



### VILLAGE HOMES FOR LADIES.

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#### PART I.

It is said that England, for every square mile, has a larger population than any other country of this world (China perhaps excepted). If so it must be due to the excessive crowding of the population into large towns and narrow areas, such as London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and the pottery and cotton districts. That the population is not sufficiently distributed over the whole country, there can be no question.

An evenly distributed population, into families and groups, cultivating their own land, or if cultivating the land of a landlord, secure in the benefits of their toil, means for such a country health, strength, and contentment.

The greater the number of people that possess property, however small, whether in savings banks, cattle in the field, owning land, or if hiring land then secure in possessing any improvements that the tenant may make, the more stable is that country, and the more secure are its inhabitants against the dislocation and misery of popular discontent, and sudden upsettings of existing customs and manners.

And not only does a number of property holders give security to a country, but it causes a greater interest to be taken in the work that has to be done, and in consequence the work is better done.

No greater thing can be asked of God, and man, than this—for a worker to find pleasure in the work that has to be done. And we may be quite sure that in a country where the workers work for the love of their work, that when the time for defence comes there will be no lack of self-sacrifice, no hesitation to the response of the call—Queen and Country.

In travelling into the country, nothing has struck me more than the absence of population. Here a cottage or two, there a farmhouse, here a collection of cottages, a school, a church, a public-house, and we are in that deadly dull thing—a country village. But of small artistic village homes—small holdings scattered conveniently over the country—where are they to be seen, where to be found. The country seems to be dead and depopulated.

Another fact has struck me, the growing

desire of all the young village people to get into the towns as soon as possible.

London goes on increasing rapidly, miles upon miles of streets, thousands upon thousands of men and women, are added year by year to its area and population. At present there seems no sign of a pause, but rather all signs point to a more rapid increase in the near future.

For statesmen, religious thinkers, and local authorities, it is a serious problem.

I have also noticed another fact, the large number of ladies, with little or nothing to do, who become submerged in flats, boarding-houses, and hotels in London. As I watch them, lost in London, with little aim in life, of no importance, position, and in many cases, of little or no value to any one, I think how different their lives might be, and how much happier they might be, if, by living in the country, they tried to bring amusement, culture and life into the villages. Here they would be of some use, of some importance, and they would be fulfilling that great commandment, laid on all men and women, who have had the inestimable benefit of birth, culture, and refinement of *noblesse oblige*—the commandment that says, "Give, give, give, that which you have received;" and in thus generously giving they would brighten up the lives of many a cottage home, and convert our villages into abodes of movement and of life.

It is the want of amusement, want of change that is depopulating the villages. Young people must have some change, some brightness, some amusement, and so not getting it in the villages, they seek it in the towns.

It is not a question of wages, for an agricultural labour in regular employment is better off than if he had 26s. and 27s. and lived in a town. As one of my cottagers said to me: "My husband for years was making 30s. per week in Manchester, but, notwithstanding the fact that we have a larger family, we are better off now than then."

Some little time ago I succeeded to an old family property. I had been used to the activity of town thought and action, and in consequence I think that I have attained a certain power of quick generalisation from what I see and hear. I went down to my little

village, and after I had been there twenty-four hours, a friend of mine asked me what I thought of it. I at once said, "What the people want is amusement, movement, more change; they do not want instruction so much, and were I a rich man I would take down a good circus, or a strolling band of musicians."

Every village has now a good schoolroom, and I feel sure that most managers of the schools would gladly allow them to be used for such a purpose.

It was no dream merely of prophets, poets and thinkers, but a great fact that modern science is step by step proving to be true—that we are all bound round by the invisible cords of a vast unity. That for one member of the community to suffer is to affect the whole community, as certainly as the mutilation and impairment of one member of the body affects all the other members of the body. And so the depopulation of the country is a matter of vital importance to the diverse hosts of men and women, who anxiously strive to make a living in the vast city bee-hives.

The crowding into the centres of the agricultural population makes competition in the towns more keen, forces wages lower and entails longer hours of work.

So here are the villages crying aloud for helpers, and numbers of ladies who I am sure are anxious to give that help.

How to bring it about is the problem.

I feel sure that ladies with small incomes can live in much greater comfort and refinement in the country than in the towns, and as I have said, by their presence in the country they could help to enliven and refine the lives of the village folk, which would stem the depopulation of the country, and thus indirectly they would assist the workers throughout the country.

In my second article I shall deal with some of the difficulties from the landlord's point of view, and from the lady tenant point of view, and the cost of living in the county of Shropshire, in which my property is situated.

In my third article I shall suggest some method whereby a lady can increase her income in the country, with advantage to herself and the whole community.

(To be continued.)