

CHAPTER ONE

The Village Before Enclosure

To elucidate these chapters, and to supply further information for those who are interested in the subject, we publish an Appendix containing the history, and tolerably full particulars, of four separate enclosures at Croydon, Haute Huntre, Stanwell and Wakefield.

At the time of the great Whig Revolution, England was in the main a country of commons and of common fields;(1*) at the time of the Reform Bill, England was in the main a country of individualist agriculture and of large enclosed farms. There has probably been no change in Europe in the last two centuries comparable to this in importance of which so little is known to-day, or of which so little is to be learnt from the general histories of the time. The accepted view is that this change marks a great national advance, and that the hardships which incidentally followed could not have been avoided: that it meant a vast increase in the food resources of England in comparison with which the sufferings of individuals counted for little: and that the great estates which then came into existence were rather the gift of economic forces than the deliberate acquisitions of powerful men. We are not concerned to corroborate or to dispute the contention that enclosure made England more productive,(2*) or to discuss the merits of enclosure itself as a public policy or a means to agricultural progress in the eighteenth century. Our business is with the changes that the enclosures caused in the social structure of England, from the manner in which they were in practice carried out. We propose, therefore, to describe the actual operations by which society passed through this revolution, the old village vanished, and rural life assumed its modern form and character.

It is difficult for us, who think of a common as a wild sweep of heather and beauty and freedom, saved for the enjoyment of the world in the midst of guarded parks and forbidden meadows, to realise that the commons that disappeared from so many an English village in the eighteenth century belonged to a very elaborate, complex, and ancient economy. The antiquity of that elaborate economy has been the subject of fierce contention, and the controversies that rage round the nursery of the English village recall the controversies that raged round the nursery of Homer. The main subject of contention has been this. Was the manor or the township, or whatever name we like to give to the primitive unit of agricultural life, an organisation imposed by a despotic landowner on his dependents, or was it created by the co-operation of a group of free tribesmen, afterwards dominated by a military overlord? Did it owe more to Roman tradition or to Teutonic tendencies? Professor Vinogradoff, the latest historian, inclines to a compromise between these conflicting theories. He thinks that it is impossible to trace the open-field system of cultivation to any exclusive right of ownership or to the power of coercion, and that the communal organisation of the peasantry, a village community of shareholders who cultivated the land on the open-field system and treated the other requisites

of rural life as appendant to it, is more ancient than the manorial order. It derives, in his view, from the old English society. The manor itself, an institution which partakes at once of the character of an estate and of a unit of local government, was produced by the needs of government and the development of individualist husbandry, side by side with this communal village. These conditions lead to the creation of lordships, and after the Conquest they take form in the manor. The manorial element, in fact, is superimposed on the communal, and is not the foundation of it: the medieval village is a free village gradually feudalised. Fortunately it is not incumbent on us to do more than touch on this fascinating study, as it is enough for our purposes to note that the greater part of England in cultivation at the beginning of the eighteenth century was cultivated on a system which, with certain local variations, belonged to a common type, representing this common ancestry.

The term 'common' was used of three kinds of land in the eighteenth-century village, and the three were intimately connected with each other. There were (1) the gable fields, (2) the common meadowland, and (3) the common or waste. The arable fields were divided into strips, with different owners, some of whom owned few strips, and some many. The various strips that belonged to a particular owner were scattered among the fields. Strips were divided from each other, sometimes by a grass band called a balk, sometimes by a furrow. They were cultivated on a uniform system by agreement, and after harvest they were thrown open to pasturage. The common meadow land was divided up by lot, pegged out, and distributed among the owners of the strips; after the hay was carried, these meadows, like the arable fields, were used for pasture. The common or waste, which was used as a common pasture at all times of the year, consisted sometimes of woodland, sometimes of roadside strips, and sometimes of commons in the modern sense. (3*)

Such, roughly, was the map of the old English village. What were the classes that lived in it, and what were their several rights? In a normal village there would be (1) a Lord of the Manor, (2) Freeholders, some of whom might be large proprietors, and many small, both classes going by the general name of Yeomanry, (3) Copyholders, (4) Tenant Farmers, holding by various sorts of tenure, from tenants at will to farmers with leases for three lives, (5) Cottagers, (6) Squatters, and (7) Farm Servants, living in their employers' houses. The proportions of these classes varied greatly, no doubt, in different villages, but we have an estimate of the total agricultural population in the table prepared by Gregory King in 1688, from which it appears that in addition to the Esquires and Gentlemen, there were 40,000 families of freeholders of the better sort, 140,000 families of freeholders of the lesser sort, and 150,000 farmers. Adam Smith, it will be remembered, writing nearly a century later, said that the large number of yeomen was at once the strength and the distinction of English agriculture.

Let us now describe rather more fully the different people represented in these different categories, and the different rights that they enjoyed. We have seen in the first chapter that the manorial courts had lost many of their powers by this time, and that part of the jurisdiction that the Lord of the Manor had originally exercised had passed to the Justice of the Peace. No such change had taken place in his relation to the economic life of the village. He might or he might not still own a demesne land. So far as the common arable or common meadow was concerned, he was in the same position as any other proprietor: he might own many strips or few strips or no strips at all. His position with regard to the waste was different, the difference being expressed by Blackstone 'in those waste grounds, which are usually called commons, the property of the soil is generally in the Lord of the Manor, as in the common fields it is in the particular tenant.' The feudal lawyers had developed a doctrine that the soil of the waste was vested in the Lord of the Manor, and that originally it had all belonged to him. But feudal law acknowledged certain definite limitations to his rights over the waste. The Statute of Merton, 1235, allowed him to make enclosures on the waste, but only on certain terms; he was obliged to leave enough of the waste for the needs of his tenants. Moreover, his powers were limited,

not only by the concurrent rights of freeholders and copyholders thus recognised by this ancient law, but also by certain common rights of pasture and turbary enjoyed by persons who were neither freeholders nor copyholders, namely cottagers. These rights were explained by the lawyers of the time as being concessions made by the Lord of the Manor in remote antiquity. The Lord of the Manor was regarded as the owner of the waste, subject to these common rights: that is, he was regarded as owning the minerals and the surface rights (sand and gravel) as well as sporting rights.

Every grade of property and status was represented in the ranks of the freeholders, the copyholders and the tenant farmers, from the man who employed others to work for him to the man who was sometimes employed in working for others. No distinct line, in fact, can be drawn between the small farmer, whether freeholder, copyholder or tenant, and the cottager, for the cottager might either own or rent a few strips; the best dividing-line can be drawn between those who made their living mainly as farmers, and those who made their living mainly as labourers.

It is important to remember that no farmer, however large his holdings or property, or however important his social position, was at liberty to cultivate his strips as he pleased. The system of cultivation would be settled for him by the Jury of the Manor Court, a court that had different names in different places. By the eighteenth century the various courts of the manorial jurisdiction had been merged in a single court, called indifferently the View of Frankpledge, the Court Leet, the Court Baron, the Great Court or the Little Court, which transacted so much of the business hitherto confided to various courts as had not been assigned to the Justices of the Peace. (4*) Most of the men of the village, freeholders, copyholders, leaseholders, or cottagers, attended the court, but the constitution of the Jury or Homage seems to have varied in different manors. Sometimes the tenants of the manor were taken haphazard in rotation: sometimes the steward controlled the choice, sometimes a nominee of the steward or a nominee of the tenants selected the Jury: sometimes the steward took no part in the selection at all. The chief part of the business of these courts in the eighteenth century was the management of the common fields and common pastures, and the appointment of the village officers. These courts decided which seed should be sown in the different fields, and the dates at which they were to be opened and closed to common pasture. Under the most primitive system of rotation the arable land was divided into three fields, of which one was sown with wheat, another with spring corn, and the third lay fallow: but by the end of the eighteenth century there was a great variety of cultivation, and we find a nine years' course at Great Tew in Oxfordshire, a six years' course in Berkshire, while the Battersea common fields were sown with one uniform round of grain without intermission, and consequently without fallowing. (5*)

By Sir Richard Sutton's Act (6*) for the cultivation of common fields, passed in 1773, a majority of three-fourths in number and value of the occupiers, with the consent of the owner and titheholder, was empowered to decide on the course of husbandry, to regulate stinted commons, and, with the consent of the Lord of the Manor, to let off a twelfth of the common, applying the rent to draining or improving the rest of it. (7*) Before this Act, a universal consent to any change of system was necessary. (8*) The cultivation of strips in the arable fields carried with it rights of common over the waste and also over the common fields when they were thrown open. These rights were known as 'common appendant' and they are thus defined by Blackstone: 'Common appendant is a right belonging to the owners or occupiers of arable land to put commonable beasts upon the Lord's waste and upon the lands of other persons within the same manor.'

The classes making their living mainly as labourers were the cottagers, farm servants, and squatters. The cottagers either owned or occupied cottages and had rights of common on the waste, and in some cases over the common fields. These rights were of various kinds: they

generally included the right to pasture certain animals, to cut turf and to get fuel. The cottagers, as we have already said, often owned or rented land. This is spoken of as a common practice by Addington, who knew the Midland counties well; Arthur Young gives instances from Lincolnshire and Oxfordshire, and Eden from Leicestershire and Surrey. The squatters or borderers were, by origin, a separate class, though in time they merged into the cottagers. They were settlers who built themselves huts and cleared a piece of land in the commons or woods, at some distance from the village. These encroachments were generally sanctioned. A common rule in one part of the country was that the right was established if the settler could build his cottage in the night and send out smoke from his chimney in the morning.(9*) The squatters also often went out as day labourers. The farm servants were usually the children of the small farmers or cottagers; they lived in their masters' houses until they had saved enough money to marry and take a cottage of their own.

Were there any day labourers without either land or common rights in the old village? It is difficult to suppose that there were many.(10*) Blackstone said of common appurtenant that it was not a general right 'but can only be claimed by special grant or by prescription, which the law esteems sufficient proof of a special grant or agreement for this purpose.' Prescription covers a multitude of encroachments. Indeed, it was only by the ingenuity of the feudal lawyers that these rights did not attach to the inhabitants of the village at large. These lawyers had decided in Gateward's case, 1603, that 'inhabitants' were too vague a body to enjoy a right, and on this ground they had deprived the inhabitants of the village of Stixswold in Lincolnshire of their customary right of turning out cattle on the waste.(11*) From that time a charter of incorporation was necessary to enable the inhabitants at large to prove a legal claim to common rights. But rights that were enjoyed by the occupiers of small holdings or of cottages by long prescription, or by encroachments tacitly sanctioned, must have been very widely scattered.

Such were the classes inhabiting the eighteenth-century village. As the holdings in the common fields could be sold, the property might change hands, though it remained subject to common rights and to the general regulations of the manor court. Consequently the villages exhibited great varieties of character. In one village it might happen that strip after strip had been bought up by the Lord of the Manor or some proprietor, until the greater part of the arable fields had come into the possession of a single owner. In such cases, however, the land so purchased was still let out as a rule to a number of small men, for the engrossing of farms as a practice comes into fashion after enclosure. Sometimes such purchase was a preliminary to enclosure. The Bedfordshire reporter gives an example in the village of Bolnhurst, in that county. Three land speculators bought up as much of the land as they could with a view to enclosing the common fields and then selling at a large profit. But the land turned out to be much less valuable than they had supposed, and they could not get it off their hands: all improvements were at a standstill, for the speculators only let from year to year, hoping still to find a market.(12*) In other villages, land might have changed hands in just the opposite direction. The Lord of the Manor might sell his property in the common fields, and sell it not to some capitalist or merchant, but to a number of small farmers. We learn from the evidence of the Committee of 1844 on enclosures that sometimes the Lord of the Manor sold his property in the waste to the commoners. Thus there were villages with few owners, as there were villages with many owners. The writer of the Report on Middlesex, which was published in 1798 says, 'I have known thirty landlords in a field of 200 acres, and the property of each so divided as to lie in ten or twenty places, containing from an acre or two downwards to fifteen perches; and in a field of 300 acres I have met with patches of arable land, containing eight perches each. In this instance the average size of all the pieces in the field was under an acre. In all cases they lie in long, narrow, winding or worm-like slips.'(13*)

The same writer states that at the time his book was written (1798) 20,000 out of the 23,000 arable acres in Middlesex were cultivated on the common-field system.(14*) Perhaps the parish of Stanwell, of which we describe the enclosure in detail elsewhere, may be taken as a fair example of an eighteenth-century village. In this parish there were, according to the enclosure award, four large proprietors, twenty-four moderate proprietors, twenty-four small proprietors, and sixty-six cottagers with common rights.

The most important social fact about this system is that it provided opportunities for the humblest and poorest labourer to rise in the village. Population seems to have moved slowly, and thus there was no feverish competition for land. The farm servant could save up his wages and begin his married life by hiring a cottage which carried rights of common, and gradually buy or hire strips of land. Every village, as Hasbach has put it, had its ladder, and nobody was doomed to stay on the lowest rung. This is the distinguishing mark of the old village. It would be easy, looking only at this feature, to idealise the society that we have described, and to paint this age as an age of gold. But no reader of Fielding or of Richardson would fall into this mistake, or persuade himself that this community was a society of free and equal men, in which tyranny was impossible. The old village was under the shadow of the squire and the parson, and there were many ways in which these powers controlled and hampered its pleasures and habits: there were quarrels, too, between farmers and cottagers, and there are many complaints that the farmers tried to take the lion's share of the commons: but, whatever the pressure outside and whatever the bickerings within, it remains true that the common-field system formed a world in which the villagers lived their own lives and cultivated the soil on a basis of independence.

It was this community that now passed under the unqualified rule of the oligarchy. Under that rule it was to disappear. Enclosure was no new menace to the poor. English literature before the eighteenth century echoes the dismay and lamentations of preachers and prophets who witnessed the havoc that it spread. Stubbes had written in 1553 his bitter protest against the enclosures which enabled rich men to eat up poor men, and twenty years later a writer had given a sombre landscape of the new farming: 'We may see many of their houses built alone like ravens' nests, no birds building near them.' The Midlands had been the chief scene of these changes, and there the conversion of arable land into pasture had swallowed up great tracts of common agriculture, provoking in some cases an armed resistance. The enclosures of this century were the second and the greater of two waves.(15*) In one respect enclosure was in form more difficult now than in earlier periods, for it was generally understood at this time that an Act of Parliament was necessary. In reality there was less check on the process. For hitherto the enclosing class had had to reckon with the occasional panic or ill-temper of the Crown. No English king, it is true, had intervened in the interests of the poor so dramatically as did the earlier and unspoilt Louis XIV, who restored to the French village assemblies the public lands they had alienated within a certain period. But the Crown had not altogether overlooked the interests of the classes who were ruined by enclosure, and in different ways it had tried to modify the worst consequences of this policy. From 1490 to 1601 there were various Acts and proclamations designed for this purpose. Charles I had actually annulled the enclosures of two years in certain midland counties, several Commissions had been issued, and the Star Chamber had instituted proceedings against enclosures on the ground that depopulation was an offence against the Common Law. Mr. Firth holds that Cromwell's influence in the eastern counties was due to his championship of the commoners in the fens. Throughout this time, however ineffectual the intervention of the Crown, the interests of the classes to whom enclosures brought wealth and power were not allowed to obliterate all other considerations.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century the reins are thrown to the enclosure movement, and the policy of enclosure is emancipated from all these checks and afterthoughts. One

interest is supreme throughout England, supreme in Parliament, supreme in the country; the Crown follows, the nation obeys.

The agricultural community which was taken to pieces in the eighteenth century and reconstructed in the manner in which a dictator reconstructs a free government, was threatened from many points. It was not killed by avarice alone. Cobbett used to attribute the enclosure movement entirely to the greed of the landowners, but, if greed was a sufficient motive, greed was in this case clothed and almost enveloped in public spirit. Let us remember what this community looked like to men with the mind of the landlord class. The English landowners have always believed that order would be resolved into its original chaos, if they ceased to control the lives and destinies of their neighbours. 'A great responsibility rests on us landlords; if we go, the whole thing goes.' So says the landlord in Mr. Galsworthy's novel, and so said the landlords in the eighteenth century. The English aristocracy always thinking of this class as the pillars of society, as the Atlas that bears the burden of the world, very naturally concluded that this old peasant community, with its troublesome rights, was a public encumbrance. This view received a special impetus from all the circumstances of the age. The landlord class was constantly being recruited from the ranks of the manufacturers, and the new landlords, bringing into this charmed circle an energy of their own, caught at once its taste for power, for direction, for authority, for imposing its will. Readers of Shirley will remember that when Robert Moore pictures to himself a future of usefulness and success, he says that he will obtain an Act for enclosing Nunnely Common, that his brother will be put on the bench, and that between them they will dominate the parish. The book ends in this dream of triumph. Signorial position owes its special lustre for English minds to the association of social distinction with power over the life and ways of groups of men and women. When Bagehot sneered at the sudden millionaires of his day, who hoped to disguise their social defects by buying old places and hiding among aristocratic furniture, he was remarking on a feature of English life that was very far from being peculiar to his time. Did not Adam Smith observe that merchants were very commonly ambitious of becoming country gentlemen? This kind of ambition was the form that public spirit often took in successful Englishmen, and it was a very powerful menace to the old village and its traditions of collective life.

Now this passion received at this time a special momentum from the condition of agriculture. A dictatorship lends itself more readily than any other form of government to the quick introduction of revolutionary ideas, and new ideas were in the air. Thus, in addition to the desire for social power, there was behind the enclosure movement a zeal for economic progress seconding and almost concealing the direct inspiration of self-interest. Many an enclosing landlord thought only of the satisfaction of doubling or trebling his rent: that is unquestionable. If we are to trust so warm a champion of enclosure as William Marshall, this was the state of mind of the great majority. But there were many whose eyes glistened as they thought of the prosperity they were to bring to English agriculture, applying to a wider and wider domain the lessons that were to be learnt from the processes of scientific farming. A man who had caught the large ideas of a Coke, or mastered the discoveries of a Bakewell, chafed under the restraints that the system of common agriculture placed on improvement and experiment. It was maddening to have to set your pace by the slow bucolic temperament of small farmers, nursed in a simple and old-fashioned routine, who looked with suspicion on any proposal that was strange to them. In this tiresome partnership the swift were put between the shafts with the slow, and the temptation to think that what was wanted was to get rid of the partnership altogether, was almost irresistible. From such a state the mind passed rapidly and naturally to the conclusion that the wider the sphere brought into the absolute possession of the enlightened class, the greater would be the public gain. The spirit in which the Board of Agriculture approached the subject found appropriate expression in Sir John Sinclair's high-sounding language. 'The idea of having lands in common, it has been justly remarked, is to be derived from that barbarous state of society, when men were strangers to any higher

occupation than those of hunters or shepherds, or had only just tasted the advantages to be reaped from the cultivation of the earth.'(16*) Arthur Young(17*) compared the with its inconveniences 'which the barbarity of their ancestors had neither knowledge to discover nor government to remedy' to the Tartar policy of the shepherd state.

It is not surprising that men under the influence of these set ideas could find no virtue at all in the old system, and that they soon began to persuade themselves that that system was at the bottom of all the evils of society. It was harmful to the morals and useless to the pockets of the poor. 'The benefit,' wrote Arbuthnot,(18*) 'which they are supposed to reap from commons, in their present state, I know to be merely nominal; nay, indeed, what is worse, I know, that, in many instances, it is an essential injury to them, by being made a plea for their idleness; for, some few excepted, if you offer them work, they will tell you, that they must go to look up their sheep, cut furzes, get their cow out of the pound, or, perhaps, say they must take their horse to be shod, that he may carry them to a horse-race or cricket-match.' Lord Sheffield, in the course of one of the debates in Parliament, described the commoners as a 'nuisance,' and most people of his class thought of them as something worse. Mr. John Billingsley, who wrote the Report on Somerset for the Board of Agriculture in 1795, describes in some detail the enervating atmosphere of the commoners' life. 'Besides, moral effects of an injurious tendency accrue to the cottager, from a reliance on the imaginary benefits of stocking a common. The possession of a cow or two, with a hog, and a few geese, naturally exalts the peasant, in his own conception, above his brethren in the same rank of society. It inspires some degree of confidence in a property, inadequate to his support. In sauntering after his cattle, he acquires a habit of indolence. Quarter, half, and occasionally whole days are imperceptibly lost. Day labour becomes disgusting; the aversion increases by indulgence; and at length the sale of a half-fed calf, or hog, furnishes the means of adding intemperance to idleness.'(19*) Mr. Bishton, who wrote the Report on Shropshire in 1794, gives a still more interesting glimpse into the mind of the enclosing class: 'The use of common land by labourers operates upon the mind as a sort of independence.' When the commons are enclosed 'the labourers will work every day in the year, their children will be put out to labour early,' and 'that subordination of the lower ranks of society which in the present times is so much wanted, would be thereby considerably secured.'

A similar view was taken of the moral effects of commons by Middleton, the writer of the Report on Middlesex(20*) 'On the other hand, they are, in many instances, of real injury to the public; by holding out a lure to the poor man -- I mean of materials wherewith to build his cottage, and ground to erect it upon: together with firing and the run of his poultry and pigs for nothing. This is of course temptation sufficient to induce a great number of poor persons to settle upon the borders of such commons. But the mischief does not end here: for having gained these trifling advantages, through the neglect or connivance of the lord of the manor, it unfortunately gives their minds an improper bias, and inculcates a desire to live, from that time forward, without labour, or at least with as little as possible.'

One of the witnesses before the Select Committee on Commons Inclosure in 1844 was Mr. Carus Wilson, who is interesting as the original of the character of Mr. Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre. We know how that zealous Christian would regard the commoners from the speech in which he reproved Miss Temple for giving the pupils at Lowood a lunch of bread and cheese on one occasion when their meagre breakfast had been uneatable. 'Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!' We are not surprised to learn that Mr. Carus Wilson found the commoners 'hardened and unpromising,' and that he was obliged to inform the committee that. the misconduct which the system encouraged 'hardens the heart, and causes a good deal of mischief, and at the same time puts the person

in an unfavourable position for the approach of what might be serviceable to him in a moral and religious point of view.'(21*)

It is interesting, after reading all these confident generalisations about the influence of this kind of life upon the character of the poor, to learn what the commoners themselves thought of its moral atmosphere. This we can do from such a petition as that sent by the small proprietors and persons entitled to rights of common at Raunds, in Northamptonshire. These unfortunate people lost their rights by an Enclosure Act in 1797, and during the progress of the Bill they petitioned Parliament against it, in these terms: "That the Petitioners beg Leave to represent to the House that, under Pretence of improving Lands in the said Parish, the Cottagers and other Persons entitled to Right of Common on the Lands intended to be inclosed, will be deprived of an inestimable Privilege, which they now enjoy, of turning a certain Number of their Cows, Calves, and Sheep, on and over the said Lands; a Privilege that enables them not only to maintain themselves and their Families in the depth of Winter, when they cannot, even for their Money, obtain from the Occupiers of other Lands the smallest Portion of Milk or Whey for such necessary Purpose, but, in addition to this, they can now supply the Grazier with young or lean Stock at a reasonable Price, to fatten and bring to Market at a more moderate Rate for general Consumption, which they conceive to be the most rational and effectual Way of establishing Public Plenty and Cheapness of Provision; and they further conceive, that a more ruinous Effect of this Inclosure will be the almost total depopulation of their Town, now filled with bold and hardy Husbandmen, from among whom, and the Inhabitants of other open Parishes, the Nation has hitherto derived its greatest Strength and Glory, in the Supply of its Fleets and Aries, and driving them, from Necessity and Want of Employ, in vast Crowds, into manufacturing Towns, where the very Nature of their Employment, over the Loom or the Forge, soon may waste their Strength, and consequently debilitate their Posterity, and by imperceptible degrees obliterate that great Principle of Obedience to the Laws of God and their Country, which forms the Character of the simple and artless Villagers, more equally distributed through the Open Countries, and on which so much depends the good Order and Government of the State: These are some of the Injuries to themselves as Individuals, and of the ill Consequences to the Public, which the Petitioners conceive will follow from this, as they have already done from many Inclosures, but which they did not think they were entitled to lay before the House (the Constitutional Patron and Protector of the Poor) until it unhappily came to their own Lot to be exposed to them through the Bill now pending.'(22*)

When we remember that the enterprise of the age was under the spell of the most seductive economic teaching of the time, and that the old peasant society, wearing as it did the look of confusion and weakness, had to fear not only the simplifying appetites of the landlords, but the simplifying philosophy, in England of an Adam Smith, in France of the Physiocrats, we can realise that a ruling class has seldom found so plausible an atmosphere for the free play of its interests and ideas. Des crimes sont flattés d'être présidés par une vertu. Bentham himself thought the spectacle of an enclosure one of the most reassuring of all the evidences of improvement and happiness. Indeed, all the elements seemed to have conspired against the peasant, for aesthetic taste, which might at other times have restrained, in the eighteenth century encouraged the destruction of the commons and their rough beauty. The rage for order and symmetry and neat cultivation was universal. It found expression in Burnet, who said of the Alps and Appenines that they had neither form nor beauty, neither shape nor order, any more than the clouds of the air: in Johnson, who said of the Highlands that 'the uniformity of barrenness can afford very little amusement to the traveller;' and in Cobbett, who said of the Cotswolds, 'this is a sort of country having less to please the eye than any other that I have ever seen, always save and except the heaths like those of Bagshot and Hindhead.' The enjoyment of wild nature was a lost sense, to be rediscovered one day by the Romantics and the Revolution, but too late to help the English village. In France, owing to various causes, part economic, part political, on which we shall touch later, the peasant persisted in his ancient

and ridiculous tenure, and survived to become the envy of English observer: it was only in England that he lost his footing, and that his ancient patrimony slipped away from him.

We are not concerned at this juncture to inquire into the truth of the view that the sweeping policy of enclosure increased the productivity and resources of the State: we are concerned only to inquire into the Way in which the aristocracy gave shape and effect to it. This movement, assumed by the enlightened opinion of the day to be beneficent and progressive, was none the less a gigantic disturbance; it broke up the old Village life; it transferred a great body of property; it touched a vast mass of interests at a hundred points. A governing class that cared for its reputation for justice would clearly regard it as of sovereign importance that this delicate network of rights and claims should not be roughly disentangled by the sheer power of the stronger: a governing class that recognised its responsibility for the happiness and order of the State would clearly regard it as of sovereign importance that this ancient community should not be dissolved in such a manner as to plunge great number of contented men into permanent poverty and despair. To decide how far the aristocracy that presided over these changes displayed insight or foresight, sympathy or imagination, and how far it acted with a controlling sense of integrity and public spirit, we must analyse the methods and procedure of Parliamentary enclosure.

Before entering on a discussion of the methods by which Parliamentary enclosure was effected, it is necessary to realise the extent of its operations. Precise statistics, of course, are not to be had, but there are various estimates based on careful study of such evidence as we possess. Mr. Levy says that between 1702 and 1760 there were only 246 Acts, affecting about 400,000 acres, and that in the next fifty years the Acts had reached a total of 2438, affecting almost five million acres.(23*) Mr. Johnson gives the following table for the years 1700-1844, founded on Dr. Slater's detailed estimate(24*) --

Years	Common Field and Waste only		some waste	
	Acts	Acreage	Acts	Acreage
1750-1760	152	237,845	56	74,518
1761-1801	1,479	2,428,721	521	752,150
1802-1844	1,075	1,610,302	808	939,043
Total	2,706	4,276,868	1,385	1,765,711

This roughly corresponds with the estimate given before the Select Committee on Enclosures in 1844, that there were some one thousand seven hundred private Acts before 1800, and some two thousand between 1800 and 1844. The General Report of the Board of Agriculture on Enclosures gives the acreage enclosed from the time of Queen Anne down to 1805 as 4,187,056. Mr. Johnson's conclusion is that nearly 20 per cent of the total acreage of England has been enclosed. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though Mr. Prothero puts the percentage still higher. But we should miss the significance of these proportions if we were to look at England at the beginning of the eighteenth century as a map of which a large block was already shaded, and of which another block, say a fifth or a sixth part, was to be shaded by the enclosure of this period. The truth is that the life of the common-field system was still the normal village life of England, and that the land which was already enclosed consisted largely of old enclosures or the lord's demesne land lying side by side with the open fields. This was put quite clearly by the Bishop of St. Davids in the House of Lords in 1781. 'Parishes of any considerable extent consisted partly of old inclosures and partly of common fields.'(25*) If a village living on the common-field system contained old enclosures, effected some time or other without Act of Parliament, it suffered just as violent a catastrophe when the common fields or the waste were enclosed, as if there had been no previous enclosure in the parish. The number

of Acts passed in this period varies of course with the different counties,(26*) but speaking generally, we may say that the events described in the next two chapters are not confined to any one part of the country, and that they mark a national revolution, making sweeping and profound changes in the form and the character of agricultural society throughout England.(27*)

NOTES:

1. Gregory King and Davenant estimated that the whole of the cultivated land in England in 1685 did not amount to much more than half the total area, and of this cultivated portion three-fifths was still farmed on the old common field system.
2. For a full discussion, in which the ordinary view is vigorously combated in an interesting analysis, see Hasbach, *History of the Agricultural Labourer*, on the other side, Levy, *Large and Small Holdings*.
3. This was the general structure of the village that was dissolved in the eighteenth century. It is distinguished from the Keltic type of communal agriculture, know as run-rig, in two important respects. In the run-rig village the soil is periodically redivided, and the tenant's holding is compact. Dr. Slater (*Geographical Journal*, Jan. 1907) has shown that in those parts of England where the Keltic type predominated, e.g., in Devon and Cornwall, enclosure took place early, and he argues with good reason that it was easier to enclose by voluntary agreement where the holdings were compact than it was where they were scattered in strips. But gradual enclosure by voluntary agreement had a different effect from the cataclysm-like enclosure of the eighteenth century, as is evident from the large number of small farmers in Devonshire.
4. See Webb, *Manor and Borough*, vol. i, p. 66 seq.
5. Slater, *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields*, p. 77.
6. 13 George III, c. 81.
7. This was done at Barnes Common; see for whole subject, *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xvii. p. 516.
8. For cases where changes in the system of cultivation of common fields had been made, see *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xvi. p. 606; 'To Peterborough, crossing an open field, but sown by agreement with turnips.' Cf. *Report on Bedfordshire*: 'Clover is sown in some of the open clay-fields by common consent (p. 339), and 'Turnips are sometimes cultivated, both on the sands and gravels, by mutual consent.' (p. 340).
9. Slater, p. 119.
10. Dr. Slater's conclusion is that 'in the open field village the entirely landless labourer was scarcely to be found.' p. 130.
11. See *Commons, Forests, and Footpaths*, by Lord Eversley, p. 11.
12. *Bedforshire Report*, 1808, p. 223, quoting from Arthur Young.
13. p. 114.

14. p. 138.
15. See on this point, Levy, *Large and Small Holdings*, p. 1.
16. *Report of Select Committee on Waste Lands*, 1795, p. 15, Appendix B.
17. *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. i. p. 72.
18. *An Inquiry into the Connection between the present Price of Provisions and the Size of Farms*, 1773, p. 81.
19. *Report on Somerset*, reprinted 1797, p. 52; compare *Report on Commons in Brecknock*, *Annals of Agriculture*, vol. xxii, p. 632, where commons are denounced as 'hurtful to society by holding forth a temptation to idleness, that fell parent to vice and immorality' also compare *Ibid.*, vol. xx, p. 145, where they are said to encourage the commoners to be 'hedge, breakers, pilferers, nightly trespassers... poultry and rabbit stealers, or such like.'
20. p. 103.
21. *Committee on Inclosures*, 1844, p. 135.
22. *House of Commons Journal*, June 19, 1797.
23. *Large and Small Holdings*, p. 24.
24. *Disappearance of Small Landowner*, p. 90; Slater's *English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields*, Appendix B.
25. *Parliamentary Register*, March 30, 1781.
26. See Dr. Slater's detailed estimate.
27. There were probably many enclosures that had not the authority either of a special Act or of the Act of 1756, particularly in the more distant counties. The evidence of Mr. Carus Wilson upon the committee of 1844 shows that the stronger classes interpreted their rights and powers in a liberal spirit. Mr. Carus Wilson had arranged with the other large proprietors to let out the only common which remained open in the thirteen parishes in which his father was interested as a large landowner, and to pay the rent into the poor rates. Some members of the committee asked whether the minority who dissented from the arrangement could be excluded, and Mr. Wilson explained that he and his confederates believed that the minority were bound by their action, and that by this simple plan they could shut out all cattle from the common, except the cattle of their joint tenants. -- *Committee on Inclosures*, 1844, p. 127.