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NOTES AND MEMORANDA

THE FARM LABOURERS OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND.

SINCE the Reports of the Assistant Commissioners to the Royal Commission on Labour began to appear, a great deal has been published in relation to the condition of the agricultural labourers in England; but very little notice has been taken of the reports on Scotland and Ireland. In the present article, then, I briefly sum up the most important points in the voluminous evidence contained in those publications.

In Scotland the great majority of the labourers are engaged by the year or half-year, boarded in farmhouses or bothies, or partly boarded in cottages, and paid during sickness as well as in health. The exceptions are mainly the 'orra' men, or casual day labourers; but regular day labourers are usually paid partly in kind, and employed in all kinds of weather. In the Lothians the payment is almost entirely in money, the men living in cottages as a rule. The same tendency of the yearly or half-yearly hiring system to cause frequent shifting among the men, as was noticed in England, is referred to by the Assistant Commissioners for Scotland. Some of the young men are in favour of shorter engagements; but Mr. Pringle appears to think that this desire is connected mainly with the bothy system, which, happily, is gradually dying out. Like most other disinterested observers, Mr. Pringle condemns this system of housing young men in detached dwellings, where they often have to do their own cooking, and frequently have only one room, in which they sleep as well as eat. Many of the bothies visited by Mr. Pringle were 'dens of dirt and confusion.' The men living in them have none of the comforts or wholesome restraints of home life. Frequently the beds are not made at all, and the bed-clothes are changed only once in two months. There is no check upon the hours which the men keep, and they can be out for half the night if they please. Thus the bothy system tends to promote immorality, and there is no excuse for it except the difficulty of abolishing it suddenly. In the Lothians and other districts, where bothies are not now found, the young men are said to be of a type superior to that of their class in the bothy districts. In some places, however,

the bothies have been greatly improved in construction and in the attention paid to their cleanliness, the services of women being applied to the cleaning of the dwellings, and sometimes to the preparation of meals; while in other districts the men have their meals in the farmhouse kitchens, and only sleep in the bothies. Mr. Pringle has no hesitation in denouncing the bothy system as 'a disgrace to Scotland.' Where female workers are lodged in bothies a great deal of immorality is found to exist.

The diet supplied in Scotland where the labourers are boarded by their employers is much less costly than it is in most parts of England, because of the smaller use of meat. Breakfast usually consists of oatmeal porridge and milk, with tea and bread and butter in some cases; dinner, of broth, meat, and potatoes; and supper, of the same food as is named above for breakfast. Thus in Scotland there is usually only one meat meal in the day, as compared with two or three meat meals in England.

Women are extensively employed in the fields and yards in Scotland, although less so than they were in past times, simply because they are gradually giving up the work in favour of other kinds of employment. As in Northumberland, the bad custom of requiring a regular farm servant to keep a 'bondager,' or woman worker, is still maintained in some parts of Scotland.

The hours of work in Scotland are about the same as those prevailing in those parts of England where they are longest for ordinary labourers and stockmen, and longer for horsemen. The Scotch ploughman, in summer, goes out to the field at 6 A.M., after attending to his horses and getting his breakfast; and, with an interval of two hours for dinner and rest, he has to be in the field again till 6 P.M. Then he returns to the stables, and has to bait his horses before turning them out into the fields for the night. In some places the hours in the field are from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M., with two hours for dinner. In winter he is engaged from light to dark, with one hour usually for dinner, and has to return to the stable at 8 P.M. to feed and clean his horses. As in England, this late attendance upon horses is disliked by the men, and in some cases it has been given up. In certain districts, it is said, the ploughmen are at work two hours before daybreak during the shortest days, doing odd jobs about the yards before going out with their horses.

Owing to the differences as to boarding and payments in kind, the money wages of farm labourers in Scotland vary greatly, and the only convenient method of giving them in summary form is that of stating the Assistant Commissioners' valuations of average earnings, including food and lodging or rent-free cottages, which Mr. Pringle states as in the first table on opposite page, and in which the fractions, given in a few cases, are omitted. No doubt the lower sums entered for horsemen and cattlemen for all but the last district are the earnings of lads.

Districts.	Horsemen.				Cattlemen.				Shepherds.				Day Labourers.							
	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>				
Lothians ...	15	0	to	21	10	13	1	to	22	1	21	6	to	29	3	17	9	to	20	6
Fife, etc. ...	12	3	to	21	0	14	9½	to	20	10	16	10	to	21	2	17	7	to	20	0
Beauly ...	12	7	to	18	0	12	7	to	21	1	16	6	to	20	11	15	4	to	16	11
Breadalbane	}	13	4	to	18	0	...				19	2	to	21	6	...				
Pastoral District																				
N. Inverness and S. Ross																				
	17	0	to	18	1	...					19	7	to	21	6	...				

Mr. Rutherford gives ranges of annual earnings, including all receipts in kind, for all classes of married labourers living in cottages, which are reduced to weekly averages in the next table :—

				<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>		<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Caithness and Orkney	...	...	...	13	1	to	14	3
Ross and Sutherland	...	...	...	15	9	to	16	2
Ayrshire	...	...	...	19	0	to	19	8
S. Argyle	...	...	...				19	1
Bute	...	...	...	20	0	to	20	9
Renfrew	...	...	...	22	4	to	23	1
Stirling	...	...	...	20	7	to	21	10
Dumbarton	...	...	...	22	8	to	23	6
Lanark	...	...	...				22	11
Linlithgow	...	...	...	20	3	to	21	5
Wigton	...	...	...	15	9	to	17	1
Kirkcudbright	...	...	...				17	0
Dumfries	...	...	...	17	5	to	17	11

Single men who live in the farmhouses or bothies, or with their parents, earn, it is said, nearly as much as the married men. The figures show that the earnings of agricultural labourers in Scotland are higher than in all but a few English counties. There is very little piecework, as the men generally do not care for it, and the harvest extras are not great. All extras are calculated in the averages given above.

Women, by the day, have 1s. to 2s. at ordinary times, and from 2s. to 3s. in harvest. Dairymaids and others engaged by the year receive from £12 to £30, with board and lodging.

Cottage accommodation has been improved in Scotland, but is still very bad in many parts. The new dwellings are generally very satisfactory, while old ones, as a rule, are the reverse, very many having only two rooms. Mr. Wilkinson says that in Berwick and Roxburgh the kitchen is still the favourite sleeping place, and that many cottages have no upstairs rooms, while Mr. Rutherford intimates that there are not a few with only one room. The bothies have already been described as generally disgraceful. On the whole, it appears that, although the Scottish agricultural labourers earn more money than the English, they live, in some respects, in a less civilized manner.

Gardens, Mr. Wilkinson says, are generally smaller in Scotland than in England; but, as potatoes are provided by employers, large gardens are not needed. Mr. Gillespie and Mr. Pringle state that every cottage

has its garden, though usually only about an eighth of an acre, and hardly ever more than a rood. There are very few allotments in Scotland, and those that exist are seldom held by agricultural labourers, who, it is said, do not desire them.

As most of the agricultural labourers in Scotland are paid by the year and during sickness, comparatively few of them belong to benefit societies.

The Ploughmen's Union appears to have obtained a hold in many counties, and there are also a few small local societies of the kind. Only one strike is mentioned, a local one among women, and it did not succeed.

With respect to the relations of employers and employed, the testimony is that they are usually friendly, and Mr. Wilkinson thinks they are more generally cordial than in England. Mr. Gillespie describes most of the masters as considerate towards their men; and the other Assistant Commissioners, though they refer to a strained condition of relationship in a few districts, and particularly where bothies are common, give a satisfactory verdict on the whole.

Mr. Pringle says that the general condition of Scottish agricultural labourers has immensely improved during the last forty years, and that money-wages have risen 25 per cent. during the last twenty-five years, while food and clothing have become cheaper. His colleagues express similar opinions. There is some agitation for more holidays, though the men hired by the year or half-year usually have six daily holidays in the year, without loss of pay, which is more than labourers in other industries get. Mr. Pringle heard of many cases in which the receipts of a family were over £150 a year, while in a few they were over £200. These were probably in the Lothians. The employment of children under thirteen years of age has almost ceased, and they enjoy the advantages of free education. When they leave school they can readily find employment on the land. It is only men with large families of young children, or those who are intemperate, thriftless, or exceptionally inefficient, who are unable to maintain their families in comfort. Both intemperance and illegitimacy have greatly decreased, and the moral condition of the Scottish agricultural labouring class has altogether improved.

In Ireland the supply of agricultural labour is said to be short in busy seasons in all the unions visited by the Assistant Commissioners except Westport, where it greatly exceeds the demand at all seasons, in spite of emigration and the migratory habits of the peasantry.

The majority of the labourers are engaged by the week or day, the exceptions being the herds and the hired servants who live in farmhouses. Mr. McCrea, who reports on fourteen counties, says that they are engaged: (a) by the year, wet and dry, with or without (generally with) perquisites consisting of a cottage and potato-ground, often a garden, and, less frequently, turbary, or an allowance of fuel; (b) half-

yearly, with board and lodging; (*c*) half-yearly, outdoor, boarded, and sometimes with cottage, garden, and potato-ground; (*d*) by the day or week. In some of his districts, he states, the majority of the men are employed regularly all the year round, while in others few except indoor men have regular employment; and Mr. O'Brien, who visited thirteen counties, makes a statement to the same effect. But Mr. Wilson Fox and Mr. Richards appear to have found a preponderance of casual labourers in the districts which they visited. As might be supposed, casual labourers are much more numerous in proportion to the whole of their class in Ireland, a country of small holdings, than in England or Scotland. Many of the small farmers or their sons are themselves casual labourers, and therefore, although they may need help in busy seasons, they cannot employ any one regularly. But the evil of the existence of a great number of casual labourers is likely to be exaggerated if the proportion holding land is left out of account, and this the reports do not show. In all Ireland, in 1891, however, the Census shows that there were 845,691 males of all ages dependent upon agriculture, while the Irish agricultural statistics for the same year give the number of occupiers of land as 526,670, more than four fifths of whom have five acres or upwards. Allowing for boys, these figures indicate that the number of landless labourers in Ireland is not very great. Still, there are thousands of men who occupy wretched spots of almost barren land, and who would be much better off without it if they could obtain regular employment as labourers. The small-farm system, which is the ideal of so many people nowadays, has its disadvantages as well as its advantages, and among the former is the unfavourable position of the labourers who do not hold land and of the men who have a little, but not enough to afford them even half a livelihood.

Hours of work in Ireland vary as in the other divisions of the kingdom, not only in different districts, but even in the same parish. For ordinary labourers they are most commonly from 6 A.M. to 6 P.M. in summer, with one and a half to two hours off for meals; and from light to dark in winter, with one hour off. Horsemen are employed about an hour longer in winter, and half an hour longer in summer, when they turn the horses out into the fields for the night.

Wages vary greatly in connection with payments in kind. Casual labourers are commonly boarded while at work, and regular men also in some districts; while ploughmen, cattlemen, and shepherds living in cottages are almost invariably paid partly in kind. Some of the regular herds or cattlemen are paid entirely in grazing land for cattle and sheep, and nearly all chiefly in this manner. It is, therefore, difficult to summarize the ordinary weekly wages. In some places regular ordinary labourers who have no perquisites get as little as 8s. a week in summer; and none of the Assistant Commissioners mention a higher rate than 12s. in their summaries, except for casual men, who occasionally get 15s.; while in winter wages are as low as

7s. 6d. in some districts, and rarely above 10s. But the men who have board are better off, as the difference seems to be only about 2s. a week. Ploughmen and cattlemen have 1s. to 2s. more than ordinary labourers, and herds and shepherds on estates or very large farms earn a great deal more in one way or another. The average weekly earnings given by the Assistant Commissioners for regular day labourers, horsemen, and cattlemen range from 7s. 9d. to 15s. 6d. Instances of herds earning £80 or even £90 a year are given; but such men commonly have to pay for assistance with their live stock. It is clear that the earnings of farm labourers are much lower, as a rule, in Ireland than in England. The board supplied to farm servants and to others who have meals in the farmhouses is much better than it was in former times; but the families of the labourers are said to fare miserably. According to one witness, they live on maize-meal stir-about and butter-milk; but presumably potatoes are added during the greater part of the year. Many of the small landholders and their families are no better fed.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the cottages of Irish labourers are generally wretched hovels. There are a few good dwellings on some of the estates of the resident gentry, and in some unions the guardians have erected cottages under the provisions of the Labourers' Ireland Act 1881. Mr. McCrea says, however, that up to March 31, 1892, little advantage had been taken of the Act throughout the North and West of Ireland, only 78 cottages having been sanctioned in Ulster, and 87 in Connaught. On the other hand, 4,464 had been granted in Leinster, and 7,242 in Munster. It may be concluded, then, that the cottage accommodation is improving, though very slowly in the North and West.

In too many instances no gardens are attached to cottages, the dwellings being often found crowded together in small towns or villages, where it is difficult to imagine any excuse for economy of space. Scattered country cottages more commonly have gardens, but not generally in some parts of the country, and seldom where their occupiers hold land near by. Garden allotments are attached to the new cottages built by Boards of Guardians; but, otherwise, allotments are uncommon in Ireland. Even the old system of con-acre, under which the labourers almost universally hired plots of land of the farmers for potatoes in former times, is falling into disuse in some districts, the rents demanded by the farmers being exorbitant. Potato land, however, is often supplied as part payment of wages.

Benefit societies are almost unknown in the agricultural districts of Ireland. 'Irish villages,' Mr. Fox says, 'entirely lack the parish societies, clubs, charities, and other organisations which do so much to assist the poor in England.' Only one of the Assistant Commissioners mentions trade unions as in existence among the agricultural labourers, and these he found nearly extinct.

Miserably as the labourers are usually paid, the relations between

them and their masters are said to be generally friendly. They are not satisfied with their condition, but do not blame their employers for it, as a rule. The condition of the casual labourers is miserable in the extreme. Mr. Richards found many of them lying in bed during the day, because they were out of work, and could keep warmer and do with less food than if they were up. Mr. Fox says that, speaking generally, the labourers in his four unions must have a great struggle for existence, and that it is marvellous how those who are not regularly employed can keep and clothe their families. Mr. O'Brien, while showing that there is great variety in the circumstances of the men and their families, and that a great number of them are in a miserable condition, confidently states that a substantial improvement has taken place within the last ten or fifteen years; and Mr. McCrea gives similar testimony. The latter adds that the condition of the very small landholder does not differ materially from that of the cottager. Practically he is a labourer, but often so unfavourably situated that there is little demand for his labour. As is well known, many of the labourers and small holders migrate to England for part of the year, and so add to their earnings; while others are helped by relatives in America, or by the earnings of their wives from poultry keeping or other industries. 'In estimating the condition of the Irish labourer,' Mr. McCrea remarks, 'an English standard cannot be adopted. The Irishman does not work so hard, nor do his wants approach those of the Englishman. Even when best employed he is much more abstemious, both in food and drink, living on potatoes, flour-bread, and tea, oatmeal porridge and milk, with a small quantity of bacon, eggs, butter, and salt fish, and butchers' meat only as an occasional luxury.' This is not a strikingly meagre bill of fare, as it is written; but probably Mr. McCrea means that a combination of one or two of the substantial kinds of food and one or two of the luxuries mentioned is the usual diet of the Irish labourer. It is clear, however, that the condition of the farm labourers in Ireland is generally far inferior to that of the same class in any part of England or Scotland.

WILLIAM E. BEAR

A TYPICAL INSTANCE OF CONCILIATION.

THE settlement of a recent dispute may be taken as a typical instance of the practical utility of properly constituted Conciliation Boards, even when dealing with conditions of considerable difficulty and complexity. The Victoria Steamboat Company owns the steamers plying between Greenwich, Hampton Court, and intermediate Piers, and their dispute with their men threatened to cause the stoppage of the passenger traffic at the commencement of the summer season of the