

FLANDERS AND BELGIUM.—In Flanders, both Belgian and French, you are probably prepared for an admission on my part, of great agricultural skill and success. I am compelled, however, to confess my own impression to be, that a great portion of what has been written upon Flemish husbandry, partakes of the character of a romance.† The cultivators of Belgian Flanders have the merit of raising fair crops from certain tracts of poor and sandy soil, of husbanding and applying manures so as to keep such land in culture, and of skilfully varying their crops so as to prevent a premature exhaustion. But no knowledge of the general principles of agriculture is widely diffused among them. The improvement of wet and heavy clay soils, except by open ditches, is almost unknown. Improving implements and thorough drainage, and modern modes of manuring, and some small instruction at least in the elements of science as applied to agriculture, have still to be introduced among them, before they can rank in general knowledge or in skilful practice with the farmers of Scotland or England.

And, indeed, in Belgium as in France, the progressive subdivision of property opposes a growing obstacle to that general amelioration of agricultural practice, which the wants of a numerous people and the progress of knowledge demand. Where the average extent of properties and farms over a whole province is already reduced to about an English acre, we cannot look for the introduction of any of those improvements which demand the purchase of new or comparatively costly implements, the rearing and feeding of multitudes of stock, the employment of hired labor, or generally the application of capital to the land. As in Ireland, the subdivision or morcelling of the tillage farms, has already, in whole districts, been carried to the starvation limit. As into Ireland, the potato failure brought with it into Belgian Flanders, famine and disease, and large emigration,—and notwithstanding all that wise governments can do, it is to be feared that on the recurrence of similar visitations, similar social evils will in both countries again re-appear.

FRANCE.—In France I need hardly inform you that practical agriculture is far in arrear. In Normandy the mixture of Teutonic blood has probably some connection with the superiority of the husbandry of this province as compared with most of the other parts of the kingdom. It is certain at least, that notwithstanding the many efforts made by persons in power to promote the introduction and adoption of better methods, the general farming of La Belle France advances with comparative slowness.

This country indeed presents another striking instance of the small connection which may exist between the existence of extensive means of agricultural instruction, provided by the central government, and the practical skill of the rural population.

In 1843 there existed in France one hundred and fifty-seven agricultural societies—six hundred and sixty-four agricultural committees—twenty-two model farms, some of which had schools attached to them—and fifteen schools and chairs of agriculture and agricultural penitentiaries. In the early part of 1849, under the auspices of the republican government, and as part of the plan of M. Foureau, then Minister of Agriculture, twenty-one farming schools had already been opened—a national agricultural university was about to be established on the farms in the little park of Versailles, and a hundred and twenty-two agricultural societies, and three hundred minor institutions, had participated in the funds voted for the encouragement of Agriculture.

† *L'Agriculture Pratique de la Flandre*, par M. J. L. VAN AELBROECK, Paris, 1830, and *Mémoire sur l'Agriculture de la Flandre Française et sur l'Economie Rurale*, par J. CORDIER, Paris, 1823.

Though it is unquestionable that a country may attain a high rank in agriculture without the aid of formal agricultural schools—provided, as in Scotland, other early mental training is placed within the reach of the rural population—and that in spite of numerous schools, if other obstacles intervene, the cultivators of a country may lag far behind:—yet both common sense and experience show that of two nations of the same blood, placed otherwise in the same circumstances, the one which teaches the principles of agriculture in its schools, will exhibit the most productive harvests on its fields; and that, as in England and Scotland now, a time will come in the agricultural history of every country, when old means and methods will fail to maintain the rural community in a flourishing condition, and when every new means of fertility which advancing knowledge can supply, must be made generally known, and become generally employed. Such are the simplest and most common sense arguments in favor of agricultural teaching—the inutility of which might be argued with some show of reason, from the comparatively small progress yet visible among the fields and farmers of France and Bavaria.

The agricultural statistics of France, which the government has collected and published in great detail, would supply many interesting subjects of reflection, were I at liberty to dwell longer on this part of Europe. I may only mention—as pregnant with thought and instruction in regard to the condition, the food, and the general mode of living of the rural classes of France—the fact, that the number of conscripts who are rejected on account of deficient health, strength and stature, is constantly on the increase; that forty per cent are turned back from this cause; and that though since 1789 the standard has been three times reduced, as large a proportion of the conscripts is below the required height, (now five feet, two inches,) as ever.—(Rubichon.) Such facts as this show how closely the discussion of agricultural is connected with that of the most profound social evils.

SWITZERLAND.—To Switzerland, I only allude as one of those countries in which the influence of natural intelligence and a fair share of early instruction, had been brought to bear most successfully on the improvement of the soil, and especially of the breeds of stock which are best adapted to its peculiar dairy husbandry. Those advances which require the application of capital and science, such as thorough draining and special manuring, are there, however, still unmade; and it will probably be many years, before, in these respects, the cultivators of the Swiss valleys and mountain slopes, can closely imitate the present improved practices of the British Islands.

SPAIN.—The agricultural condition of Spain, suggests melancholy reflections. The central table lands of this country* are reckoned among the finest wheat growing districts in the world. The culture is rude and imperfect. The soil is scratched with a primitive plough, and is seldom manured, yet the returns are said to be prodigious, and the quality of the grain excellent. But where nature does much, man too often contents himself with doing little. Amid all this plenty, the peasant is miserable. He lives in a cabin of baked mud, or in burrows scooped out from the friable hillocks, ignorant of the luxuries of furniture, and barely possessing the necessities of life. The want of roads and of means of easy transport, makes his produce almost worthless, so

* The two elevated plains of New and Old Castile, and that of La Mancha, separated from each other by the granites and metamorphic rocks of the Sierra Nevada, are composed of a white limestone, occasionally covered with the drift of other rocks. These plains are burned up in summer, so as to produce no grass till the October rains fall, but they yield magnificent crops of wheat. (Sir E. Head.)