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THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN PICARDY AND FLANDERS

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A GLANCE at the 1 : 100,000 topographical maps of Northern France quickly reveals a great difference in the arrangement of rural population in Picardy and in that part of the department of Nord belonging to the Plain of Flanders. The distribution in both cases is very even, but the arrangement is radically different. Reference to the geological map shows a close connection between the arrangement in each district, and its geology and physiography.

Picardy is a lonely-looking land of low, naked, rolling hills, cut by tortuous mature valleys. Here and there a village is seen, generally nestling in a hollow, and close circled by trees. Otherwise there is not a house in sight, though the greater part of the country is under cultivation. A winding belt of poplars marks a neighbouring valley, and a regular row of elms reveals a main road on the horizon. Other vegetation there is none, save an occasional dense wood of young trees, on high ground. One seldom sees old trees in France. The underlying formation almost everywhere is the chalk (Senonian) of the Upper Cretaceous, which yields a poor and shallow soil on the terraced hillsides. The climate is continental and humid, moderated by proximity to the sea in the west, but becoming more rigorous inland.

The villages are compact, generally several kilometres apart, dotted over the land quite regularly, and connected by good roads, too numerous for communication alone. The map has hence a characteristic "knotted and netted" appearance. Owing to the poorness of the soil holdings are large, and the farmer, following the gregarious instinct of man, lives not on his farm, far from neighbours, in a melancholy country, but in the village, setting out daily with his team, one of the numerous roads serving his convenience. Though the total population of the department of Somme has declined, the agricultural section, be it noted, is on the increase.

The French part of the Plain of Flanders constitutes about three-fifths of the department of Nord, and a small corner of the Pas de Calais. It stretches from the sea to the Scheldt and the Sensée. The landscape is flat and enclosed, with occasional noble vistas through the trees and hedges into green and fertile distances, dotted with red thatched or tiled cottages, and seldom broken by an undulation until the foothills of Artois are reached. The only feature of importance is the beautiful chain of residual heights stretching from Cassel to Kemmel, and studded with windmills. Ditches and hedges line the roadsides and fields; sluggish brooks, "tamed" and canalized streams, and long canals traverse the plain. Woods are rare, but trees abound, distributed regularly around the edges of fields and along the roadways. Not an acre of ground remains untilled, except the

rich little pasture field on each farm. The roads are straight, and tend to cross at right angles. The whole scene is one of draught-board regularity and garden formality, recalling the picture-book landscapes of our childhood, or the Solano target. The climate is maritime, humid, and more temperate than that of Picardy. The waterways are seldom frozen sufficiently to bear a skater.

The predominant formations are the soft marls and clays of the Lower Eocene (Ypresien). Yielding a naturally fertile soil of great depth, they have been marvellously enriched by centuries of intense culture. With so rich a soil holdings are small, and every man lives on his farm. The farm-houses are usually placed close to the roads, and are so thickly and evenly scattered that true villages are often difficult to define. Small straggling towns merge imperceptibly into the normal country. The general arrangement here also gives the map a characteristic appearance, the regular intersection of roads and ditches giving rise, in such regions as that to the south-west of Armentières, to a series of perfect parallelograms, best seen on the 1 : 40,000 maps.

REVIEWS

EUROPE

The Thames Highway.— **F. S. Thacker.** London: Thacker, 1914.
Pp. 295. *Illustrations.* 6s. net.

THE Thames has waited long for an adequate historian, but Mr. Thacker has proved to be one. He deals with the river, not in its estuarine course, so far as it leads from the seaways to the Port of London (which indeed would offer a worthy subject, but would call for very different treatment), but with its inland navigation alone, over a period of eight and a half centuries. "For over seven and a half of these centuries . . . the river was the everyday commercial highway of Southern England, . . . as vitally a highway to those elder men as any railway or trunk road is to us." Mr. Thacker's history gives a very full insight, of much interest to geographers, into the extraordinary difficulties offered by such a highway, comparable with those of the English road-system, when neither had been taken in hand by strong central authorities in order to be brought into a condition meeting the economic needs of the country. We see the river vainly expected to serve a multiplicity of masters with conflicting interests—the navigator, the miller, the fisherman, and others, and its problems are solved only by the time it has ceased to be a vital artery in the life of the country. It is a fascinating story, and one that is possibly capable of extension to a wider survey of the history of inland navigation in England generally.

The purely physical aspects of the subject are of interest: we trace here and there evidence, not indeed of any profound physical change in the character or habit of the river, but certain clues to the natural condition of its valley when its waters were less closely under control than they are now. These might be pursued as leading to the consideration of the distribution of old towns and villages along its banks, and of the lie of the principal lines of road along and across its valley, which do not always conform to the present condition of the land, but were sometimes governed by the occurrence of marshes