

CHAPTER NINE

The Village in 1830

We have described the growing misery of the labourer, the increasing rigours of the criminal law, and the insensibility of the upper classes, due to the isolation of the poor. What kind of a community was created by the Speenhamland system after it had been in force for a generation? We have, fortunately, a very full picture given in a Parliamentary Report that is generally regarded as one of the landmarks of English history. We cannot do better than set out the main features of the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners of 1834, and the several effects they traced to this system.

The first effect is one that everybody could have anticipated: the destruction of all motives for effort and ambition. Under this system 'the most worthless were sure of something, while the prudent, the industrious, and the sober, with all their care and pains, obtained only something; and even that scanty pittance was doled out to them by the overseer.'(1*) All labourers were condemned to live on the brink of starvation, for no effort of will or character could improve their position. The effect on the imagination was well summed up in a rhetorical question from a labourer who gave evidence to a Commissioner. 'When a man has his spirit broken what is he good for?'(2*) The Poor Law Commissioners looked at it from a different point of view: 'The labourer feels that the existing system, though it generally gives him low wages, always gives him work. It gives him also, strange as it may appear, what he values more, a sort of independence. He need not bestir himself to seek work; he need not study to please his master; he need not put any restraint upon his temper; he need not ask relief as a favour. He has all a slave's security for subsistence, without his liability to punishment.... All the other classes of society are exposed to the vicissitudes of hope and fear; he alone has nothing to lose or to gain.'(3*)

But it is understating the result of the system on individual enterprise to say that it destroyed incentives to ambition; for in some parishes it actually proscribed independence and punished the labourer who owned some small property. Wages under these conditions were so low that a man with a little property or a few savings could not keep himself alive without help from the parish, but if a man was convicted of possessing anything he was refused parish help. It was dangerous even to look tidy or neat, 'ragged clothes are kept by the poor, for the express purpose of coming to the vestry in them.'(4*) The Report of the Commissioners on this subject recalls Rousseau's description of the French peasant with whom he stayed in the course of his travels, who, when his suspicions had been soothed, and his hospitable instincts had been warmed by friendly conversation, produced stores of food from the secret place where they had been hidden to escape the eye of the tax-collector. A man who had saved anything was ruined.

A Mr. Hickson, a Northampton manufacturer and landowner in Kent, gave an illustration of this.

'The case of a man who has worked for me will show the effect of the parish system in preventing frugal habits. This is a hard-working, industrious man, named William Williams. He is married, and had saved some money, to the amount of about £70, and had two cows; he had also a sow and ten pigs. He had got a cottage well furnished; he was a member of a benefit club at Meopham, from which he received 8s. a week when he was ill. He was beginning to learn to read and write, and sent his children to the Sunday School. He had a legacy of about £46, but he got his other money together by saving from his fair wages as a waggoner. Some circumstances occurred which obliged me to part with him. The consequence of this labouring man having been frugal and saved money, and got the cows, was that no one would employ him, although his superior character as a workman was well known in the parish. He told me at the time I was obliged to part with him: "Whilst I have these things I shall get no work; I must part with them all; I must be reduced to a state of beggary before any one will employ me." I was compelled to part with him at Michaelmas; he has not yet got work, and he has no chance of getting any until he has become a pauper; for until then the paupers will be preferred to him. He cannot get work in his own parish, and he will not be allowed to get any in other parishes. Another instance of the same kind occurred amongst my workmen. Thomas Hardy, the brother-in-law of the same man, was an excellent workman, discharged under similar circumstances; he has a very industrious wife. They have got two cows, a well-furnished cottage, and a pig and fowls. Now he cannot get work, because he has property. The pauper will be preferred to him, and he can qualify himself for it only by becoming a pauper. If he attempts to get work elsewhere, he is told that they do not want to fix him on the parish. Both these are fine young men, and as excellent labourers as I could wish to have. The latter labouring man mentioned another instance of a labouring man in another parish (Henstead), who had once had more property than he, but was obliged to consume it all, and is now working on the roads.'^(5*) This effect of the Speenhamland arrangements was dwelt on in the evidence before the Committee on Agricultural Labourers' Wages in 1824. Labourers had to give up their cottages in a Dorsetshire village because they could not become pensioners if they possessed a cottage, and farmers would only give employment to village pensioners. Thus these cottagers who had not been evicted by enclosure were evicted by the Speenhamland system.

It is not surprising that in the case of another man of independent nature in Cambridgeshire, who had saved money and so could get no work, we are told that the young men pointed at him, and called him a fool for not spending his money at the public-house, 'adding that then he would get work.'^(6*) The statesmen who condemned the labourer to this fate had rejected the proposal for a minimum wage, on the ground that it would destroy emulation.

There was one slight alleviation of this vicious system, which the Poor Law Commissioners considered in the very different light of an aggravation. If society was to be reorganised on such a basis as this, it was at any rate better that the men who were made to live on public money should not be grateful to the ratepayers. The Commissioners were pained by the insolence of the paupers. 'The parish money' said a Sussex labourer, 'is now chucked to us like as to a dog.'^(7*) but the labourers did not lick the hand that threw it. All though the Report we read complaints of the 'insolent, discontented, surly pauper,' who talks of 'right' and 'income,' and who will soon fight for these supposed rights and income 'unless some step is taken to arrest his progress to open violence.' The poor emphasised this view by the terms they applied to their rate subsidies, which they sometimes called 'their reglars,' sometimes 'the county allowance,' and sometimes 'The Act of Parliament allowance.' Old dusty rentbooks of receipts and old dirty indentures of apprenticeship were handed down from father to son with as much care as if they had been deeds of freehold property, as documentary evidence to their right to a share in the rates of a particular parish.^(8*) Of course there was not a uniform administration, and the

Commissioners reported that whilst in some districts men were disqualified for relief if they had any wages, in others there was no inquiry into circumstances, and non-necessitous persons dipped like the rest into the till. In many cases only the wages received during the last week or fortnight were taken into account, and thus the allowance would be paid to some persons who at particular periods received wages in excess of the scale. This accounts for the fact stated by Thorold Rogers from his own experience that there were labourers who actually saved considerable sums out of the system.

The most obvious and immediate effect was the effect which had been foreseen without misgiving in Warwickshire and Worcestershire. The married man was employed in preference to the bachelor, and his income rose with the birth of each child. But there was one thing better than to marry and have a family, and that was to marry a mother of bastards, for bastards were more profitable than legitimate children, since the parish guaranteed the contribution for which the putative father was legally liable. It was easier to manage with a family than with a single child. As one young woman of twenty-four with four bastard children put it, 'If she had one more she should be very comfortable.'(9*) Women with bastard children were thus very eligible wives. The effect of the whole system on village morals was striking and widespread, and a witness from a parish which was overwhelmed with this sudden deluge of population said to the Commission, 'the eighteen-penny children will eat up this parish in ten years more, unless some relief be afforded us.'(10*) Before this period, if we are to believe Cobbett, it had been rare for a woman to be with child at the time of her marriage; in these days of demoralisation and distress it became the habit.

The effects produced by this system on the recipients of relief were all of them such as might have been anticipated, and in this respect the Report of the Commissioners contained no surprises. It merely illustrated the generalisations that had been made by all Poor Law Reformers during the last fifteen years. But the discovery of the extent of the corruption which the system had bred in local government and administration was probably a revelation to most people. It demoralised not only those who received but those who gave. A network of tangled interests spread over local life, and employers and tradesmen were faced with innumerable temptations and opportunities for fraud. To take the case of the overseer first. Suppose him to be a tradesman: he was liable to suffer in his custom if he refused to relieve the friends, or it might be the workmen of his customers. It would require a man of almost superhuman rigidity of principle to be willing not only to lose time and money in serving a troublesome and unprofitable office, but to lose custom as well.(11*) From the resolve not to lose custom he might gradually slip down to the determination to reimburse himself for 'the vexatious demands' on his time, till a state of affairs like that in Slaugham came about.

'Population, 740. Expenditure, £1706. The above large sum of money is expended principally in orders on the village shops for flour, clothes, butter, cheese, etc.: the tradesmen serve the office of overseer by turns; the two last could neither read nor write.'(12*)

If the overseer were a farmer there were temptations to pay part of the wages of his own and his friends' labourers out of parish money, or to supply the workhouse with his own produce. The same temptations beset the members of vestries, whether they were open or select. 'Each vestryman, so far as he is an immediate employer of labour, is interested in keeping down the rate of wages, and in throwing part of their payment on others, and, above all, on the principal object of parochial fraud, the tithe-owner: if he is the owner of cottages, he endeavours to get their rent paid by the parish; if he keeps a shop, he struggles to get allowance for his customers or debtors; if he deals in articles used in the workhouse, he tries to increase the workhouse consumption; if he is in humble circumstances, his own relations or friends may be among the applicants.'(13*) Mr. Drummond, a magistrate for Hants and Surrey, said to the Committee on Laborers' Wages in 1824, that part of the poor-rate expenditure was returned to

farmers and landowners in exorbitant cottage rents, and that the farmers always opposed a poor man who wished to build himself a cottage on the waste.

In the case of what was known as the 'labor rate' system, the members of one class combined together to impose the burden of maintaining the poor on the shoulders of the other classes. By this system, instead of the laborer's wages being made up to a fixed amount by the parish, each ratepayer was bound to employ, and to pay at a certain rate, a certain number of laborers, whether he wanted them or not. The number depended sometimes on his assessment to the poor rate, sometimes on the amount of acres he occupied (of the use to which the land was put no notice was taken, a sheep-walk counting for as much as arable fields): when the occupiers of land had employed a fixed number of laborers, the surplus labourers were divided amongst all the ratepayers according to their rental. This plan was superficially fair, but as a matter of fact it worked out to the advantage of the big farmers with much arable land, and pressed hard on the small ones who cultivated their holdings by their own and their children's labor, and, in cases where they were liable to the rate, on the tradesmen who had no employment at which to set an agricultural laborer. After 1832 (2 and 3 William IV. c. 96) the agreement of three-fourths of the ratepayers to such a system was binding on all, and the large farmers often banded together to impose it on their fellow ratepayers by intimidation or other equally unscrupulous means: thus at Kelvedon in Essex we read: 'There was no occasion in this parish, nor would it have been done but for a junto of powerful landholders, putting down opposition by exempting a sufficient number, to give themselves the means of a majority.'(14*)

Landlords in some cases resorted to Machiavellian tactics in order to escape their burdens.

'Several instances have been mentioned to us, of parishes nearly depopulated, in which almost all the labour is performed by persons settled in the neighboring villages or towns; drawing from them, as allowance, the greater part of their subsistence.'(15*) This method is described more at length in the following passage: --

'When a parish is in the hands of only one proprietor, or of proprietors so few in number as to be able to act, and to compel their tenants to act, in unison, and adjoins to parishes in which property is much divided, they may pull down every cottage as it becomes vacant, and prevent the building of new ones. By a small immediate outlay they may enable and induce a considerable portion of those who have settlements in their parish to obtain settlements in the adjoining parishes: by hiring their laborers for periods less than a year, they may prevent the acquisition of new settlements in their own. They may thus depopulate their own estates, and cultivate them by means of the surplus population of the surrounding district.'(16*) A clergyman in Reading(17*) said that he had between ten and twenty families living in his parish and working for the farmers in their original parish, whose cottages had been pulled down over their heads. Occasionally a big proprietor of parish A, in order to lessen the poor rates, would, with unscrupulous ingenuity, take a farm in parish B, and there hire for the year a batch of labourers from A: these at the end of their term he would turn off on to the mercies of parish B which was now responsible for them, whilst he sent for a fresh consignment from parish A.(18*)

The Report of the Commission is a remarkable and searching picture of the general demoralisation produced by the Speenhamland system, and from that point of view it is most graphic and instructive. But nobody who has followed the history of the agricultural labourer can fail to be struck by its capital omission. The Commissioners, in their simple analysis of that system, could not take their eyes off the Speenhamland goblin, and instead of dealing with that system as a wrong and disastrous answer to certain difficult questions, they treated the system itself as the one and original source of all evils. They sighed for the days when 'the paupers were a small disreputable minority, whose resentment was not to be feared, and whose favour was of no value,' and 'all other classes were anxious to diminish the number of

applicants, and to reduce the expenses of their maintenance.'(19*) They did not realise that the governing class had not created a Frankenstein monster for the mere pleasure of its creation; that they had not set out to draw up an ideal constitution, as Rousseau had done for the Poles. In 1795 there was a fear of revolution, and the upper classes threw the Speenhamland system over the villages as a wet blanket over sparks. The Commissioners merely isolated the consequences of Speenhamland and treated them as if they were the entire problem, and consequently, though their report served to extinguish that system, it did nothing to rehabilitate the position of the labourer, or to restore the rights and status he had lost. The new Poor Law was the only gift of the Reformed Parliament to the agricultural labourer; it was an improvement on the old, but only in the sense that the east wind is better than the sirocco.

What would have happened if either of the other two remedies had been adopted for the problem to which the Speenhamland system was applied, it is impossible to say. But it is easy to see that the position of the agricultural labourer, which could not have been worse, might have been very much better, and that the nation, as apart from the landlords and money-lords, would have come out of this whirlpool much stronger and much richer. This was clear to one correspondent of the Poor Law Commission, whose memorandum, printed in an Appendix,(20*) is more interesting and profound than any contribution to the subject made by the Commissioners themselves. M. Chateaufieux set out an alternative policy to Speenhamland, which, if the governing class of 1795 or the governing class of 1834 had been enlightened enough to follow it, would have set up a very different labouring class in the villages from the helpless proletariat that was created by the enclosures.

'Mais si au lieu d'opérer le partage des biens communaux, l'administration de la commune s'était bornée à louer pour quelques années des parcelles des terres qu'elle possède en vaine pâture, et cela à très bas prix, aux journaliers domiciliés sur son territoire, il en serait résulté:

'(1) Que le capital de ces terres n'aurait point été aliéné et absorbé dans la propriété particulière.

'(2) Que ce capital aurait été néanmoins utilisé pour la reproduction.

'(3) Qu'il aurait servi à l'amélioration du sort des pauvres qui l'auraient défriché, de toute la différence entre le prix du loyer qu'ils en auraient payé, et le montant du revenu qu'ils auraient obtenu de sa récolte.

'(4) Que la commune aurait encaissé le montant de ses loyers, et aurait augmenté d'autant les moyens dont elle dispose pour le soulagement de ces pauvres.'

M. Chateaufieux understood better than any of the Commissioners, dominated as they were by the extreme individualist economy of the time, the meaning of Bolingbroke's maxim that a wise minister considers his administration as a single day in the great year of Government; but as a day that is affected by those which went before and must affect those which are to come after. A Government of enclosing landowners was perhaps not to be expected to understand all that the State was in danger of losing in the reckless alienation of common property.

What of the prospects of the other remedy that was proposed? At first sight it seems natural to argue that had Whitbread's Minimum Wage Bill become an Act of Parliament it would have remained a dead letter. The administration depended on the magistrates and the magistrates represented the rent-receiving and employing classes. A closer scrutiny warrants a different conclusion. At the time that the Speenhamland plan was adopted there were many magistrates in favour of setting a minimum scale. The Suffolk magistrates, for example, put pressure on the county members to vote for Whitbread's Bill, and those members, together with Grey and

Sheridan, were its backers. The Parliamentary support for the Bill was enough to show that it was not only in Suffolk that it would have been adopted; there were men like Lechmere and Whitbread scattered about the country, and though they were men of far more enlightened views than the average J. P., they were not without influence in their own neighbourhoods. It is pretty certain, therefore, that if the Bill had been carried, it would have been administered in some parts of the country. The public opinion in support of the Act would have been powerfully reinforced by the pressure of the labourers, and this would have meant a more considerable stimulus than might at first be supposed, for the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners shows that the pressure of the labourers was a very important factor in the retention of the allowance system in parishes where the overseers wished to abandon it, and if the labourers could coerce the local authorities into continuing the Speenhamland system, they could have coerced the magistrates into making an assessment of wages. The labourers were able by a show of violence to raise wages and to reduce prices temporarily, as is clear from the history of 1816 and 1830. It is not too much to suppose that they could have exercised enough influence in 1795 to induce magistrates in many places to carry out a law that was on the Statute Book. Further, it is not unreasonable to suppose that agricultural labourers' unions to enforce the execution of the law would have escaped the monstrous Combination Law of 1799 and 1800, for even in 1808 the Glasgow and Lancashire cotton-weavers were permitted openly to combine for the purpose of seeking a legal fixing of wages. (21*)

If assessment had once become the practice, the real struggle would have arisen when the great prosperity of agriculture began to decline; at the time, that is, when the Speenhamland system began to show those symptoms of strain that we have described. Would the customary wage, established under the more favourable conditions of 1795, have stood against that pressure? Would the labourers have been able to keep up wages, as critics of the Whitbread Bill had feared that they would? In considering the answers to that question, we have to reckon with a force that the debaters of 1795 could not have foreseen. In 1795 Cobbett was engaged in the politics and polemics of America, and if any member of the House of Commons knew his name, he knew it as the name of a fierce champion of English institutions, and a fierce enemy of revolutionary ideas; a hero of the *Anti-Jacobin* itself. In 1810 Cobbett was rapidly making himself the most powerful tribune that the English poor have ever known. Cobbett's faults are plain enough, for they are all on the surface. His egotism sometimes seduced his judgment; he had a strongly perverse element in his nature; his opinion of any proposals not his own was apt to be petulant and peevish, and it might perhaps be said of him that he generally had a wasp in his bonnet. These qualities earned for him his title of the Contentious Man. They would have been seriously disabling in a Cabinet Minister, but they did not affect his power of collecting and mobilising and leading the spasmodic forces of the poor.

Let us recall his career in order to understand what his influence would have been if the labourers had won their customary wage in 1795, and had been fighting to maintain it fifteen or twenty years later. His adventures began early. When he was thirteen his imagination was fired by stories the gardener at Farnham told him of the glories of Kew. He ran away from home, and made so good an impression on the Kew gardener that he was given work there. His last coppers on that journey were spent in buying Swift's *Tale of a Tub*. He returned home, but his restless dreams drove him again into the world. He tried to become a sailor, and ultimately became a soldier. He left the army, where he had made his mark and received rapid promotion, in order to expose a financial scandal in his regiment, but on discovering that the interests involved in the countenance of military abuses were far more powerful than he had supposed, he abandoned his attempt and fled to France. A few months later he crossed to America, and settled down to earn a living by teaching English to French refugees. This peaceful occupation he relinquished for the congenial excitements of polemical journalism, and he was soon the fiercest pamphleteer on the side of the Federals, who took the part of England, in their controversies with the democrats, who took the part of the Revolution. So far as the warfare of

pamphlets went, Cobbett turned the scale. The democrats could not match his wit, his sarcasm, his graphic and pointed invectives, his power of clever and sparkling analysis and ridicule. This warfare occupied him for nearly ten years, and he returned to England in time to have his windows broken for refusing to illuminate his house in celebration of the Peace of Amiens. In 1802 he started the *Political Register*. At that time he was still a Tory, but a closer study of English life changed his opinions, and four years later he threw himself into the Radical movement. The effect of his descent on English politics can only be compared to the shock that was given to the mind of Italy by the French methods of warfare, when Charles VIII led his armies into her plains to fight pitched battles without any of the etiquette or polite conventions that had graced the combats of the condottieri. He gave to the Reform agitation an uncompromising reality and daring, and a movement which had become the dying echo of a smothered struggle broke into storm and thunder. Hazlitt scarcely exaggerated his daemonic powers when he said of him that he formed a fourth estate of himself.

Now Cobbett may be said to have spent twenty years of his life in the effort to save the labourers from degradation and ruin. He was the only man of his generation who regarded politics from this standpoint. This motive is the key to his career. He saw in 1816 that the nation had to choose between its sinecures, its extravagant army, its rulers' mad scheme of borrowing at a higher rate to extinguish debt, for which it was paying interest at a low rate, its huge Civil List and privileged establishments, the interests of the fundholders and contractors on the one hand, and its labourers on the other. In that conflict of forces the labourer could not hold his own. Later, Cobbett saw that there were other interests, the interests of landowners and of tithe-holders, which the State would have to subordinate to national claims if the labourer was to be saved. In that conflict, too, the labourer was beaten. He was unrepresented in Parliament, whereas the opposing interests were massed there. Cobbett wanted Parliamentary Reform, not like the traditional Radicals as a philosophy of rights, but as an avalanche of social power. Parliamentary Reform was never an end to him, nor the means to anything short of the emancipation of the labourer. In this, his main mission, Cobbett failed. The upper classes winced under his ruthless manners, and they trembled before his Berserker rage, but it is the sad truth of English history that they beat him. Now if, instead of throwing himself against this world of privilege and vested interests in the hopes of wringing a pittance of justice for a sinking class, it had been his task to maintain a position already held, he would have fought under very different conditions. If, when prices began to fall, there had been a customary wage in most English villages, the question would not have been whether the ruling class was to maintain its privileges and surplus profits by letting the labourer sink deeper into the morass, but whether it was to maintain these privileges and profits by taking something openly from him. It is easier to prevent a dog from stealing a bone than to take the bone out of his mouth. Cobbett was not strong enough to break the power of the governing class, but he might have been strong enough to defend the customary rights of the labouring class. As it was, the governing class was on the defensive at every point. The rent receivers, the tithe owners, the mortgagers, the lenders to the Government and the contractors all clung to their gains, and the food allowance of the labourer slowly and steadily declined.

There was this great difference between the Speenhamland system and a fixed standard of wages. The Speenhamland system after 1812 was not applied so as to maintain an equilibrium between the income and expenditure of the labourer: it was applied to maintain an equilibrium between social forces. The scale fell not with the fall of prices to the labourer, but with the fall of profits to the possessing classes. The minimum was not the minimum on which the labourer could live, but the minimum below which rebellion was certain. This was the way in which wages found their own level. They gravitated lower and lower with the growing weakness of the wage-earner. If Cobbett had been at the head of a movement for preserving to the labourer a right bestowed on him by Act of Parliament, either he would have succeeded, or the disease would have come to a crisis in 1816, instead of taking the form of a lingering and wasting

illness. Either, that is, other classes would have had to make the economies necessary to keep the labourers' wages at the customary point, or the labourers would have made their last throw before they had been desolated and weakened by another fifteen years of famine.

There is another respect in which the minimum wage policy would have profoundly altered the character of village society. It would have given the village labourers a bond of union before they had lost the memories and the habits of their more independent life; it would have made them an organised force, something like the organised forces that have built up a standard of life for industrial workmen. An important passage in Fielding's *Tom Jones* shows that there was material for such combination in the commoners of the old village. Fielding is talking of his borrowings from the classics and he defends himself with this analogy; 'The ancients may be considered as a rich common, where every person who hath the smallest tenement in Parnassus hath a free right to batten his muse: or, to place it in a clearer light, we moderns are to the ancients what the poor are to the rich. By the poor here I mean that large and venerable body which in English we call the mob. Now whoever hath had the honour to be admitted to any degree of intimacy with this mob must well know, that it is one of their established maxims to plunder and pillage their rich neighbours without any reluctance: and that this is held to be neither sin nor crime among them. And so constantly do they abide and act by this maxim, that in every parish almost in the kingdom there is a kind of confederacy ever carrying on against a certain person of opulence called the squire whose property is considered as free booty by all his poor neighbours; who, as they conclude that there is no manner of guilt in such depredations, look upon it as a point of honour and moral obligation to conceal and to preserve each other from punishment on all such occasions. In like manner are the ancients such as Homer, Virgil, Horace, Cicero and the rest to be esteemed among us writers as so many wealthy squires from whom we, the poor of Parnassus, claim an immemorial custom of taking whatever we can come at.'(22*)

It would not have been possible to create a great labourers' union before the Combination Laws were repealed in 1824, but if the labourers had been organised to defend their standard wage, they would have established a tradition of permanent association in each village. The want of this was their fatal weakness. All the circumstances make the spirit of combination falter in the country. In towns men are face to face with the brutal realities of their lives, unsoftened by any of the assuaging influences of brook and glade and valley. Men and women who work in the fields breathe something of the resignation and peace of Nature; they bear trouble and wrong with a dangerous patience. Discontent moves, but it moves slowly, and whereas storms blow up in the towns, they beat up in the country. That is one reason why the history of the anguish of the English agricultural labourer so rarely breaks into violence. Castlereagh's Select Committee in 1817 rejoiced in the discovery that 'notwithstanding the alarming progress which has been made in extending disaffection, its success has been confined to the principal manufacturing districts, and that scarcely any of the agricultural population have lent themselves to these violent projects.' There is a Russian saying that the peasant must 'be boiled in the factory pot' before a revolution can succeed. And if it is difficult in the nature of things to make rural labourers as formidable to their masters as industrial workers, there is another reason why the English labourer rebelled so reluctantly and so tardily against what Sir Spencer Walpole called, in the true spirit of a classical politician, 'his inevitable and hereditary lot.' Village society was constantly losing its best and bravest blood. Bamford's description of the poacher who nearly killed a gamekeeper's understrapper in a quarrel in a public-house, and then hearing from Dr. Healey that his man was only stunned, promised the doctor that if there was but one single hare on Lord Suffield's estates, that hare should be in the doctor's stew-pot next Sunday, reminds us of the loss a village suffered when its poachers were snapped up by a game-preserving bench, and tossed to the other side of the world. During the years between Waterloo and the Reform Bill the governing class was decimating the village populations on the principle of the Greek tyrant who flicked off the heads of the tallest blades

in his field; the Game Laws, summary jurisdiction, special commissions, drove men of spirit and enterprise, the natural leaders of their fellows, from the villages where they might have troubled the peace of their masters. The village Hampdens of that generation sleep by the shores of Botany Bay. Those who blame the supine character of the English labourer forget that his race, before it had quite lost the memories and the habits of the days of its independence and its share in the commons, was passed through this sieve. The scenes we shall describe in the next chapter show that the labourers were capable of great mutual fidelity when once they were driven into rebellion. If they had had a right to defend and a comradeship to foster from the first, Cobbett, who spent his superb strength in a magnificent onslaught on the governing class, might have made of the race whose wrongs he pitied as his own, an army no less resolute and disciplined than the army O'Connell made of the broken peasants of the West.

NOTES:

1. *Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1834, p. 243.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7.
4. *Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1834, p. 244.
5. *Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1834, pp. 78-9.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
8. *Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1834, p. 94.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
11. *Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1834, pp. 98-104.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
13. *Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1834, p. 108.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
15. *Report of the Poor Law Commission*, 1834, p. 73.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

20. Appendix F, No. 3, to 1st Report of commissioners.

21. See Webb's *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 59.

22. *Tom Jones*, Bk., XII, chap. i.