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Allotments and Small Holdings. by J. I. Green

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For this purpose only a limited amount of gold is to be coined, and a charge is to be made for coining. Such is the remedy, and if the author is correct in asserting that in every well-balanced mind nature has proportioned desire to capacity, it is likely to prove effectual. But then it is all the more to be regretted that the author should have entered into so few particulars concerning the application. The book contains no single suggestion which is likely to throw any light on the solution of such problems, as the means by which ground values could be estimated or the standard of value rendered invariable. If Mr. Laycock had given up less space to such unnecessarily disrespectful attacks on Mill, Comte, and other philosophers, and more to the elucidation of his own theory which is to supersede theirs, the book would have gained in style if not in usefulness.

F. M. BUTLIN

Allotments and Small Holdings. By J. I. GREEN, F.S.S.
(London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co. 1896.)

It will be seen that this useful little work, in the few chapters which are devoted to original matter, travels over a good deal of the same ground as Professor Re's work on Italian agriculture, and deals also with much the same class of subjects as my own work on the *Agricultural Labourer*, of which the third edition appeared in 1893. It contains altogether 141 pages, but of them about eighty are devoted to a summary of legislation, to a statement of the rules and agreements governing agricultural clubs and associations, to the Small Holdings Act of 1892, which is printed at full length, and to various official papers and orders connected with it. Mr. Green has some serviceable pages of his own on the subject of cottages and farm buildings. But when he gets to the history of the agricultural labourer, the disappearance of the smaller cultivators, and the enclosure of open land, he is not always accurate; and on the economic results of the small farm system we entirely dissent from him.

He is right in saying that a great change took place in the agricultural system of England about the beginning of the Tudor period. But he does not seem to see the reason of it. And I cannot do better I think than quote the following account from an article on the History of Small Holdings, published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in April 1892:—

‘The first important inroad began with the termination of the Wars of the Roses, when the great fabric of feudalism was falling to pieces. The feudal baron had chiefly prized his estates for the fighting power which they represented; and it was to his interest, of course, that they should maintain as many men as possible. The monasteries, too, seem to have favoured the system of small holdings; but when the civil war of the fifteenth century, and the ecclesiastical revolution of the sixteenth had changed the old order, these reasons for keeping

up the yeomen and smaller tenants, who had dyed so many fields with their blood, from Wakefield to Tewkesbury, began to disappear. The men themselves must have been grievously thinned in numbers by the drain upon them, which lasted for a whole generation; and when the old proprietors saw that the fighting days were over, and when new proprietors came besides who looked only to profit, it is easy to see how the process of consolidation set in. Estates passed rapidly from the hands of the old Norman aristocracy into the possession of merchants, goldsmiths, or successful lawyers, who preferring money to men, turned their corn-land into grass, pulled down the cottages and farmhouses which were no longer required, and threw half a dozen farms into one wherever it was possible. In spite of all that legislation could do to arrest the process, it continued through the following century, till, by the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the rural economy of England had undergone a total transformation, and the agricultural labourer, as we now know him, appears upon the scene.'

The writer of this article calls attention to the well-known paper, written in 1581 by W. S. (See Dr. Cunningham's article in *ECONOMIC JOURNAL*, Vol. III., p. 669), where we have the whole question discussed at considerable length and with great ability, in the form of three dialogues between a knight, a husbandman, a doctor of divinity, a merchant, and a craftsman, the general result of the argument being rather in favour of enclosures than otherwise. But Mr. Green is quite wrong in saying that during the Tudor period the absorption of small farms into large ones was favoured by the crown. On the contrary, between the accession of Henry VII. and the death of Queen Elizabeth no fewer than seven Acts of Parliament were passed for the purpose of arresting the new system, and preventing the enclosure of arable land and its conversion into pasturage; the first was in 1489, the last in 1601. The legislature struggled hard. But it was useless to fight against an economic law even with all the power which Governments then possessed for thwarting its operation. When fighting was uppermost men were more valuable than sheep. When the sword was turned into the pruning-hook sheep were more valuable than men.

The process however was of course not an interminable one. By the beginning of the seventeenth century it had run its course, and for another hundred and fifty years the land had rest. All through this period, labourers, farmers, and landlords seem to have been prosperous and contented, and the first-mentioned in particular reached, as Hallam thought, their culminating point of prosperity in the reign of George II. 'Petty culture still continued on a large scale in spite of consolidation. Small tenants and small proprietors still had their holdings in the common field,' that is, the unenclosed part of the parish, which was still to be seen in some English counties twenty years ago and may be still; while the survival of the world 'field'

almost everywhere as coterminous with parish even where every acre is enclosed serves to remind us of the former state of things. In the causes which led to the revival of the Enclosure Question, and to a renewed controversy on the comparative advantages of large and small farms, we can only refer our readers to the same article from which we have already quoted. Regarding the present aspect of the question, Mr. Green tells us that 'the large farm system has failed,' and also that 'the remunerative character of small holdings has been proved over and over again.' We take exception to both statements. The large farm system has only failed, if it has failed, as all farming has failed. That small holdings are remunerative when used as market gardens we did not require to be told. It is one of the commonplaces of the question. That they may be remunerative in a good grass country is likewise quite admissible. But they are not remunerative as corn farms, which is the great point at issue; and, then, the small dairy farmer or small grazier must have straw, and it would never answer his purpose to buy it. The question is whether the system known as *la petite culture* is capable in England of being carried out and maintained on a large scale, and as the normal condition of English agriculture. If 'the large farm system has failed,' those who say so must mean that or nothing; must mean the small farm system to be a substitute for the large. In this case of course the present state of things would be reversed, and small holdings would be the rule and large ones the exception. It seems to me that if, turning from our own personal experiences, we survey the whole subject as presented to us in the exhaustive Reports issued by successive Government Commissions, which cover the whole country from north to south and from east to west, it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that genuine peasant farmers, whether as owners or tenants, are not in this country a commercial success. They may be an element of social strength, and this indeed is the general belief. But whether a system which is at variance with political economy can be permanently maintained on the ground of its moral utility, is just the very doubt by which so many schemes for the 're-establishment of the peasantry on the soil' find themselves confronted. Can Acts of Parliament prevail against laws of nature? They joined battle in the 17th century and nature triumphed. Is the 19th or 20th century likely to give Parliament its revenge?

T. E. KEBBEL

Economia della Industria Agraria. By Professor ANTONIO LO RE of Foggia. With a Preface by GIUSEPPE PAVONCELLI, Deputy of the Italian Parliament. (Foggia: 1895. Pp. 220.)

WE have here a work from the pen of an Italian agricultural expert, intended for the instruction of the Italian farmer, who is suffering from agricultural depression almost as severely as the