance was an unpleasant undertaking, travel and communication between various sections of the country was limited; this condition naturally hindered any transference or spread of ideas. The improvement of roads was blocked by the landholders, who believed that road improvement would lead to the exploitation of their nearby markets.

The beginning of the nineteenth century was marked by an area of high prices, due chiefly to the war with France. Prices rose because of the continuing growth of manufacturing towns, the reduction of food imports (which were cut off by the war), several years of scarcity and general speculation on the part of landholders. After a few years of high prices depression followed and the agricultural portion of the country was in serious difficulties. Many farmers abandoned their farms and moved to the towns and much agitation arose for Parliamentary remedies.

Even by the middle of the nineteenth century agriculture was in a backward state. Very little machinery was used, implements were poor as a rule, and the farming itself was not conducted on what we now consider to be sound lines. Gradually, however, improvement came about with the development of efficient farm machinery, drainage, fertilization, improvement of livestock breeds and the following of scientific crop rotations. Through all of these years the movement of population from country to city continued and it is still going on at the present time.

THE DRIFT TO THE TOWNS.

The reason for the desertion of farms lies in the fact that the wages paid in the country have not been equal to the wages paid for the city labour. In addition, the social advantages of the cities, regular hours, less drudgery and unlimited means of amusement have lead farm labourers and small-farm owners to leave the land and seek urban employment.