

BRITISH COAL MINER TODAY

According to Mr. Smillie the pitman, miner and collier, as he is variously styled in the North and in the South, is a "wage-serf" and a down-trodden individual enchained by the blood-sucking capitalist. But nothing can be further from the truth than this presentation, for there is no freer, heartier, healthier, more hospitable, or more independent man in the world than the pitman, and none with a greater capacity for enjoying life or a keener love of sport. As every one knows, "Geordie's" thoughts of a future life, where he was to achieve "wings," were concentrated on "fleeing the priest for a sovereign."

Far from being down-trodden he is more like to treat you to a scornful pity than to suffer any "impitance" from yourself, and if you engage in argument with him "tis you, no he, who will cry "touche" or "a moi." Once you have recognized his incontestable superiority he will become your friend and patron and give you "wrinkles" as to the art of life "Champions" abound in the pit villages of the north and are infinite in their variety. Thus in a single village you may come across a "Pansy Champion," a "Quoits Champion," in "Draughts Champion," and the writer, who lived years ago close beside various pit centres, employed a pitman as a sort of assistant game-keeper or watcher. He was, according to his own account, the champion "sparrow" (sparrow) shutter, and when he sustained defeat attributed it to his being "tarrible trashed out wi' wark," and boldly maintained his title to the championship.

Pit villages are not beautiful, and in some Scottish districts the housing is scandalously inadequate and insanitary, yet the interior of some of these small and ugly houses is often warm and cosy to an extraordinary degree. We may hate other people's "froust"; we enjoy our own. The writer remembers one cottage in particular that was well lined with books. The owner, an overman or deputy, was an authority on social questions, and once when it was suggested that the late Principal of Newnham would like to call upon him, he evinced no sign of gratification, for he "knew what she was after—she wants to pick man brains." Another cottage we remember which was lit with electric light—one of the sons was an engineer or electrician and obtained power from the colliery, and another son had musical tastes and had fitted up a small organ, whilst the father had made for himself a fine collection of fossils. In another colliery centre, a few miles eastward, the writer well remembers giving an address on George Meredith in an excellent institute, the chairman being the then mine's manager, later to become H.M.'s Chief Inspector and a K.C.B. This is mentioned because the general public knows nothing of "Geordie," and, relying on Mr. Smillie's speeches, would naturally believe such an incident, over twenty years ago, to have been impossible. "Geordie" in short, resembles the Maid of Dove in that he lives so remote from big towns that there are few to know him and "very few to love." It has been said that "Geordie" in Northumberland plays the violin, while south of the Tyne, in the ancient bishopric of Durham, he keeps a greyhound or a whippet, but in either event the like heartiness prevails in either district, though with its teeming population a greater admixture of "Irishmen" and "Cousin Jacks" (Cornishmen) etc., being employed in Durham County.

The writer was some years ago on his way to attend the Durham Miners' Gala and beside Framwellgate Bridge within the shadow of the great Cathedral of St. Cuthbert, chanced to speak to one who was evidently of the mining fraternity. Alert, well-built, clean-shaven as a Poilu, he was a fine specimen of humanity. "Ho-way is

and hev a drink," said he, with a jerk of the thumb towards the public house. This offer of hospitality having been meanly evaded on the score of indigestion, "Geordie" exclaimed "Indigestion! Aa divv'n't knaa what the ward means. Wey, aa cud digest a paving-stone," and he pointed to the cobbles upon the street. Another magnificent figure recurs to the mind's eye of a burley veteran brewer, six feet high and broad in proportion, who could hew coal with the best of the young men. Though over sixty years of age, he was in no mind to "take the cowl," he had still, he confessed, several "follies" to get through and still had his "favorytes" amongst women kind. He could demolish a leg of mutton at a sitting and as for the "gills" he could dispose of he would have delighted Rabelais.

Though this calling is arduous and dangerous, none can deny that it keeps a man in excellent physical "fettle," and the writer for one would far sooner be a hewer of coal than an agricultural laborer. Many improvements in housing are of course overdue, as is now generally recognized, and an increase of wages could be admitted if an increase of production were assured. What one fears is that the preaching of "ca' canny" and discontent with his calling inculcated by

the President of the Miners' Federation may sap the heartiness, the independence and the former fine morale of the pitman as a class.

To maintain as some do, that there has been no improvement in the conditions under which the pitman lives is stark nonsense. A hundred years ago he was indubitably a "serf," being truly adscriptus fossae. "The youthful portion of a pitman's life," wrote Thomas Wilson in his "Pitman's Pay" (first published in "Mitchell's Magazine," 1826), "in those days was passed in the most galling slavery. Eighteen or nineteen hours a day for weeks together being spent in almost insupportable drudgery."

"Thou knows for weeks aw've gyeen away,

At twee o'clock o' Monday mornin', And niver seen the leet o' day Until the Sabbath day's returnin'.

"The slav'ry borne by Blackmoors They've lang been ringin' i' wor ears, But let them try a lunk at wors, And tell us which the warse appears."

In short, when Mr. Smillie compares the present-day pitman to a "serf" he is a hundred years behind the times. —London "Spectator."

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Synopsis of

Land Act Amendments

Minimum price of first-class land reduced to \$5 an acre; second-class to \$3 an acre.

Pre-emption now confined to surveyed lands only.

Records will be granted covering any land suitable for agricultural purposes and which is non-timber land.

Partnership pre-emption abolished, but parties of not more than four may arrange for adjacent pre-emption with joint residence, but each making necessary improvements, and respective claims.

Pre-emptors must occupy claims for five years and make improvements to value of \$10 per acre, including clearing and cultivation of at least 5 acres before receiving Crown grant.

Where pre-emptor in occupation less than 5 years, and has made proportionate improvements, he may, because of ill-health, or other cause, be granted intermediate certificate of improvement and transfer his claim.

Records without permanent residence may be issued, provided applicant makes improvements to extent of \$500 per annum and records same each year. Failure to make improvements or record same will operate as forfeiture. Title cannot be obtained in less than 5 years, and improvements of \$10.00 per acre, including 5 acres cleared and cultivated, and residence of at least 3 years are required.

Pre-emptor holding Crown grant may record another pre-emption, if he requires land in conjunction with his farm, without actual occupation, provided statutory improvements made and residence maintained on Crown granted land.

Unsurveyed areas, not exceeding 30 acres, may be leased to homesteaders; title to be obtained after satisfying residential and improvement conditions.

For grazing and industrial purposes areas exceeding 640 acres may be leased by one person or company.

Mill, factory or industrial sites on timber land not exceeding 40 acres may be purchased; conditions include payment of stumpage.

Natural hay meadows inaccessible by existing roads may be purchased conditional upon construction of a road to them. Rebate of one-half of cost of road, not exceeding half of purchase price, is made.

PRE-EMPTORS' FREE GRANTS ACT.

The scope of this Act is enlarged to include all persons joining and serving with His Majesty's Forces. The time within which the heirs or devisees of a deceased pre-emptor may apply for title under this Act is extended from one year from the death of such person, as formerly, until one year after the conclusion of the present war. This privilege is also made retroactive.

No fees relating to pre-emption are due or payable by soldiers on pre-emption recorded after June 26, 1918. Taxes are remitted for five years.

Provision for return of money acquired, due and been paid since August 1, 1914, on account of payments, fees or taxes on soldiers' pre-emption.

Interest on agreements to purchase town or city lots held by members of Allied Forces, or dependants, acquired direct or indirect, remitted from settlement to March 31, 1920.

SUB-PURCHASERS OF CROWN LANDS.

Provision made for issuance of Crown grants to sub-purchasers of Crown lands, acquiring rights from purchasers who failed to complete purchase, involving forfeiture, on fulfilment of conditions of purchase, interest and taxes. Where sub-purchasers do not claim whole — rights parcel, purchase price due and taxes may be distributed proportionately over whole area. Applications must be made by May 1, 1920.

GRAZING.

Grazing Act, 1910, for systematic development of livestock industry provides for granting districts and range administration under Commission.

Annual grazing permits issued based on numbers ranged; priority for established owners. Stock-owners may form Associations for range management. Free, or partially free, permits for settlers, campers or travellers, to be made.

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