

BRITISH TRADE REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1887.

(a.) AGRICULTURE.

There has been very little if any improvement in the condition of agriculture in this centre during the present year. At the present time the agricultural returns are of special interest as they provide a ready means of forming a tolerably accurate idea of the actual amount of agricultural depression existing throughout the country. The low ebb at which agriculture has stood for many years has been so obvious to all that no reference to figures has been necessary to make it a recognized fact. But a disregard of reliable statistics has led to very mistaken ideas as to the amount of land under cultivation, and consequently to an erroneous idea as to the extent of agricultural depression, since variations in the amount of land under cultivation afford some means of gauging the actual extent of the agricultural depression that prevails. Time after time the press has assured the public that land is falling out of cultivation at a very rapid rate, and also alarming statements have appeared as to the amount of arable land unoccupied. A reference, however, to official returns distinctly shows that such statements are very erroneous. Taking Great Britain as a whole there has never been so much land under cultivation as at the present time. There are now 24,000 acres more under cultivation than last year; 900,000 acres more than ten years ago, and nearly 2,900,000 acres more than there were twenty years ago. Seeing that every year large quantities of land are taken from cultivation for building purposes and for making roads, railways, &c., it is clear that yearly a very considerable amount of unreclaimed land is necessarily brought under cultivation, and consequently the country is not returning to desert as some people have asserted. The truth is that a larger proportional acreage of available land is cultivated than was ever the case before. From statements which have appeared in the papers on the authority of country gentlemen and others who have been struck by the number of farms which they have seen or have believed were unoccupied, it would be assumed that the quantity of unoccupied arable land in the country was quite unprecedented. However, upon this point returns have not usually been procurable, but a return was obtained for England and Wales in 1881, and another has been taken this year. The result is to show the quantity of unoccupied land in England and Wales this year is 25,284 acres, and is 18,533 acres less than it was in 1881, when the figures were 43,817. A point to be noted is that the quantity of bare fallow or uncropped arable land in the whole of Great Britain is much less than it was ten or twenty years ago. This year the quantity of bare fallow or uncropped arable land is 485,874 acres; last year it was 552,898 acres; and in 1867 it was 922,558 acres. There is therefore only about one-half as much land lying fallow as was the case twenty years ago. Although the quantity of land under cultivation in Great Britain has continually and gradually increased and keeps on increasing, a great change has taken place in the crops obtained from it. The arable land has diminished and the permanent pasture has largely increased.

The following are the figures :—

	1867.	1877.	1887.
	Acres.	Acres.	Acres.
Permanent pasture.....	11,967,288	13,728,355	15,671,395
Arable land.....	17,777,302	17,984,058	16,943,909

The corn crops in this district show a great falling off, an increase being apparent only in oats. Green crops have remained about stationary, clover and rotation grasses have largely increased, and orchards, market gardens, and woods and plantations have also exhibited an increase. In the permanent pasture department the quantity of land devoted to hay continues to increase.