
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

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difficulties in detail which we find in other parts of the evangelic narrative. And now let us single out simply one point from the moral and religious teaching of the occasion. It must strike everyone that the sudden speaking of Jesus Christ to St. Matthew in this way must have excited wonder, and that St. Matthew's sudden obedience—obedience, too, so complete, that he changed his vocation at once—was equally wonderful. But, after all, do not events of the same kind happen to us in our own lives? Does not Christ sometimes suddenly speak to us, so that we are unexpectedly placed under the responsibility of listening or refusing? Do we not sometimes find ourselves all at once in an emergency? and are not such moments full of great consequences for good or for harm? Are we ready to listen to the voice? And when we hear it, shall we have courage to obey? "Jesus speaks, and speaks to *thee*." The happiness of the soul depends on promptitude in listening and willingness to obey.

J. S. HOWSON.

ART. V.—LADY VERNEY'S "PEASANT PROPERTIES."

Peasant Properties and other selected Essays. By Lady VERNEY. 2 Vols. Longmans, Green, and Co. 1885.

IT is strange that, while in England the question of peasant properties is coming to the front as the solution of agricultural difficulties, in France it is declared that of all the changes in their financial habits the greatest is the cooling of the public passion for the ownership of land. "The desire of it," says a French authority, "has hitherto brought about most of our social crises; but the excessive division, which is the inevitable result of our laws of succession, is no longer pursued with the same fury." Again, it is said that "the succession duties paid to the State by the constant changes of property have become so high as almost to absorb the total value of individual property by the community." The consequence of the fear of this, and that other investments of money are gradually becoming popular with the peasants, has made land much less valuable than it was.[1] The disease

[1] It has also encouraged the rush upon great cities. The surplus labourer does not emigrate; and in Paris—supposed to be the Eldorado of high wages and constant pleasure—he often sinks to the lowest level of distress.

in the vines, the mulberry, and the olive, and the impossibility of finding a fruitful appropriation for the devastated fields, has brought down rents, and forced proprietors to cultivate at a loss the land which has been abandoned. In the centre and south, says another French authority, "la petite culture est impraticable" at the present time. Wherever the subdivision of land is excessive, the poverty is very great. The state of the peasants in the different departments of course varies greatly. In Touraine a number of large estates still remain, and many of the old families reside in the *châteaux* for a great part of the year. Work for pay, therefore, is to be obtained, and there is comparatively little distress. The small owners appear to be best off in the provinces of the north-west, for there they have the command of the London market, and send over eggs, fowls, butter, and so forth. In the department of the Hautes Alpes, Lady Verney heard of a Protestant village where the subdivision had been so great, and the cutting of the forests by the peasants so injurious, that the snows had come down on the place and the soil had been carried away. The poverty of the people had increased in consequence to a degree amounting almost to starvation; and the Protestant Committee of Lyons, aided by English friends, had sent the greater part of the inhabitants to form a little colony near Oran, in Algiers. "In the neighbourhood of Vichy, a friend of our own," writes Lady Verney, "intended to take a walking tour, but he found that at the village inns the only food to be had was a *potage* made of cabbage, of a few slices of bread, an onion or two, and a piece of lard. The cauldron was filled up with water three, and sometimes four, times in the day, without anything else being added. This was the habitual food of the peasants, and there was nothing else but black bread to be had." Other facts which show the extreme poverty of the small owners in certain departments at the present time are given in the work before us. Five essays in the first volume deal with the subject of peasant properties.

When you consider the extraordinary advantages of climate and soil in the south of France, says Lady Verney; that trellises of vines can be grown every thirty yards or so apart, with crops of maize, roots, and haricots between; that grass can be cut three or four times in the year; that fruit of all kinds ripens season after season, and has a good sale; that little fuel need be consumed, a fire during the chief part of the year being only lighted for an hour or two—it is marvellous that the owners are not more prosperous with all their hard work and thrift. It would seem as if the only explanation was that, *adscripti glebæ*, their land system induces them to try and get a subsistence out of small patches which are

utterly incapable of affording it.[1] The cultivation of the French holdings is so bad, according to Mr. Caird, that production is nearly as two to one in favour of the English system; while it takes eight peasant farmers and their families to work the same extent of land in France as is done here by a farmer and five or six labourers. And the English labourers, says M. de Lavergne, the greatest French writer on agricultural affairs, are far better off than the French small proprietor. There is no doubt about it. The state of the French peasant is going down, that of the English labourer is in the ascendant; his wages have risen and his dwelling has been improved. He, indeed, benefits more than anyone by the agricultural improvements which have been introduced, while in France an ignorant conservatism prevents such novelties; so that when the fields of wheat in California of 3,000 acres are considered, with every advantage of machinery, it is no wonder that French agriculturists are in fear for the future. That machines, which are the very life of agriculture in America and in England, are occasionally to be found in France, says Lady Verney, there is no doubt, "but they must indeed be few, when, during three weeks of very careful investigation and inquiry, after having seen the corn reaped in the north, the hay cut and carrying everywhere, and ploughing going on along the whole line of journey, we" only came across a single one. Those who have marked the size of the peasant plots, indeed, must see how impossible any help from machines would be. The difficulty of turning even a common plough within their minute limits is so great, and so much damage is necessarily done to *le voisin*, that questions of compensation would become serious were it not that *le voisin* does as much harm in return. A steam-plough would be like a bull in a china closet.

As to the health of the women and children in different districts, Lady Verney gives a good deal of information. Thus, in the neighbourhood of Aix-les-Bains, she writes: "In general the sickly, worn look of the women, and even of the men, in the fields, was very striking; they are underfed and overworked." They eat little but rye-bread, it seems; they do not drink their own wine, and only the buttermilk from their own cows. The *morcellement* of land is so great and the mortgages on it are so heavy that the peasants cannot live on the produce of the plots; in a bad year they are reduced to starvation. The weakly look of the children is sad to see. The mothers are forced to go out to work, and cannot take

[1] Writing at Geneva, Lady Verney remarks that the division of property in the canton is exceedingly great, but the Swiss emigrate to so large an extent, and are besides so industrial and commercial a people, that, unlike French peasants, they do not call on the land exclusively to support them.

proper care of them. "Hard times," said an old woman, sickly, worn, and unkempt, with her house as wretched as herself; she would have been supposed to be in the lowest dregs of poverty in England. In a glorious bit of country, where the great bunches of purple grapes, the figs, the standard peach-trees made a most idyllic picture, the houses—picturesque with overhanging roofs and balconies and outward stairs—were filthy; the smells were almost overpowering; the children, pale and sickly, were wallowing in the dirt; the women, stunted and ugly, were dragging little carts, cutting grass, carrying great loads on their heads. Again. In another village, where the soil was most fruitful, and a good market for produce was close at hand, peasant proprietorship might be expected in perfection. Yet here the struggle was severe. A widow with two grandsons, who had a cow and a heifer on the mountain, a piece of vineyard and of maize, and a bit of land "où il y a un peu de tout," hemp, beans, hay for forage, etc., was hideous, dirtier even than the floor of her house. The room would have been quite dark, for the tiny window was so blocked and dirty that it gave no light, but that two sticks were flaming in the open fireplace; the uneven mud floor was the same as Lady Verney saw everywhere; a broken press, some dirty sacks, two chairs—nothing else was in the place. The proprietress begged for a sou. In another house, where was a winepress, the mistress was young, but withered and haggard with overwork. "Ah, c'est un vilain pays ici," she said, "laid—tout montagne." "We think it all beautiful," said Lady Verney. "Ah, pour vous," she sighed. Everything was done at home. She dressed the hemp and spun it, after which it was sent to the village *tisserand* to be woven into coarse cloth; there is no division of labour here—all is done at home. In the house there was no kind of cupboard, press, or drawers; the clothes of the family were hanging on a rope. Their two cows spent the summer on the mountains, on the communal ground, and it took an hour for the eldest daughter to go up and milk them. She made butter but once a week; she baked every fortnight, and put a little wheat into the loaf, "pas beaucoup." The possession of a *pressoir* implies a certain amount of dignity and profit; the neighbours who have not got one send in their grapes to be trodden, and in payment leave behind the mass of hard-squeezed skins and stalks called *marc*, from which, after it is steeped in boiling water, an *eau-de-vie* is distilled. But even with a *pressoir* the proprietor was very poor. The winepress was in a dark, dirty hole beneath the "house-place," with a great cask, where the grapes were trodden by men's feet before being put under the screw of the machine.

The amount of work done by the women [we read] is enormous, without which it would be utterly impossible to cultivate these small scattered plots, as the owners cannot pay for labour. Here was an old woman, dirty and worn, working with a great hoe, her gold cross hanging from a gilt heart, dangling above the dirt, as she bent her stiff old body over the work; another was guiding the plough, which two oxen were dragging, and which only scratched the earth; another was harrowing with the little three-cornered harrow used here, a baby laid by her on a heap of sticks in the open field. Some were breaking the hard lumps of soil with a sort of hook. In a ploughed field, far from any cottage or village, was a mother sitting in the middle of her work, suckling her baby, with three small children hanging round her; the fatigue and anxiety to a woman of dragging such tiny feet to such a distance, where they had to be kept the whole day, perhaps only a woman can rightly understand. At Chambéry we met four men riding on a bullock car, their three women walking by the side. Even on Sunday, poor souls! they work on after Mass, with an attempt at better clothes, it is true; but they are too down-trodden to have courage enough or time enough to attend to their looks or the looks of their houses. Indeed, the use of beauty is certainly altogether ignored in French country life here. A woman is treated as a beast of burden, and the general civilization suffers.

As to the houses, filthy discomfort, it seems, is the rule: clay floors, no furniture, no presses for clothes, the children sitting on the ground for lack even of stools. "We did not see," says Lady Verney, "a single book or newspaper, or ornament of any kind in the thirty-five or forty houses we visited. The struggle for life is so severe, the wolf of starvation is so close to the door, that the effort to get bread enough to eat seems to exhaust their energies. But owners who had cows and oxen, pigs and winepress, were just as squalid as their neighbours; the richer houses were not a whit more comfortable than the poorer ones. The ideal had sunk to the level of the most miserable everywhere."

In a flour-mill on rather a large scale, where we went, says Lady Verney, to look at a press which made colza oil for lamps and walnut oil for salad, the old miller, who looked like a day labourer, took us into his house. In England he would have had a smart parlour, with prints on the wall and books on the table—an attempt, at least, at art and literature. Here the one room was so small that it was hardly possible to sit down; a flour-bin on one side, the staircase on the other, and the cooking-stove set in the large unused chimney-corner on the third, and everything dirty and bare. These stoves are now taking the place of the great wood fires, and are very convenient. A flat iron box, four inches deep, is set on four legs, with three or four round openings in the top—a handful of fuel is put inside, and as soon as it is alight the pots are set in the holes to simmer, while an iron tube carries off the very

small amount of smoke. His two daughters were making some soup—haricots, leeks, sometimes a little maize or potatoes, no milk, a little bit of butter, seldom any meat, they said—this was the usual *potage* of the district, and, indeed, generally in France. The miller employed no workmen; they did all in the family, and "had a good piece of land of their own." In England the sons would have resisted being made into day labourers, and would have gone off into other trades; but here the only object seems to be to avoid hiring, and to keep the piece of ground together. The idea of "bettering" themselves, of rising in the world—which is the great object of the Anglo-Saxon race for themselves, or at least for their children—is entirely absent here. There is no ambition but that of putting money by in the funds, or hiding it in an old stocking, after the barest necessaries of life have been provided; and no capital is invested in cultivating the land.

The agricultural difficulties, just now, are truly great. The wheat, cheese, and pork are undersold by American produce; the "déplacements d'industrie et de commerce" occasioned by arrivals from the New World, unhinge everything. As population increases in America and the cost of production with it, an equilibrium will probably be found; but there will be much distress in Europe first. And among peasant proprietors, in France, as in Germany, there is real distress.

Lady Verney's third essay, "Jottings" in Auvergne, shows much the same state of things. The *morcellement* is greater than even at Aix-les-Bains; scraps of ground with hay or corn lie between the vines; a piece fifty yards by thirty looks quite large; a bit here, a bit there, often at an hour's distance from each other; "nobody has land lying together!" They will not buy up or exchange so as to have their property lying under their hands; there is the greatest jealousy of each other. "L'échange des parcelles s'accomplit rarement," writes Le Play. In the minute patches, isolated and scattered, to which the *partage forcé* reduces peasant properties, he adds, the proper employment of water for irrigation, all improvements in the cultivation of cereals, and so forth, become impossible. In some places the width of the plot is from four to five furrows. It is easy to see at a glance that waste of time and money and labour is serious.

At Beaumont, a little village town in the midst of the vineyards, the women sat gossiping and knitting in the roadway; there was no furniture in the dismal, dark houses, which did not seem to be intended to live in, but merely for sleeping and eating. At Montferrand, in fine old stone houses, the *cultivateurs* were squatting—it could scarce be called living—amidst heaps of dirt; everywhere squalor and nastiness. Ig-

norant, narrow-minded, and dirty, they seem to have no object but to put by many sous: they imperil the future of France by a diminishing population in order to carry out their ideal of having only children enough to enable them all to be kept at home, so as to succeed to the wretched little property.

The last census of France shows that the population is nearly stationary, and that it is diminishing in thirty-four rural departments.[1] An average of three children to a family is the smallest that can keep up the present number, and even this is not now attained. Two children are more common than three—very often there is only one.

"Je n'en ai pas; à quoi bon avoir des enfants? Il faut vivre," was one cynical answer to Lady Verney's question. An old woman said she had three sons and only four grandchildren. An old man said his two sons were married; "et nous leur avons donné à chacun du pain et du vin"—*i.e.*, a bit of corn-ground and of vineyard; but the old people had great difficulty in living on the diminished remainder. The peasant marriages are, to a large extent, mercenary. As to morality in relation to the married life, some medical critics, we believe, have given a very unsatisfactory opinion.

After visiting several cottages, dark, dirty, and wretched,[2] Lady Verney chatted with her French neighbours at the *table-d'hôte;* they showed no surprise. "How is it, then, with you?" she said to a lady from Brittany. "Hommes, femmes, et bêtes, tout ça vit pêle-mêle," was the reply. "How is it in Touraine?" she asked another lady. "Oh no; they do not live in the cowsheds," said she—"only in the stables, and there is generally a little off-place where they sleep." There is little difference in this respect, it seems, in the different parts of France; but in Normandy, where the subdivision is not so great, and many tenant farms remain, the land being better cultivated, country life has more of charm; "homes" are cleaner and brighter. Comfortable homesteads, with "trente bêtes à cornes," are to be seen in Normandy.

The essay on "Peasant Proprietors in Brittany" has much information, precise and accurate, taken by the accomplished essayist from the *Revue des Deux-Mondes* for November, 1844. The *Revue* describes the cottages with roofs reaching to the

[1] "Il y a moins de naissances en France que dans les autres pays de l'Europe." The calculation is made from the beginning of the century, when the diminution of the proportion of births to deaths began. Some statisticians consider that the "phénomène tient à la loi du partage forcé."—*Revue des Deux-Mondes*, June, 1882.

[2] We read (p. 134) "The floor was without pavement of any kind; filthy to a degree not describable, with the cow's litter, the chicken's dirt . . . They all slept summer and winter in the dark and horrible discomfort from choice, in order to save fuel."

ground, the interior black with the smoke of heather and dried rushes (their only fuel); the owner and his family half naked, sleeping in a box, without sheets, on a chaff mattress, with a cow, a pig, or a donkey at the other end of the hovel, as not uncommon. During the last forty years *la petite propriété* has increased enormously:

The state of the country, socially, seems to be of the lowest. Food for a working-man is calculated at £8 a year, for a woman at £6. A *soupe*—of course without meat—with or without lard, water-gruel with black bread ill-baked, butter and potatoes (the lard generally in small quantities), is the food for employer and employed alike. This diet produces *une mollesse et une lenteur* very bad for work. The women are particularly worn and weakened by it. *Les abus alcooliques*, to which a too great number of the peasants yield, seem to be the reaction from a state of semi-starvation. The evil has grown worse of late in the lower stratum of the working-class, unhappily the most numerous. Alcohol has taken the place of wine and cider, and drunkenness among women goes on increasing. Their excuse of bad food does not hold good for the women of Normandy, who are addicted to the same vice.

The drinking at fairs, at sales of land, and at feasts and "Pardons," is excessive for both sexes, especially on Sunday. The ceremonies of the Church, however, are dying out:

Nothing improves more slowly than the dwellings: it is the last use to which the savings of the peasant are applied. The houses are generally exceedingly damp, and the inhabitants have to choose between being frozen or smoked; and the *cohabitation du cochon* is general, though sometimes he is separated from the family by a thin partition. The beds are arranged one over the other, like the berths of a ship—*le système Breton*—dirty, the feathers ill-cured and full of smells. *L'ascension pénible et ridicule du docteur* to a patient above may be imagined. The want of windows and doors is general everywhere; and these wretched hovels are rented at £1, £2, and even £4 a year—letting, of course, is not confined to large owners. Wages vary in the different communes: about 15d. a day for men without food, 10d. with; 10d. or 7d. for women; "and we have met cases of 5d. for women with food, and 8d. without." In the Côtes du Nord even the men have only from 5d. to 6d. a day during the winter—"*c'est misérable!*" It is only in harvest-time, and in the more prosperous districts, that the labourer in Brittany obtains two francs a day; two and a half is very exceptional. The work is so bad that this cheap rate costs as much as better pay for more efficient labour, but the employers are too poor to give more.

In the great majority of middle-sized and small farms, we read, the wife is humble and submissive—*façonnée au joug de l'homme*. She is like a servant without wages; she waits on the men at table and eats their leavings—*un ridicule très marqué* attaches to an indulgent husband in popular estimation. Unfortunately, the habit of parents to strip themselves

of their property during their lifetime for their children, only tends to make *des ingrats*. Education, it seems, is at the lowest. In the Morbihan, sixty out of a hundred cannot read; in the Île et Vilaine, according to the census of 1872, the population was over 589,532; those who could read were only 355,400, and of some 234,000 of these the instruction was very bad. Strange superstitions linger in the province, and the state of the peasants we should consider extremely low. Mendacity is a tradition and a career—*on est né mendiant en Bretagne.*

A remark of Lady Verney—already quoted—that "ceremonies" are dying out, and that the influence of the Church has diminished a good deal, has many illustrations. At Amiens, an *ouvrier*, clenching his fist, remarked with a scowl that the statue of Peter the Hermit ought to be pulled down and broken up. At Aix, a workman complained of the sums paid to the Church: "*Cinquante-deux millions sur le budget*, and we don't want the priests."

"Do you think it right [he cried] for a woman to go to confession to a man, and tell him all her husband says and does? It is abominable. The priest ferrets out all the gossip in the village, and puts his nose into all our affairs; but the husbands won't allow their wives now to confess, except *quelques vieilles dévotes*, and the fathers won't even let their daughters go, after they have once made their *première communion*.[1] . . . I don't want the curé, or his teaching or his preaching."

Religion is dying away, because the true and the false are so bound together. Lady Verney quotes the saying: "On veut nous faire croire un tas de bêtises qui sont incroyables, et nous n'en voulons pas, je vous le dis tout court!" Earnest "Catholics" in the Church of England who are apt to laud the Church of Rome may be recommended to study such testimonies as these, or those in other recent publications, showing the moral[2] and religious condition of France. Italy is hardly worse than France.

The curé is extremely ill-paid, only 900 francs by the State, besides his fees, which are not high; he is hardly ever a man of education, and generally rises from the poorest families; he only associates with the gentlefolks professionally; "thus a link between the upper and lower classes is wanting in France, such as is found in the English clergyman." Between the

[1] Confession, Lady Verney heard, "was nearly extinct in the North of France also."

[2] We read (p. 68) "The books the people read (when they read at all, which is not the case with the peasants) are bad, and the papers worse; the *feuilletons* of the cheap press are simply disgraceful." The proportion of suicides in France has greatly risen. In London the proportion is 85 per million; in Paris, 200 (p. 108).

seigneurs and the peasants, as a rule, there has been a social chasm. Eugénie de Guérin mentions, says Lady Verney, that one day she asked an old woman to fetch soup from the *château;* she did not come, and when questioned, she replied that her grandchild had said, "N'y va pas, grand'mère; on t'y mangera!" Such grim traditions of hostility English people can hardly understand; between the manor-house and the cottage, as a rule, there has been, and still is, a very friendly feeling. In England a thousand village people may play at cricket, and games of all sorts in the park, visit the gardens, and take tea on the lawn, with self-restraint and thorough enjoyment. Lady Verney, however, heard of a *fête* given on the occasion of a marriage at a *château*, where the gardens had been opened, but everything had been "pillé, ravagé, et saccagé; c'était comme si l'ennemi avait passé par la campagne." Of Christian ministry by lay-folk, again, one hardly ever hears. In the *Récit d'une Sœur*, as a proof of her extraordinary sanctity, the angelic Alexandrine is described as visiting the sick, and teaching the children of the poor near her father-in-law's home, in the way that is done by wives and daughters of the clergyman and the squire in almost every village in England, as a matter of course, without any notice being taken of it. As Lady Verney, in her notes on Paris, remarks, while there is "much regulation work" of an earnest type among Roman Catholics in France, there is little spontaneity, very little private voluntary effort. For ourselves, we may go further; the teaching of Rome in regard to what is termed the Religious life must necessarily, we think, chill and cramp the zeal of the "laity"; it is not consistent with the independence of Christian service as set forth in the New Testament.

In regard to French Protestantism, its character, and its prospects, Lady Verney's remarks in the main agree with the article by Dr. Pigou, in a recent CHURCHMAN.

Lady Verney's essay on "Little Takes" in England, as in contrast with "Peasant Properties" in France and Germany, is very readable, and is, besides, a timely and a really practical contribution to a subject which is just now engaging much attention. The unwisdom of much that is advanced by Radical land reformers in England, as well as in Ireland, about agricultural labourers with three acres of their own, is very plainly shown.

In connection with the subject of allotments is a matter to which many country clergymen have of late been giving serious thought—we mean the use of portions of glebe-lands by labourers in the parish. To this subject we hope soon to return.