

THE CHARACTER OF VILLEIN TENURE.¹

STUDENTS of Economic History have of late years begun to awake to the fact that during the period of the Tudors, and over a considerable area of England, there took place an agrarian revolution which altered the whole aspect of country life. This revolution was the substitution of pasture for tillage, of pasture with large and enclosed farms for tillage on the old intermixed or open-field system. Its significance we still further appreciate when we notice that, after a time, the new generation of farmers settled down to what is known as a "convertible husbandry." To devote their lands continuously to sheep-breeding did not turn out quite so profitable as was at first expected; and it was seen to be expedient to plough up the pasture every few years for a harvest or two. What took place at this time in England was, accordingly, only the English phase of the great movement from open-field tillage to enclosed convertible husbandry, which manifested itself during the same or a somewhat later period over a large part of Western Europe.

I propose in this paper to deal with but a part of this revolution, and that in only one of its aspects. It has been recently said by an eminent writer,² that while there is plenty of work still to be done on earlier social history, for this middle period little more can be desired. Its main features, we are told, are already quite clear; the materials necessary for the student's purpose have been printed, and are easily accessible. But as soon as we begin to look

¹ A paper read before the Economic Section of the British Association at its Leeds Meeting, September 5, 1890.

² Sir Frederick Pollock, in a paper on "Early Landholding," in Macmillan's Magazine. For April, 1890.