

English agriculture during the last century. The next step, after some advance had been made, was to break down the barriers which separated the farmers of that day, and which left them nearly as ignorant of what was going on in every district besides their own as of what was passing in China or Japan. The active agent in this work was the son of a prebendary of Canterbury—the well-known Arthur Young, one of the most useful and sagacious, if not one of the most brilliant of men. Within the last twenty years, railways, the penny postage, and a cloud of newspapers have rendered personal and written communication universal. Let a superior animal be bred, an ingenious machine invented, or a new kind of manure be discovered, and in a few days the particulars are circulated through the press round the whole kingdom, and bring visitors or letters of inquiry from every quarter. But in the time of Arthur Young the most advanced counties communicated with the metropolis and each other by thoroughfares which could hardly be traversed except by a well-mounted horseman, or a broad-wheeled waggon drawn by twelve horses, while as “not one farmer in five thousand read anything at all,” the printing-press could not supply the place of personal inspection. Norfolk, with a subsoil which allowed the rain to filter through, boasted her natural roads, and the inhabitants quoted with pride a saying of Charles II., that the county ought to be cut up to make highways for the rest of the kingdom. But this only proved how deplorable was the condition of the other parts of the country, for when Young visited Norfolk he did not meet with a single mile of good road. In Essex he found lanes so narrow that not a mouse could pass a carriage, ruts of an incredible depth, and chalk-waggons stuck fast till a line of them were in the same predicament, and it required twenty or thirty horses to be tacked to each to draw them out one by one. The thorough-fares in fact were ditches of thick mud cut up by secondary ditches of irregular depth. In attempting to traverse them, Young had sometimes to alight from his chaise, and get the rustics to assist him in lifting it over the hedge. Such was the state of things when, in 1767, he abandoned the farm in which he had experimented too much to be successful, and, availing himself of the frank hospitality which has in every age been the characteristic of our farmers and country gentlemen, made those celebrated “Tours,” which are absolute photographs of agricultural England, and are models of what all such reports should be—graphic, faithful, picturesque, and philosophical! His work, however, affords numerous instances of the danger of any man pronouncing opinions upon subjects which he has never studied. His candid confession that he has no technical knowledge of the fine arts does not diminish the absurdity of the judgments he frequently passes upon the houses and paintings he met with in his journeys. He viewed the human form in much the same light that he regarded cattle for the butcher, for after enumerating three pictures by Rubens at the seat of Sir Gregory Page on Blackheath, he adds, “They are fine in his general style; the females *capitally plump*.” Of a poulterer’s shop in the same collection he says, “The exact imitation of the basket will make you smile with pleasure.” Nothing more can be required to show that he looked at paintings with the eye of an agriculturist.

About half a century after Young had published his principal English tours, another celebrated man copied his example, and made his “Rural Rides” through various counties between the years 1821 and 1832. It would be natural to refer to this entertaining work of Cobbett to discover the changes which had taken place in the interval, but scarce a notion can be gleaned from it of the condition of agriculture. Superior to Young in talent, in force of language, and in liveliness of style, though not surpassing him in lucidity, which was impossible, he is, beyond comparison, inferior to him in information and candour. The “Rural Rides” are little better than a collection of reckless invectives, hardy assertions,