

of. They will learn where there is a demand for labour, and what is the class of labour required, and they will learn the character of the work done by foreign workmen, and the kind of men with whom they may be expected to compete in the markets of the world.

THE ENGLISH AND THE BELGIAN LABOURER.

The working man here is neither highly paid nor fed, and perhaps these two causes, combined with the cheapness of spirituous liquors, may contribute in a measure to keep him in a position of inferiority in comparison with the English artisan. It appears astonishing, however, that a workman should, despite these drawbacks, not only maintain himself and family decently, but even save money, and occasionally buy the cottage he lives in out of his savings. Yet such is the fact, and the secret seems to lie in the habits of strict economy and thrift practised by the artisan. In this country, too, he marries much later in life than the English workman, and, after marriage, his wife and children are expected to contribute their share in gaining a livelihood.

Provisions, again, are procured in the cheapest possible manner. The artisan in most cases, particularly if he lives in the suburbs of the town, hires a piece of land at about 1s. per Flemish rood, equal to about 400 square feet; this he plants with the small potatoes remaining over from the previous year's supply, increased by the purchase of a few additional sets; and though it might be supposed that the smallness of the sets would yield only sorry results, yet by dint of hand labour in the mornings and evenings, by the artisan, himself, and his family, and by the judicious application of liquid manure from the tank—without which no working man's establishment is complete—a fair crop is obtained, sufficient in quantity for the use of the family during the winter. It not uncommonly happens that he has a surplus, the sale of which realises enough to pay his house-rent. He also obtains a second crop of vegetables from the ground, and it is no exaggeration to say that he does not allow an inch of his miniature farm to remain unproductive.

Thus the Belgian artisan manages to live, and though his pay and his food are inferior to those of the English workman, yet his life is, in some respects, a less laborious one; his wants are few, and those wants are easily satisfied.

BELGIAN WORKMEN'S DECORATIONS.

The word "decoration" does not at once convey to the English reader the idea implied by the same word in French, and yet it is not easy otherwise to describe the badge of distinction (worn externally like the star of an order of knighthood), which was instituted in Bel-

gium in the year 1817 as a special mode of rewarding skillful and meritorious artisans. According to the Royal Decree establishing this industrial order, as it might be termed ("Décoration ouvrière") it was intended to be exclusively conferred upon workmen and artisans "of recognised ability and irreproachable conduct," but subsequent decrees extended its use to persons employed in agricultural pursuits, and in the fisheries, the order being divided into two classes, the first limited to 500, the second to 1,200 persons. Those who have obtained this honourable distinction are entitled to wear the "decoration" attached by a tricolour ribbon (the national colours) on the left breast. It consists in an oblong badge of elegant workmanship of gold for the first class, and silver for the second, relieved by a border of blue enamel and surmounted by a crown, and forms, attached to its ribbon, a handsome ornament. It is accompanied by an artistically engraved diploma, setting forth the name, occupation, and qualifications of the recipient, the same being usually framed and hung in a conspicuous place in the artisan's dwelling. These decorations, which are greatly prized by working men, have had the two-fold effect of exciting as a stimulus to exertion on the part of the artisans and of benefiting the masters by inducing good workmen to remain steadily in the same employ, the distinction being generally granted on the recommendation of the employers, and being looked upon as a reward for long and faithful services, as well as for good conduct and approved ability. The way in which they are usually obtained is the following: the employer or master addresses a request to the municipal authorities, enumerating the particular claims of the candidate. The application, if favourably entertained at the Town Hall, is then transmitted to the Commissary of Police of the district in which the artisan resides, for his support as to the character and conduct of the applicant. Both must be excellent to afford a chance of success, one of the conditions invariably insisted upon being that the children of the claimant regularly attend school. After undergoing this ordeal the application is submitted to the Minister of the Interior, upon whose recommendation the decoration is conferred by a special decree signed by the King.

The following is a list and description of the working men who have recently received the decoration of the second class extracted from the "Précurseur" newspaper of the 28th of September, 1870:*

P. Jacobs, unmarried, 53 years of age, carpenter, has been for over forty years in the employ of M. Bex, timber merch-

ant and contractor, at Antwerp. He is a very able workman, and has shown special skill in the construction of doors, window frames, and wood-work generally.

C. Van Offel, married, 62 years old, carpenter. Van Offel has been also for thirty-nine years in the employ of M. Bex, and is in no degree inferior to Jacobs in point of ability and conduct.

A. Moreels, married, aged 44, working jeweller. Moreels has been constantly employed in the workshop of M. Dandeloey, jeweller, at Antwerp, where he served his apprenticeship. He has been foreman to the establishment for over twenty years to the entire satisfaction of his employer, who is happy to testify to the ability and good conduct of his assistant.

H. Plato, widower, aged 41, cabinet-maker. Plato has been for twenty-five years, in the establishment of M. Colpyn, and has, according to the declaration of his employer, shown particular skill and taste in the ornamental branches of the trade. He is highly inventive and intelligent as a workman, and is of irreproachable character.

J. Constenopole, married, 55 years of age, mattress-maker. Constenopole has been employed since 1837 by the Company for constructing beds for the army. He is a zealous, able, and well-conducted workman.

STATE OF LABOUR IN CHARENTE.

The working classes generally in the Charente Inférieure are in comfortable circumstances; poverty, accompanied with distress, is almost unknown amongst them; where it does exist it is usually traceable either to the fault of the individual or to his misfortunes, such as long illness; it rarely, except in cases of marked improvidence, arises from inability to obtain employment and remunerative wages. The artisans and workmen are, as a rule, honest, steady, provident, and remarkably abstemious and sober; and this observation applies with equal force to the workpeople of both sexes.

There is an absence of that strong separation between classes which exists in England and in various other countries; and this levelling upwards of the different classes, whilst it may have the effect of depressing in sentiment and character those of higher rank, has a perceptible influence in giving to the lower classes an independence of character and amount of self-reliance which, though not without drawbacks, raises them in the social scale, and by the confidence it creates, materially assists their efforts to better their position. It is thus that, in most branches of employment, it is rather the employed than the employer who regulates the rates of wages; sometimes the employed considers that he is conferring,

* The first class medal is, as a rule, conferred only upon those who have previously obtained the second class.