Agricultural Improvement in England and Wales and Its Impact on Government Policy, 1783-1801.

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AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT IN ENGLAND AND WALES
AND ITS IMPACT ON GOVERNMENT POLICY, 1783-1801

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in
The Department of History

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PREFACE

This study of an eighteen-year period in the Agricultural Revolution in England and Wales at the end of the eighteenth century is intended to give a view of "agricultural improvement" in peace and war. It is not a treatise on farming or the technical aspects of husbandry and implements, but rather is concerned with the men and the movement for improvement, their attitudes and enthusiasms, their successes and failures.

A summer of research in 1973 in the British Library, London, and in the Scottish Record Office and the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, turned up a number of books and papers useful for my purposes, but most of the materials on which this study is based were located in the libraries of Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, and Tulane University, New Orleans. The librarians and personnel of both institutions were unfailingly kind and helpful, and my warmest thanks are tendered them.

I wish also to give special thanks to the Rt. Hon. Viscount Thurso of Ulbster for his kind permission to quote from the Sir John Sinclair Papers in the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.
Most especially I wish to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Patrick C. Lipscomb III, of Louisiana State University, for his good cheer and friendly help. Without his encouragement I would likely have abandoned the project long since. But, of course, I accept full responsibility for everything that is presented here.
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ABSTRACT

In the final two decades of the eighteenth century a lively movement for agricultural reform, commonly known as the Agricultural Revolution, reached a high level of activity in England and Wales with significant effects throughout society and economy. Stimulated by the opportunities for profit generated by increasing population and rising industrial demand, that reform movement called on the scientific methods and attitudes of the Enlightenment to overcome the wasteful practices of traditional agriculture and achieve more efficient production of food and raw materials. A number of improvers, or agricultural philosophes, such as Arthur Young, William Marshall, Sir John Sinclair, and others, espoused new techniques of cropping, rotation, land use, and selective stock-breeding and urged further inquiry and experimentation for further progress.

The peacetime years 1783-93, however, were comparatively a time of abated activity. Sluggish prices for agricultural commodities gave little incentive to large-scale improvement, while government policy, which seemed to favor industry and commerce at the expense of agriculture, was considered unhelpful. But the outbreak of war with France in 1793 imparted new vigor to the
movement for improvement, and government established the Board of Agriculture at the behest of the improvers as a means of coordinating and encouraging the efforts of the landed interest. A renewed burst of enclosure and improvement ensued, as financial opportunity and patriotism merged. But because of continued population growth, a normal year's grain harvest required some imports to satisfy demand, and the arrival of an abnormal year produced a severe dearth and a serious social and political crisis. In both 1795-6 and 1800-1 deficient harvests triggered demonstrations and riots; internal commerce in grain was obstructed; charges of monopoly were hurled about; in parliament the war was blamed for the scarcity and pressure on government mounted to make peace on any terms. Government learned from the food crisis how ill-equipped it was to obtain information about crop yields, stocks, and consumption on which to base decisions; several projects were begun to provide such information; the census was introduced in 1801 in order to determine how many mouths needed to be fed; and an act was passed to simplify and cheapen the cost of enclosure bills in order to enlarge the cultivated area and produce more food.

By 1801 England and Wales had over a million more acres under cultivation than in 1783 and the yield per acre was gradually increasing. Prices and profits were up, but wages of labor were not, and that was the tragedy
of the age. The laboring poor, in both agriculture and industry, were denied appropriate wage increases by the landed and manufacturing interests who considered the price rises only temporary. The poor were forced to look to parish relief in order to survive.

The achievements of the movement for improvement, however, were concrete, positive, and significant. Because of that movement Britain was able, then and later, with only a modest supplement of imports, to feed her rapidly growing population as it shifted in ever-increasing numbers from mainly agricultural occupation to urban, industrial employment.
CHAPTER I
IMPROVEMENT AND IMPROVERS

In England in the eighteenth century a number of interrelated economic, demographic, and agricultural processes played against one another in lively motion. National commerce was expanding both domestically and abroad. Increased demand for manufactured goods called forth the invention of new machines and techniques and the improvement of old ones to hasten production. From about 1750 onward the nation's population began to increase at an accelerating rate, which both enlarged the market for manufactured goods and added to the number of mouths to be fed. English agriculture was thus challenged to provide food for the growing population, much of which now worked exclusively in manufacturing and no longer raised its own food, and to provide raw materials for a growing industry.

Traditional agriculture was not capable of the expansion that was needed. Fundamental changes were called for. Some landowners and farmers responded to the challenge by undertaking the "improvement" of their properties. They put into practice over an ever-widening area a complex of new tenures, crops, rotations, and husbandry techniques which are usually called the Agricultural Revolution.
It is not possible to say how widespread was this movement for improvement at any given time. The new husbandry techniques which formed the basis of improvement came into England from the Low Countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and from the east coast they spread elsewhere through the kingdom at varying rates of speed. Whenever markets developed or the price level improved, landowners and farmers were stimulated to increase production to take advantage of the opportunity. The new techniques were put forward as the surest road to profit and plenty.

Meanwhile, population continued to increase at a faster rate than did the food supply, in spite of improvement, with the result that a supply of imported grain was necessary in most years in the second half of the century. Nevertheless, by the final two decades of the eighteenth century the movement for agricultural improvement was gaining momentum and making a significant impact on the nation's life. Spokesmen for improvement urged on landowners and farmers by precept and example and pointed out the opportunity for great profit from increased yields. The message was that the old, traditional commonfield husbandry with its periodic fallowing must be abandoned and in its place new, efficient, improved practices must be introduced on enclosed fields.

In this first chapter we will analyze the philosophy of improvement, tracing its origins and noting the way
it inspired and bound together in the closing decades of the eighteenth century a diverse group of men whose task was to move their country forward toward the ideal of agricultural perfection. We will examine the components of their improvement program, and we will take stock of the men themselves.

The years 1783 and 1801 in the title of this study are of only limited agricultural significance: 1783 marks the end of the American war and 1801 was the date of the passage of the Enclosure Consolidation Act. But the virtue of those years for this study is that the interval between them falls neatly into two roughly equal periods of peace and war. From the end of the American war in 1783 to the beginning of the French war in 1793 English agricultural improvement operated in what might be termed "normal" circumstances, subject to the "usual" economic, social, and political forces but not distorted by the alarums and excursions of war. We will see what were the ordinary problems, concerns, goals, successes, and failures of the improvers during peacetime.

From 1793 onward, however, circumstances changed. War conditions and a siege mentality exerted a strong influence on the nation's agriculture. Government took a keen interest in assuring that an adequate food supply was on hand. A project to organize the landed interest for greater efficiency in the national effort resulted in the establishment of the Board of Agriculture. The
Board undertook to obtain an accurate account of the state of British agriculture by means of county agricultural surveys. In 1795 and again in 1800-1 serious shortages in the harvest brought about public disturbances in which government's determination to continue the war was threatened and nearly undermined by what was essentially an agricultural failure. We will investigate the effects of the war on the movement for improvement and the change in government's policy toward agriculture.

To understand the philosophy of improvement which commanded the allegiance of so many men in the eighteenth century we must consider it on both the intellectual and practical levels. The spirit of improvement derived from a variety of sources, some of them tracing back to the Renaissance and the age of scientific discovery. It can be seen in relation to the philosophical attitudes of the Enlightenment which were characterized by a rejection of procedures which could not be justified on any grounds other than tradition or abstract theory. These attitudes flowed in large part from the scientific discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the scientific method of experimentation and observation. In the realm of practical matters, Arthur Young, the most articulate of the improvers, stated that the "great progress which natural philosophy has lately made" was owing to the growing realization by intelligent men of the necessity
of "making experiments the road of truth." Traditional farming techniques were no longer considered sacrosanct simply because they were traditional.

Going hand-in-hand with the scientific method was an attitude of greater acceptance of and curiosity about foreign practices than in previous times, largely as a result of the forced traveling of many members of the landed classes during the Civil War. After the Restoration foreign travel became de rigueur in the education of young gentlemen at a time when scientists and philosophers were formulating new scientific approaches to understanding the universe. The belief that the creation is governed and regulated by natural laws which are uniform and universal impressed young minds and caused them to begin to seek insights into the operation of natural laws in their own land and in their own affairs. It was generally felt that progress would ensue from a recognition of natural law and a modification of human activity to accord with it. Men should no longer be "chained to the routine of their fathers," but let reason guide them to more efficient, prosperous, and harmonious times. Thus an optimistic sense of purpose imbued the age. And with it came a feeling that natural law must not be obstructed or prevented from working as it was intended; an attitude of

\[^1\text{Annals of Agriculture, V (1786), 17-18.}\]
\[^2\text{Ibid., 27.}\]
laissez-faire suggested itself as correct and reasonable. Governmental interference in economic affairs (as well as many other affairs) was seen as positively objectionable, because such interference would warp and twist nature from its free career and by ramification would result in disorganization and misery.

Such ideas clashed with the prevailing economic doctrines of mercantilism which held that national wealth should be promoted by means of governmental regulation of production and distribution. Complete regulation promised complete success, and manufacturing and commerce seemed to promise greater value than agriculture.

In the eighteenth century, however, a reaction set in against the policy of state regulation. Exponents of a new doctrine in opposition to mercantilism were, in France, called the Economists, or Physiocrats, whose chief theoretician was Dr. François Quesnay. His doctrine denied the superior value of manufacturing and commerce and instead gave the palm to agriculture, or the soil.

According to the Physiocrats, said Adam Smith, there are three economic classes: proprietors of land, cultivators of land, and "the class of artificers, manufacturers and merchants, whom they endeavour to degrade by the humiliating appellation of the barren or unproductive class."³

Proprietors add to national wealth by providing the buildings, enclosures, drains, and other improvements on the land, said Smith; cultivators or farmers provide stock, equipment, seed, and labor and actually produce the goods which are of value. The proprietor's increased rent, resulting from improvements, said Smith, should be exempt from tithe and taxation until all expenses have been repaid; otherwise, by discouraging the improvement of land, the church discourages the future increase of its tithes, and the king discourages the future increase of his taxes. Manufacturers and merchants, although called unproductive, actually are greatly useful to the other classes, in that they supply manufactured and imported goods more cheaply than the proprietors and cultivators could produce them for themselves. The proprietors and cultivators should never, therefore, said Smith, restrain or discourage or oppress the artificers, manufacturers, and merchants, or other mercantile states. "The establishment of perfect justice, of perfect liberty, and of perfect equality, is the very simple secret which most effectually secures the highest degree of prosperity to all three classes." 

Adam Smith praised Dr. Quesnay but disagreed with him in certain respects. The chief error of the physiocratic system was to consider the class of artificers, merchants, and manufacturers as altogether barren and

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4Ibid. 5Ibid, 634.
unproductive, and Dr. Smith demonstrated the means by which they increased national wealth. Among other things, by means of trade and manufactures, a greater quantity of subsistence can be annually imported into a country than its own lands could supply. The physiocratic system, however, said Smith, in spite of its imperfections, was the nearest approximation to the truth yet formulated in political science. Although too narrow in some conceptions, yet in suggesting that real wealth consists of consumable goods rather than hoards of bullion, and in declaring that perfect liberty was the best means of making possible the greatest annual production of goods, the physiocratic system seemed to Smith to be "as just as it is generous and liberal."

The greatest branch of commerce, Smith continued, was that between town and country; the town draws its raw materials from the country and sends back the manufactured goods. The dearer manufactured goods, the cheaper agricultural produce, for more of the latter must be traded for less of the former; and whatever tends to raise the price of manufactured goods tends to lower that of agricultural goods and thereby to discourage agriculture.

Declaring that neither preference nor restraint is a wise policy, Smith concluded that "the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its

\[\text{6Ibid., 638.} \quad \text{7Ibid., 650.}\]
own accord." Every man should be left free to pursue his own interest, within the laws of justice, in competition with all other men. The sovereign, then, was relieved of the burden of trying to determine what is best for the society and directing the industry of private people toward that goal.

Smith's logic was invincible, and the agricultural improvers agreed in the main with the principles he enunciated. But Smith's declaration that government should not favor one class of endeavor over another and should not direct the investment of capital in laudable projects ran counter to the improvers' projects with regard to enclosure of waste lands.

In 1784, at the end of the American War, Arthur Young, the best known writer on improvement, surveyed the ruins of British policy and meditated on causes and effects. He declared that all the wars of the eighteenth century had been ill-advised and were "all entered into, because the beggars, fanaticks, felons, and madmen of the kingdom, had been encouraged in their speculations of settling in the wilds of North America." The purpose of those wars at such great national expense was, he said, only to further the commercial interest in "mad projects, and senseless

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8Ibid., 651. 9Ibid. 10Annals of Agriculture, I (1764), 12.
schemes," with the result that the landed interest was almost ruined by oppressive taxes.11

Nor was Young alone in his disillusionment at the failure of British arms and policy. Trade, said The Daily Universal Register,

is a good thing when it does not injure the landed property, which is infinitely more valuable. This country has expended above one hundred millions, within fifty years, to assert claims that belong to no one nation on earth; she has gained her point, but paid dearly for the success; for after all her expence of blood, with more money than the fee simple of her dominions is worth, she sits down in splendid bankruptcy, and the loss of Thirteen Colonies.12

However, after surveying consumption, population, exports, money in circulation, and other "indicators," Young declared there was still hope; there were "no immediate signs of national decay; on the contrary, . . . we are a prosperous and flourishing people."13 But the changed circumstances required a new and wiser policy. To keep what remained of her empire, to protect herself against a resurgent France, and to cope with her staggering national debt would require for Britain a domestic policy dedicated to "improving our internal, and therefore secure

11Ibid., II (1784), 307.

12The Daily Universal Register, July 13, 1786. Originally called The Daily Universal Register when publication began on January 1, 1785, the name was changed with the edition of January 1, 1788, to The Times, as it will be cited hereafter. A microfilm copy in the Tulane University Library was used for this study.

13Annals of Agriculture, I (1784), 38.
resources." He advocated improving agriculture and thereby adding to the national wealth. Others agreed that agricultural improvements and expansion should have priority; a reviewer in the *European Magazine* declared: "Agriculture claims our first notice, not only from its seniority, but because the other [branches of the economy] derive their existence from it."

Young argued that English agriculture was suffering from under-investment; if funds were poured into agricultural improvement, manufacturing and commerce would expand commensurately with agriculture, and the enhanced national prosperity would strengthen Britain's central power, making the center better able to protect the outer limbs of empire. Moreover, he said, the present moment (1784) was right for beginning large-scale agricultural improvements, when the services were discharging nearly two hundred thousand soldiers and sailors who would certainly emigrate if no measures were taken to make it attractive for them to stay in England.

While Young wanted a government policy sympathetic to agriculture's needs, he certainly did not want government to start interfering in the market to keep the prices

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14Ibid., 39.


16*Annals of Agriculture*, I (1784), 41-2.
of agricultural goods low for the benefit of manufacturers. Prices should not be regulated in any way. "Whatever is the price, ought to be the price," he wrote, "since price can be formed by nothing but quantity, demand, and competition." He held it self-evident that improvements and high prices went hand in hand, as for example with regard to livestock: "Can anyone be surprised that more care and attention should be paid to breeding animals that let at 500 and 1000 guineas, than to such as are sold for five?" And with reference to a parliamentary inquiry into the high price of provisions, he declared that government should not meddle, "because the less that is attempted the better; and doing nothing in this case, as in so many others, is the best policy."

It was for the purpose of spreading the knowledge of improvement on which the national interest so clearly depended that Young began publishing his Annals of Agriculture in 1784, to inculcate and stimulate progressive ideas. The task was not inconsiderable; William Marshall, another important agricultural writer of the day, reported from Cornwall and Devon in 1796 that "of late years, the SPIRIT OF IMPROVEMENT has not slumbered more composedly,

17Ibid., VII (1786), 43.


19Annals of Agriculture, VIII (1787), 45.
in the Highlands of Scotland, than it has in this part of England." The Annals were a sales campaign on behalf of improvement conducted by "publishing to the world the exertions of many capital cultivators and in various parts of the kingdom, and especially the local practice of common farmers who, with all their merit, were unknown beyond the limits of their immediate district, and whose operation wanted only to be known to be admired." Projects other than publication also interested the improvers, such as proposals for agricultural colleges, experimental farms, botanic gardens, repositories of implements and models, agricultural libraries, and laboratories for analyzing soils and fertilizers.

Another proposal of improvement deserving notice was that put forward by William Marshall in 1790 pointing out how advantageous to the entire nation would be the establishment of a board of agriculture, or as he envisioned it, a board of rural affairs which would concern itself broadly not only with agriculture but also with the enclosure and cultivation of wastes and the


planting of trees for timber. Such undertakings, he 
thought, would be useful to the nation as a whole.23

To exhort the nation to adopt a spirit of improve­
ment, however, would be of only partial efficacy, if at 
the same time a rough set of specific goals were not 
identified toward which the spirit of improvement should 
work. But antecedent to the formulation of such goals 
had to be a discovery of current agricultural conditions 
and practices throughout the realm.

Arthur Young congratulated himself that he had 
invented the agricultural survey for discovering those 
conditions and practices by means of the tours he made 
through the country in 1768-71. The published accounts of 
them were "esteemed highly useful to practical agricultur­
alists," said Young. To know clearly the present state 
of cultivation was surely a necessary prelude to proposals 
of improvement. Young claimed to have provided that 
knowledge by his tours.24

Marshall disagreed with Young's methodology. 
Marshall declared that a "transient view" of an agricul­
tural area was useless; what was needed was at least a 
year's residence so that the practices of every season 
could be observed.25

23Ibid., I, 89.

24Young, Autobiography, 54-5.

25William Marshall, The Rural Economy of Norfolk 
(London: T. Cadell, 1787), I, iii.
From his own periods of extended residence in various parts of the kingdom Marshall concluded that the best husbandry practices were to be found among the better sort of yeomanry and the larger tenant farmers. Their "independency, conversation, and perhaps reading" freed them from old prejudices and opened them to a spirit of improvement. But not all large farmers were paragons of improvement. Arthur Young found many large, engrossed farms in Kent and Essex in 1784; one farmer occupied more than a dozen and once had nearly twenty, scattered all about the country, stretching for many miles. "This is the sort of large farm that I am ready to condemn," said Young. "Contiguity of land is essential to convenience and cheapness of husbandry." Marshall at one time endorsed large farms ("it is on the LARGER, not on the smaller farms, we find a SPIRIT of IMPROVEMENT, and a SUPERIORITY of MANAGEMENT prevail."), but at another time we find him praising the old Kentish practice of gavelkind, or inheritance by all children equally, for its having multiplied small proprietors, "that most valuable order of men, any country can possess . . . . The suppression of this ancient law /gavelkind/


27 Annals of Agriculture, II (1784), 46.

28 Marshall, Rural Economy of Yorkshire, I, 255.
may well be considered, as the greatest evil, which the Norman Conquest entailed on this Country." The happy median view, struck by John Billingsley in 1797, was that "without farms, at least moderately large, I much question the possibility of extending an improved agriculture." But some farmers, irrespective of the size of holdings, presented a kind of imperviousness to new ideas. Marshall was astonished to discover that farmers in the Vale of London were "as homey . . . as those of the more recluse parts of the kingdom, and are far less enlightened and intelligent than those of many parts of it." They were apparently accustomed to see hare-brained plans wastefully pursued by town farmers, who purchased or rented lands in their neighbourhood; and the country folk naturally concluded "that any deviation from the beaten path will necessarily lead them to ruin." The improvers never met in convention and agreed on a formal program of improvement. While most agreed on the general outlines of what was desired, there was never any unanimity, and each improver emphasized his own pet ideas. Moreover, certain improvement schemes found


30John Billingsley, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Somerset (third edition; Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1795; 1798), 155.

readier welcome in some parts of the country than in others. Among matters which chiefly concerned the improvers were enclosures, tithes, poor relief, new husbandry techniques, leases, livestock breeding, and better implements.

The reformers almost as one agreed on the desirability of enclosing common fields and wastes as rapidly as possible. Such a course appeared necessary as a first step toward improvement. Where enclosures had already taken place the transformation was reported to be little short of miraculous. Former sheepwalks and meadows with small production were enclosed and production increased three-fold, land values increased, old arable was laid down to grass and old pasture was converted to arable. Isaac Leatham, writing of Yorkshire in 1794, painted a more balanced picture however; the subdivided state of the enclosure offered more places of residence and diffused more widely the comforts of life; "in particular cottagers are hereby accommodated with the land for the maintenance of a cow, and the growth of potatoes, all which must have a tendency to promote marriages and consequently increase population."

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32 Marshall, Rural Economy of Yorkshire, I, 292

33 Isaac Leatham, General View of the Agriculture of the East Riding of Yorkshire (London: W. Bulmer, 1794), 37.
said, the trend continued, and the value of land had increased considerably above the original rent, but sometimes because of a lack of knowledge or because the situation of the land did not lend itself to improvement, or even because of the wicked actions of a solicitor or other self-interested persons, some lands had been enclosed which might more advantageously have been left open.34

Indeed, it was not enough to enclose; it was also necessary to have a system of husbandry ready in order to employ the land to its best use.35 William Marshall cautioned all enclosers to study the "NATURAL ABILITY of the object in view," and to base their plans on wise principles of management in order to avoid "miscarriages" and to assure, "with a degree of moral certainty, a PERMANENT IMPROVEMENT."36

These caveats notwithstanding, immediate enclosure and subsequent improvement were of first priority; yet enclosure was an unconscionably long time delayed by the complexities and expense of obtaining parliamentary approval and carrying through the actual division. A

34Ibid., 38.


simplified procedure was desired and became one of the goals of improvement.

Closely associated with enclosure was the question of tithe. It loomed as a great burden and an almost insuperable obstacle to improvement. Farmers who carried out improvements were "immediately plundered for their success, by a tithe; that, on land improveable under an expensive arable culture, and which is consequently let under a long lease, very soon exceeds the rent itself."37 One aim of the improvers was for a full and permanent commutation of tithes, although there was no agreement with regard to the means of effecting this.

The question of enclosure raised the associated question of provision for the poor whose access to the common was often crucial to their livelihood. Improvers failed to arrive at a single view of this matter. They generally agreed in principle on enclosure but disagreed regarding what provision should be made for the poor. Some declared that enclosure would in the long run be positively beneficial to the poor as it would force them to give up their idleness and shiftlessness.38 Increased employment opportunities would result from enclosure, the improvers said, and without the right of common to fall

37Annals of Agriculture, XXI (1793), 345.
38John Clark, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Brecknock (London: J. Smeeton, 1794), 42.
back on, the poor would be forced to accept work offered to them and would prosper. The Times, however, pointed to a palpable disadvantage, noting that "wherever a common has been enclosed, and the peasants, who inhabited it, obliged to take up their dwelling in the adjoining town or village, the poor rates of the parish have immediately increased." Arthur Young was certain he had a solution to this problem: he would give a dwelling and ten acres of land to every needy family, along with allowances for fences, furniture, implements, potatoes, seed, and livestock, totaling perhaps thirty pounds, which though little would be "encouragement to be industrious," and the poor thus helped should thereby forfeit all future parish relief. Certainly the poor should not be pampered or coddled. Industry, frugality, and sobriety were expected of them; luxury should be eschewed. Young, for example, thought it scandalous that the poor should keep dogs -- he urged employers to refuse to hire a laborer who owned a dog, and proposed that poor relief be denied any family that possessed a dog. The drinking of tea by the lower

39 The Times, October 17, 1786.
40 Annals of Agriculture, I (1784), 54-5.
41 Gazeley, Life of Arthur Young, 277.
classes outraged the sensibilities of other observers, and alehouses were an abomination unto the Lord.42

Once lands were enclosed and fashioned into farms of a suitable size, the program of improvement called for the granting of reasonably long leases by the landowner to the farmer. "That leases are the first, the greatest, and most rational encouragement that can be given to Agriculture," wrote Nathaniel Kent, "admits not of a doubt, in my opinion."43 The transformation of Norfolk resulted in large part from the fact and nature of the leases granted there. "A good plain form, equally protecting the interest of landlord and tenant," was the ideal desired by some writers;44 while others endorsed covenants containing more specific stipulations, but the point was that the confidence imparted by a lease was necessary to the advancement of agriculture in every county; in backward counties like Cambridge, it was desirable that the term should be twenty-one years, while in more improved counties such long duration might not be so necessary.45 William Marshall discovered in Norfolk in 1787 that landlords were

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43Nathaniel Kent, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 36.


45Charles Vancouver, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cambridge (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 198-9.
reducing the length of leases from twenty-one to fourteen or even seven years, so that they could take advantage of increasing prices of agricultural commodities by raising rents. The short lease was unsatisfactory, he declared, because marling, or adding clay to sandy soil, was the principal improvement in Norfolk, "but who would marl on a seven years lease?" Marshall sang paeans to the Norfolk farmers for the openness of their manner and their self-confidence which resulted from many of them being rich which in turn led them to mix "with what is called the world; of which their leases render them independent. A tenant-at-will, be his riches what they may, is a subaltern in society; in which he dares not mix, lest his landlord, or his landlord's associates, should be pleased to take offence." 47

After enclosure, establishment of large farms, and granting of leases, the improvers looked to the introduction of enlightened husbandry practices as a source of increased yield and greater profit. Fallowing of course was dismissed as a foolish and unnecessary practice; nature did not require fallowing, wrote Nathaniel Kent; the earth produces something every year. If not wheat, then weeds. "It is therefore our business, by good culture," he said, "to

46 Marshall, Rural Economy of Norfolk, I, 68.
47 Ibid., I, 37.
expel the unprofitable plant, and introduce another, from which we may derive benefit." The appropriate courses of cropping for the arable were discussed at length, while at the same time the improvers tried not to lose sight of the fact that the best system seemed that "wherein corn and livestock are made subservient to each other, and in which the greatest quantity of both is raised for the food and employment of mankind."49

The improvement of livestock was also an object of much concern. The established practice of the age was to select females from the native stock of the country and cross them with males of a better breed.50 But in the eighteenth century superior breeds were developed by inbreeding, "not from the same line, only, but the same family: a practice which has now been so long established, as to have acquired a technical phrase to express it: 'BREEDING INANDIN'."51 There was a great deal of weighing of merits of the competing systems, and the argument for inbreeding was that "there can be only one best breed; and if this be crossed, it must necessarily be with an


49W. Pitt, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Worcester (London, 1813), 71.

50Marshall, Rural Economy of the Midland Counties, I, 249-50.

51Ibid., 250.
inferior breed; the necessary consequence of which must be an adulteration, not an improvement.  

Improved agricultural implements, of course, were a matter of interest to improvers. The tours and residences had as their purpose, among other things, to discover the best implements in use in the different parts of the kingdom. In his earlier years William Marshall attempted to draw detailed sketches of plows and other implements for his readers, but from the unsuccessful attempts that were made to build implements from his sketches, he became convinced that such sketches were a waste of time. Accordingly, he fell back on a plan for a kind of museum or display of implements, models of farm buildings, fences, gates, and other articles of husbandry. By showing the articles which were in actual use in different parts of the country, and not merely the "ingenious fabrics of theory," he believed the experienced husbandman could select from the variety shown those articles which would be best suited to his situation.

In their search for the best, the most efficient, and the most economical means of performing the work of agriculture, the improvers of the late eighteenth century embroiled themselves in a lively controversy over the

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52 Ibid., 251.

53 Marshall, Rural Economy of the Midland Counties, I, 92.
relative merits of horses and oxen for draft. In periods of scarcity of food in the 1780's editorials were printed in The Times suggesting that parliament should require farmers to plow only with oxen which were cheaper to buy, less expensive to maintain, did not consume oats, produced better dung for the land, and had value as food when they became too old to work. If only oxen were employed in husbandry, many thousand acres would be saved for wheat and barley, beef would become cheaper, and tallow and leather would become less expensive. The horse-oxen controversy was one of the harmless diversions of the day and had little success in reducing the number of horses in use.

The movement for agricultural improvement, like Saint Paul, was all things to all men. Each reformer raised in it whatever feature seemed to him to need reform, and the discussion here is only a partial listing of the program's features. One further feature should be noted, one which undoubtedly agitated the tillers of fields from the dawn of agriculture: the Game Laws. Improved husbandry went for naught if sportsmen might destroy crops with impunity or if pests were protected to provide sport. The Times labeled the Game Laws "vestiges of despotism" which only stimulated men "to persecute each other, by an unaccountable encouragement

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54 The Times, October 19, 1786.
to informers." The newspaper declared it "arbitrary and unjust" to prevent the farmer who raised the grain from sharing in the birds that fed on it, and recommended to parliament to divest the landlords of their tyrannical powers. "To separate the power over the *ferae naturae*, &c. from the possession of the soil, is a principle of legislation, that would disgrace an Assembly of Hottentots."\(^{57}\)

A closer look at some of the leading advocates of improvement is now in order, to see what sort of men they were and how they functioned. In large part, they were agricultural *philosophes*, publicists of the doctrine of agricultural improvement rather than active, practicing farmers, and in method, style, and emphasis of program they varied considerably. Contempt, resentment, and jealousy occasionally poisoned relations among them, but they were united in the cause of improvement and agreed on the fundamental principles and goals of that doctrine. They were the spokesmen and counsellors of the landed interest, both to assert the natural superiority of their kind of endeavor in the value system of the nation and to defend their interest against the inroads of upstart

\(^{55}\)Ibid., November 17, 1785.

\(^{56}\)Ibid., January 30, 1786.

\(^{57}\)Ibid., November 21, 1786.
commercial and manufacturing interests. In one sense they were a conservative force, hoping to maintain the ancient supremacy of the landed interest in British life, while at the same time they were radical and progressive in advocating change in the methods and techniques and organization of agriculture.

The publicists alone, however, cannot claim full credit for the changes wrought or for the popular following which came to attend the movement for agricultural reform. The hard economic fact of greater profitability undoubtedly converted many farmers who never read a word of the publicists but to scoff. And no small part was played by socially-eminent landowners whose example and precept carried numbers of their tenants and neighbors into the flowing current of improvement. To these grandees agriculture became a hobby, even a passion, as to others horse racing or faro were more alluring. But the great improving landlords had effect beyond their own sphere, and to their exertions is due some measure of the success of the movement.

The best-known agricultural writer of the age was Arthur Young, keen enthusiast of improvement and dogged advocate of the landed interest. Born in 1741, son of a Suffolk rector and only fitfully educated, he was disappointed in his plans to pursue a commercial career by the untimely death of the owner of the firm he had hoped to join. After his father's death in 1759, Young tried to
publish a monthly magazine which failed. He considered a military career but was dissuaded by his mother and instead persuaded to take up a twenty-acre farm belonging to his mother at Bradfield, to which the eighty-acre home farm was soon added. He had "no more idea of farming than of physic or divinity," but persevered for three years, then wrote an account of his experiences, entitled The Farmer's Letters to the People of England (1767). In this work he stressed the importance of agriculture to the nation's welfare, advocated enclosure of wastes as a preliminary to improvement, recommended large farms as appropriate for improvements, and emphasized the importance of alternate husbandry -- grass for cattle for manure for arable crops.

He later characterized his publication of Farmer's Letters as "nothing but ignorance, folly, presumption, and rascality," but added that his four years of farming at Bradfield enabled him "to view the farms of other men with an eye of more discrimination that I could possibly have done without that practice." Thereafter, he took a farm in Essex, gave it up and sought another, wrote up the tour he made in search of the new farm as A Six Weeks' Tour through the Southern Counties of England and Wales (1768), found a farm in Hertfordshire, lost money operating it, thought of emigrating to America, and instead published

58 Young, Autobiography, 29.
59 Ibid., 30.
numerous essays and books on agricultural subjects as a means of earning money. He remembered "once to have written a quire of foolscap in one day!" In 1773 he began reporting parliamentary debates for the Morning Post at five guineas a week; in 1777 he became Lord Kingsborough's agent in Co. Clare in Ireland but returned to England in 1779 and took a farm near Bradfield, which became his when his mother died in 1785.

In 1784 Young commenced publication of his Annals of Agriculture, a potpourri of articles on matters of concern to agriculture which ran to forty-six volumes in 1809, with irregular installments thereafter until 1815. The Annals constitute an archive of the opinions and concerns of agricultural improvers for the period. Young himself wrote a fourth or a third of the whole work; George III also contributed several articles under a pseudonym and the Annals were among his favorite reading. Young used the Annals to propagandize for his causes -- rotations, manures, experiments, commutation of tithes, reform of the corn laws, protection for agriculture, and enclosures.

Young's journeys to France and his accounts of that country on the eve of the French Revolution need no comment here, except that his apparent sympathy with the early stages of the movement placed him in the opposition camp. His book appeared in May 1792 just before violence erupted.

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60 Ibid., 45.
in France leading to the overthrow of the monarchy. On August 20, 1792, he wrote for the Annals an article condemning the whole affair as a danger to private property, "a trial of arms whether those who have nothing shall not seize and possess the property of those who have something." Thereafter, to the end of his life Young was a conservative, anti-French patriot. Some uncharitable persons maintain that Young's conversion to conservatism was self-interested and convenient, a transparent ploy to obtain official favor. Early in 1793 he amplified his criticisms of France in The Example of France a Warning to Britain which aligned him solidly with the landed interest and the government.

In 1793 the government established the Board of Agriculture with Sir John Sinclair as president and Arthur Young as secretary, which position Young held for about twenty years. Critics declared this appointment was his reward for having turned his political coat. Young himself wrote that Pitt made the decision that he should be secretary to the new board, but "... If the appointment of secretary be considered, as it has been by many, a reward for what I had effected, it was not a magnificent one; the salary, 400£. per annum, would have been

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61 Annals of Agriculture, XVII (1792), 486.
desirable had it left me more time in Suffolk . . . ."\textsuperscript{63}

As secretary he was offended and incensed by Sinclair's "inconsiderate manner" in appointing men to conduct the county surveys "who scarcely knew the right end of a plough."\textsuperscript{64} Yet, over the next years Young himself conducted seven surveys for the Board and supervised the publication of the others, all the while continuing the Annals and other publications.

In 1797 Young's favorite child, his daughter "Bobbin", died. The joy went out of his life; his gregarious, pleasure-loving nature changed, and he became a solitary, gloomy, pious man, reproaching and condemning all that he had previously enjoyed. After 1811 he was also nearly blind from cataracts, and his publications slowed to a trickle. He died in 1820.

Young's writings spanned forty years and, according to his latest biographer, made him "the leading authority of his own time and perhaps the greatest agricultural writer of all time."\textsuperscript{65} It is an assessment with which Young would have agreed. Never a modest man, he wrote

\begin{quote}
before the appearance of my tours there was scarcely a district in the kingdom described in such a manner as to convince the reader that the authors had any practical knowledge of the art; for a man to quit his farm and his fireside in order to examine the husbandry of a kingdom by
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63}Young, Autobiography, 219.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 242.
\textsuperscript{65}Gazeley, Life of Arthur Young, 16.
travelling above four thousand miles through a country of no greater extent than England was certainly taking means efficiently effective for laying a sure basis for the future improvement of the soil. To understand well the present state of cultivation is surely a necessary step prior to proposals for improvement. This I effected; and in the opinion of some very able agriculturalists now living, the greatest of the subsequent improvements that have been made during the last forty years have, in a great measure, originated in the defects pointed out by me in the detail of these journeys. 66

A somewhat more negative view of Arthur Young's merit is taken by Eric Kerridge, who writes that "Arthur Young was a mountebank, a charlatan, and a scribbler, while William Marshall was an earnest student, a meticulous scholar, and a faithful reporter." 67

Certainly chief among the rivals of Arthur Young for the title of foremost agricultural writer of the age was William Marshall. In a long career he published an amazing quantity of material relating to agricultural improvement. As a practical farmer he had broader experience than Young and also greater success. But his primary interest lay in writing about agriculture.

"I set out with advantages," said Marshall, "which cannot readily be acquired, by those who have not been

66 Young, Autobiography, 54-5.
born to the profession." And born to it he was, in the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1745, of a long line of farmers, and bred to agriculture from infancy. For the first fifteen years of his life, farming was his daily occupation, and he "conversed on no other practical subject, used every tool." At age fifteen he entered the world of commerce and spent the next fourteen years of his life in the West Indies until illness forced his return to England. His Caribbean sojourn gave him opportunities to observe different practices, and he became aware of "the radical benefits arising from Agriculture, comparatively with the fleeting advantages of commerce." Upon his return to England in 1774 he became manager of a farm in Surrey for several years, and published his Minutes of Agriculture, Made on a Farm of 300 acres, of Various Soils, Near Croydon, Surrey, in 1778. The volume begins: "1774. July 18th. Yesterday, discharged my bailiff; and determined to be wholly, my own manager: to regulate tomorrow's conduct, by today's experience; and next year's plan of management, by the result of this year's practice." In

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69 Ibid., 68.

70 Ibid., 69.

71 Ibid., 72.
February 1780 he submitted to the Society of Arts in London a plan whereby they should grant him a subsidy of £200 per annum to pass a year in each of six or seven counties famous for their agricultural practices and he should study and observe and record the local operations with a view to reporting. In earlier years, he said, he had "experienced the inutility of a transient view; but, at the same time, clearly saw the advantages which would accrue from a TWELVE-MONTHS-RESIDENCE in the immediate District of the practice to be registered." The Society rejected Marshall's plan, saying it was not their practice to make direct subsidies. One of the members of the agriculture committee of the Society at the time was Arthur Young, and although it is not known what his attitude was toward Marshall's plan, it is almost certain that Marshall blamed Young, and their relations thereafter were always strained.  

Later in 1780 Marshall went to Norfolk as agent to Sir Harbord Harbord and remained there for two years. He next resided in Staffordshire for several years until in 1786 he took up residence at Clement's Inn in London where he stayed the winter months while devoting summers to travelling in the various districts. In 1787 appeared the

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72 Marshall, Rural Economy of Norfolk, I, iii.
73 Gazeley, Life of Arthur Young, 131-2.

These works received critical acclaim in the monthly magazines of the day, but Arthur Young's reviews were a kind of damning with faint praise. Of the Norfolk volumes, Young wrote in the *Annals*: "Upon the whole, Mr. Marshall's book, if read with caution, and by those who have a competent knowledge of the subject, will be found a useful addition to the farmer's library."^{74}

In 1790 in his *Rural Economy of the Midland Counties* Marshall set out his thoughts on a Board of Agriculture. Having acquired a mass of information by his observations and studies, he wrote,

> I think it right to intimate the probable advantage which might arise, from a BOARD OF AGRICULTURE: -- or, more generally, of RURAL AFFAIRS; to take cognizance, not of the state and promotion of AGRICULTURE, merely; but also of the CULTIVATION OF WASTES and the PROPAGATION OF TIMBER: bases, on which, not commerce only, but the political existence of the nation is founded. And when may this country expect a more favorable opportunity, than the present, (1790) of laying a broad and firm basis of its future prosperity?^{75}

^{74} *Annals of Agriculture*, VII (1786), 354.

^{75} Marshall, *Rural Economy of the Midland Counties*, I, 89.
Also in 1790 Marshall met Sir John Sinclair who was at the time engaged in the establishment of the Society for the Improvement of British Wool and in gathering materials for his Statistical Account of Scotland. Sometime later, in the spring of 1793, as Marshall was setting out for Scotland on extended business, Sinclair informed Marshall that he intended to seek parliamentary action on setting up a Board of Agriculture, but as the prospects were most unpromising, Marshall should not postpone his journey. No sooner had he arrived in the Highlands than he received word that the Board had been established with Sinclair as president and Arthur Young as secretary. Marshall was extremely disappointed at what he and others considered a "political job," but he swallowed his pride and volunteered his services to Sinclair. In 1794 he produced the General View of the Agriculture of the Central Highlands of Scotland.

In 1808 Marshall purchased an estate in the Vale of Cleveland in Yorkshire where he set to work on his five-volume Review of the County Reports of the Board of Agriculture, which he completed in 1817, the year before his death.

William Marshall was a man of determination and of a strong mind who set himself a program in 1780 and pursued

it with dedication until his death. He is always compared with Arthur Young and usually he comes off the winner, although qualifications are necessary to such a judgment. A nineteenth-century biographer of Marshall wrote that as a "rational observer and practical compiler Marshall was most decidedly superior to Young." Yet, the two men were not trying to do exactly the same thing. As an agricultural reporter, Marshall probably did a more thorough job -- an extended residence in a place will produce a more detailed understanding than a brief visit. But Arthur Young displays a dimension of intellect and scope of endeavor that is not to be found in Marshall. Young not only toured and reported; he also fought and propagated for the landed interest in other arenas.

Arthur Young and William Marshall exhorted; Sir John Sinclair acted. A formidable Scottish baronet with unbounded energy and with rank and position enough to carry others along, Sinclair tried to crystalize the landed interest and give it a focus.

Born in 1754, he inherited from his ancestors the largest estate belonging to any individual in Scotland, and was a Member of Parliament almost continuously after 1780. He took a position as an "Independent Representative of the people; and . . . often endeavoured, but in vain,

77Ibid., 61, quoting John Donaldson, Agricultural Biography (1854).
to establish a union among persons of that description." 78
His first interest lay in financial affairs, and in 1705 he published *A History of the Public Revenue of the British Empire*. From that he moved to concern for improvement of wool and was instrumental in establishing the Society for the Improvement of British Wool in 1791. Simultaneously he busied himself with collecting the fullest possible information on a parish-by-parish basis for his *Statistical Account of Scotland* which was published at intervals over a period of some ten years. (He is credited with introducing the word "statistics" into the language.) The idea of national surveys and a general census follows almost logically from his activities.

Early in 1793 Sinclair did government a service in the financial crisis that accompanied the outbreak of war. As a reward Pitt acceded to Sinclair's request for the establishment of a Board of Agriculture with £3,000 a year for expenses, and Sinclair was named president, Arthur Young secretary. The Board was neither "administrative machinery, nor voluntary society," writes a student of it, "but an interesting and unsuccessful muddle of the two, as well as an attempt to organize the landed

78 *European Magazine*, January 1791, 3.
interest." Sinclair considered the Board pretty much as his private property, and he set it at once to conduct a systematic survey of the country, parish by parish, but the Archbishop of Canterbury, fearing that tithes might be put in jeopardy, used influence to prevent that, so Sinclair fell back on county surveys with the expectation that they would be united eventually in a national report. Much of the work was hastily and ill done. Arthur Young reflected in later years that he was "mortified to the quick" by the manner in which affairs were conducted, and he criticized the way the Board "rushed into such a rapid succession of publications of the original County Reports, that it was morally impossible to find any merit attaching to by far the greatest part of them (men who are employed without examination, knowledge or ability) and a more wretched mass of erroneous and insufficient information could scarcely have been produced." Sinclair committed the Board to heavy expense for the surveys and for an infinite variety of other projects. Moreover, his friendship with Pitt in 1793 was at best a temporary one, and on subsequent

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79 Rosalind Mitchison, "The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)," English Historical Review, LXXIV (1959), 41.

80 Ibid., 48.

81 G. E. Fussell, "Impressions of Sir John Sinclair, Bart., First President of the Board of Agriculture," Agricultural History, XXV, no. 4 (October 1951), 165.
occasions he put himself in opposition to the ministry. Eventually, in 1798, Pitt wearied of Sinclair and put Lord Somerville up as a rival candidate for the presidency; Sinclair was deposed. In 1806, somewhat chastened, he was permitted to resume the presidency of the Board of Agriculture, which he held until 1813. He retired in that year, residing most of the time thereafter in Edinburgh and writing voluminously on many topics, until his death in 1835.

Perhaps the aptest assessment of Sir John Sinclair is that of Arthur Young, who had ample opportunity to arrive at it: "Had his industry been under the direction of a better judgment," wrote Young, "he would have made an admirable president." A modern writer has rendered a just verdict:

He was an egoist without a grain of humour who could not have conceived that he, in common with all other men, was slightly ludicrous. What indeed had Sir John Sinclair, Bart., in common with other men? He was complacent about his work and was full of self-conceit, but against these fairly human weaknesses must be placed his determination, the vigour of a character that could bend others to his will, and the solid achievements in agricultural development that were gained in his day largely because of the part he played as a publicist.

82 Gazeley, Life of Arthur Young, 393-6.
83 Young, Autobiography, 316.
84 Fussell, "Impressions of Sir John Sinclair, Bart., First President of the Board of Agriculture," Agricultural History, XXV, no. 4 (October 1951), 169.
Sir John Sinclair, Arthur Young, and William Marshall are the best-known of the agriculturalists of the late eighteenth century, and were perhaps the most influential through the volume and popularity of their writings. But a battalion of men, less prone to publication, labored as enthusiastically as they in the vineyard of improvement. Brief notice of their endeavors will suggest the nature of their work and the value of their accomplishments.

The appraiser and estate agent Nathaniel Kent (1737-1810) was well-known in his day both for his publications and for actual farming practice. As a young man he was employed as secretary to the British minister in Brussels where he became interested in the special husbandry of the Netherlands and made a thorough study of it. Returning to England, he wrote a description of Flemish techniques which so impressed some influential persons that they persuaded him to give up diplomacy and make a career in agriculture. He became an estate agent and land valuer, working mostly in Norfolk where he had a notable effect on agricultural improvement. In 1775 he published *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* which was popular enough to go through three editions in twenty years and brought him wide recognition. He was invited to write the Norfolk volume of the Board of Agriculture surveys in 1793, and he also contributed to Dr. Alexander
Hunter's famous *Georgical Essays*. For a short time Kent was bailiff of the king's farm at Windsor. 85

Alexander Hunter (1729-1809) was a Scottish physician with an abiding interest in agriculture, largely with relation to plant nutrition and soil chemistry. He settled at York in 1763 and practiced medicine there until his death. He wrote several popular essays on the composition and value of various waters, and in 1770 he was active in the establishment of the Agricultural Society at York. He solicited and edited essays from other agriculturists which were published in four volumes as *Georgical Essays* (1770-2) and republished several times before the end of the century. William Marshall and Nathaniel Kent are numbered among the contributors. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society in both London and Edinburgh, and was named an honorary member of the Board of Agriculture. Sir John Sinclair's Address to the Board of Agriculture in 1796 mentioned experiments being conducted at Hunter's seat "for the purpose of ascertaining the Principles of Vegetation, and the Effects of Manures." 86

Another writer was James Anderson (1739-1808), also a Scot and an economist who received an LL.D. from Aberdeen


in 1780. At first he was concerned with fisheries and was employed by government in a fisheries survey in 1784; later he published many articles on rural subjects. In the late 1790's he moved to Isleworth where he conducted agricultural experiments and wrote and reviewed books on agriculture for the Monthly Review for many years. Under the name AGRICOLA he wrote thoughtful, provocative letters to The Times and other publications. In 1798, for example, we find him attacking the Board of Agriculture's policy on enclosures as harmful to the public good, saying that enclosures turn country gentlemen and overgrown tenants into "arrogant and unfeeling monopolists." Not long after that, he criticized stock-breeders for producing bloated and unhealthy animals, "pampered to immoderate fattness by Oil cake, &c. which fat more resembles the blubber of a Whale than good Beef." Anderson conducted the Aberdeenshire survey for the Board of Agriculture in 1793.

In addition to the literary agriculturalists just described, a number of prominent landowners and farmers drew attention and respect to the agricultural profession by imaginative experimentation and the well-reasoned management of their estates. Foremost among the "improving


88 The Times, December 16, 1801.

89 McDonald, Agricultural Writers, 214; Dictionary of National Biography, I, 381-2.
landlords" of the eighteenth century was Thomas William Coke (1754-1842), a figure much nimbussed by myth. He has been credited with working miracles in Norfolk; the fact that his accomplishments were less spectacular than the legend should not be permitted to obscure the genuine contributions that he made. It must be recorded that his contemporaries recognized him as a leader of agricultural improvement. Coke came into his estate in 1776 at age twenty-two and devoted his long life to progressive and methodical farming. It is often written that he took over a poor and backward property and increased the rent roll by ten-fold in forty years, that he introduced marling and wheat-growing to his part of Norfolk, that he was the first to grant long leases to tenants, and that he was perhaps the first to put together large farms. In reality, none of these statements is quite true. Norfolk was not backward in 1776 and Holkham was not especially poor; he doubled the rent roll in forty years; marl was used and wheat grown in his part of Norfolk throughout the century; twenty-one year leases were begun on the Coke estates about 1725; and large farms were not uncommon at that same period. Coke's reputation is due not to his having introduced marvelous novelties but rather to his having improved on the substantial legacy left him by his predecessors. He made Holkham a private and successful experimental farm and a model estate. One feature to his credit was the improvement of leases. Covenants became
more detailed and more in the nature of positive instructions than mere negative prohibitions. (Nathaniel Kent apparently drafted the leases for Holkham in the 1790's, which is the period during which great progress was made.) The courses of rotation became more specific, and good farming was made more and more a matter of following the lease stipulations. Coke also was responsible for the introduction and establishment of the Devon breed of cattle and the Southdown breed of sheep in Norfolk. Moreover, he did important work in promoting drainage and irrigation and row-culture of crops. All the various improvements at which he labored were put on display at his annual sheep-shearings, which were in the nature of private agricultural shows attended by landowners and farmers from far and near and at which prizes were given for farming excellence in various categories. It was these sheep-shearings that spread the message of agricultural improvement; they also spread the fame of Thomas William Coke.90

Another practical agriculturalist whose name became famous for his improvements was the stock-breeder Robert Bakewell (1725-95). Born at Dishley in Leicestershire where his family had farmed for several generations,  

Bakewell observed "that domestic animals, in general, produced others possessing qualities very similar to their own," and he set about to acquire a stock of those with the most desirable characteristics and to experiment with these to produce a new and superior breed. Early in his career, about 1760, he sold his sheep at two or three guineas each; then the fame of his breed began to be spoken of and he raised his prices. By 1770 he was letting his rams by the season for twenty-five guineas. By the time of Bakewell's death single rams were being let for the season for the enormous price of four hundred guineas or more. His New Leicestershire sheep were described as "small in the bone, low on the legs, yet of great weight; and will get fat in half the time that is required to fatten sheep." Arthur Young, however, found Bakewell's sheep deficient in several points: their wool was too coarse to command top prices, their mutton was inferior to that of some other breeds, and they did not serve well as manure-providers in nightly folds. Bakewell developed a breed of black horses, famous for their strength in harness and much used by the army, and he experimented with cattle

91 *European Magazine*, November 1795, 327.
92 Ibid., 328.
93 *The Times*, February 2, 1788.
to produce a new Leicestershire long-horn, "a small, clean-boned, round, short-carcassed, kindly-looking cattle, inclined to be fat."\footnote{George Culley, Observations on Livestock (1786), 26, quoted in Dictionary of National Biography, I, 942.} With all his breeds he believed in demanding the highest prices for breeding -- "the only way to improve the breed of cattle is to keep up the price; for, if the price is low, people will send any kind of cows, and if the produce fails, the bull is blamed; but if the price is high, they are particular, and send the very best, which is the only method to improve the breed."\footnote{John Monk, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Leicester (London: J. Nichols, 1794), 29.}

Dishley Farm, apart from the stock-breeding activities carried on there, was hailed also as a model of its kind and was the object of a lively tourist traffic. Bakewell's water-meadows, fed by a canal a mile and a half long, produced fabulous quantities of grass, and the canal provided a means of transportation for conveying turnips and other crops about the farm. Moreover, his livestock were treated with remarkable kindness -- kept unusually clean, pampered, well-fed, and the sheep sometimes put into body-clothes after shearing, a project which also
interested Sir John Sinclair. Bakewell's many activities not only increased the quantity and quality of Britain's food supply, they also attracted a great deal of mostly friendly attention to the cause of the landed interest and to the cause of agricultural improvement.

An improver of the highest rank was Francis Russell, the fifth Duke of Bedford (1765-1802). Exposed to education at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, but ill-educated, he had the upbringing customary for his time and station, went on the Grand Tour, and took his seat in the House of Lords in 1787. A staunch whig, he followed Fox in his politics, and although reluctant at first to enter debate for fear of humiliating himself for incorrect English, he became a competent debater and involved himself in the issues of the day. In the 1790's he became interested in agriculture and made it his chief employment. He established a model farm at Woburn and lavished money on it to make it the most complete and best-equipped possible for experiments in stock-breeding. His experiments in "the comparative value of the different kinds of sheep," was noted by the Board of Agriculture

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97 Dictionary of National Biography, I, 942; Young Autobiography, 159-60. The DNB carries an entry for another Robert Bakewell, a younger contemporary of the famed stock-breeder, who was once asked by the Countess of Oxford whether he was related to the Mr. Bakewell "who invented sheep."
reporter for Bedford in 1794, and the duke himself made reports in 1795 in Arthur Young's *Annals of Agriculture*. He was named an original member of the Board of Agriculture in 1793, and he was later president of the Smithfield Club, a society of breeders. Like Coke of Norfolk, his fame as an agriculturalist spread widely due to the famous sheep-shearings which he instituted at Woburn and which were attended by great numbers of landowners and large farmers. Competitions were held, prizes awarded, products were exhibited, and the affair was concluded by a festive banquet. The press was unstinting in its praise for his allotting "so large a part of his immense fortune" to the laudable pursuit of improving agriculture.

The third earl of Egremont (1751-1837) was a patron of the fine arts and a patron of improved agriculture. His estate at Petworth in Sussex was described as a nursery of art and a college of agriculture. Lord Egremont was a Wyndham and was at school with Charles James Fox, but he took little interest in politics. He was appointed to the Board of Agriculture on its inception in 1793. At Petworth, where he resided most of the time in his later years, he became a great stock-breeder. William Marshall

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100 *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXI, 1159-60.
reported that Lord Egremont was "carrying on the patriotic work of improvement, with unparalleled zeal; and on a broader basis, than that on which it has, heretofore, been pursued, in any part of the Island."\textsuperscript{101} He was coming up with a Petworth breed of cattle, selecting from the Sussex, Hereford, and Devon breeds. Moreover, Egremont "a few years ago, instituted an EXHIBITION of Cattle, of these breeds; and distributed REWARDS, to those who produced the most perfect individuals."\textsuperscript{102} Egremont's agricultural exhibitions performed much the same service for improvement as did the sheep-shearings of Coke of Holkham and the duke of Bedford.

It would be \textit{lèse majesté} to omit the king's name from this roll of improvers, and indeed he deserves to be in this company. George III was a progressive farmer and keenly interested in matters agricultural. Arthur Young recounts that the queen told him that the king never traveled without the \textit{Annals of Agriculture} in their carriage,\textsuperscript{103} and it is well known that he contributed several articles to the \textit{Annals} under the name of his shepherd, Ralph Robinson. The king acquired the Great Park at Windsor in 1791, a tract of some four thousand acres, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Marshall, \textit{Rural Economy of the Southern Counties}, I, 195-6.
\item \textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Young, \textit{Autobiography}, 122.
\end{itemize}
proceeded to establish two experimental farms within it. He had as bailiffs Mark Ducket, a well-known farmer, and Nathaniel Kent, who wrote an account of the husbandry on the farms. A thousand acres of light soils were denominated the Norfolk Farm and the practices of that county were adopted on that farm, while another four hundred acres of heavier loam at the other extremity of the Great Park were called the Flemish Farm and the husbandry techniques of the Netherlands were followed there. Experiments were conducted on courses of rotation, folding sheep, plows and other implements, and especially with regard to the late eighteenth century controversy over the relative merits of horses or oxen for draft. "His Majesty has unquestionably tried the latter upon a larger scale than any other person," wrote Kent, "as he does not work less than one hundred and eighty Oxen upon his different farms, parks, and gardens, and has found them to answer so well, that there is not now a horse kept."104

The king also was interested in Spanish merino sheep and introduced them into England. He distributed rams and ewes as gifts to various other stock-breeders and tried to promote the breed in all ways possible. Eventually, however, it was decided that the merinos were not suitable to England.

John Southey, fifteenth Lord Somerville (1765-1819), represents a good type of noble improver. Born at Taunton, educated at Harrow and Cambridge, he set about improving certain properties that came into his hands. In 1793 he was named as an original member of the Board of Agriculture, and in 1798 he was chosen president of the Board when Pitt decided to get rid of Sir John Sinclair. As president, he changed the Board's emphasis from publication, which had proved so expensive under Sinclair, to the granting of prizes and premiums. He was made a lord of the king's bedchamber in 1799, and was thus brought into close association with the king who was also enthusiastic about agricultural affairs. Somerville became a notable breeder of merino sheep with one of the largest flocks in the country. He regularly attended the sheep-shearings at Holkham and Woburn, and in 1801 announced plans for an agricultural show of his own, on a slightly different basis from that of the other shows. He announced he would give prizes of fifty pounds each for the best yoke of fat oxen, "which shall have laboured a given period, to provide corn and other food for man, but shall never once have consumed it," and for "breeds of short-wooled sheep (hitherto so much neglected), giving preference to those most productive in food and raiment."\(^{105}\) The prizes, he declared, were designed "to countenance farmers in their usual course of

\(^{105}\)The Times, November 25, 1801.
profitable husbandry, rather than those who, forgetful of
general benefit, are ambitious of keeping on cattle too
long after they are ripe."\textsuperscript{106}

The third earl of Orford joined in the sentiment for
improvement in a large way. The \textit{Times} noted in 1790 that
gentlemen everywhere were taking a more active interest in
agricultural improvement, but nowhere more than in Norfolk,
where the Earl of Orford was allotting a great part of his
park at Houghton to agricultural experiments, growing every
new species of grain and grass as well as trying every sort
of new implement of husbandry.\textsuperscript{107} The recollections of
Orford by Arthur Young constitute the most fitting obituary
and as well the best description of the ideal of all
improvers of high rank. Young lamented that while the
"insects of a drawing-room, the patrons of faro, the
luminaries of Newmarket" were spared, death took the
liberal patron of the common farmer.\textsuperscript{108}

A modest host of other improvers can be cited to
illustrate the movement for improvement. The duke of
Buccleugh, wrote Arthur Young, "is another determined
farmer, and seems to like conversing on no other subject."\textsuperscript{109}
The Board of Agriculture reporter for Leicester observed
the "Lord Harborough has been at great expense to improve

\textsuperscript{106}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{107}\textit{Ibid.}, December 20, 1790.
\textsuperscript{108}Young, \textit{Autobiography}, 206-7.
\textsuperscript{109}\textit{Ibid.}, 261.
the breed of cattle in general, for the benefit of his tenants,"\textsuperscript{110} while the Cornwall reporter noted that "Sir Francis Basset, on an experimental farm, which he has taken up with his usual public spirit, means to try both the Leicester and South Down breeds."\textsuperscript{111} In the West Riding of Yorkshire it was stated that turnips were introduced "principally owing to the indefatigable exertions of that truly patriotic nobleman the late Marquis of Rockingham,"\textsuperscript{112} whom Arthur Young thought nearly as enlightened as Coke of Norfolk -- he drained lands, laid down arable fields to grass, brought in turnip-hoers to teach his people, experimented with various manures, and introduced many useful agricultural implements.\textsuperscript{113} Many others can also be found, all of whom shared one thing: the spirit of improvement.

The movement for agricultural improvement was not, however, the work of mere individuals, alone and unsupported. From the 1750's and 1760's began to appear organizations of like-minded men, banding together in most counties and

\textsuperscript{110} Monk, General View of the Agriculture of . . . Leicester, 31.

\textsuperscript{111} Robert Fraser, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cornwall (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 47.

\textsuperscript{112} George Rennie, Robert Brown, and John Shirreff, General View of the Agriculture of the West Riding of Yorkshire (London: W. Bulmer, 1794), 20.

\textsuperscript{113} Gazeley, Life of Arthur Young, 40.
many towns as agricultural societies to disseminate the new knowledge of improved techniques and practices. Unfortunately, in spite of their zeal and devotion, the county- and town-level societies were of only limited utility. They were too narrowly formed; something of a larger scale, a national agricultural society, was needed to manage a broader exchange of information.

Some societies actively pursued their goal which was "to promote and extend a knowledge of the theory and practice of Agriculture and Husbandry, and the arts which have a tendency to the improvement thereof."\(^{114}\) The Bath and West of England Society, for example, founded in 1777, undertook a program of publishing agricultural papers, of which fourteen volumes appeared between 1783 and 1816.\(^{115}\) Most resorted to premiums to rouse interest, and we read of the Monmouthshire Agricultural Society offering premiums for the best bulls to be shown at Usk,\(^{116}\) while the Leicester Agricultural Society awarded prizes to five poor men who brought up large families without parish assistance,\(^{117}\) and the Society of Arts offered premiums for planting and

\(^{114}\) "Rules and Regulations of the Georgic Society, for the Promotion of Agriculture and Husbandry," *Annals of Agriculture*, XX (1793), 340.


\(^{116}\) *The Times*, April 9, 1792.

\(^{117}\) *Ibid.*, December 27, 1792.
husbandry, including an astonishing variety of trees, vegetables, and livestock, as well as for "ascertaining the component parts of arable land, improving land lying waste, manures, improving waste moors, gaining land from the sea, a machine to reap or mow corn, an improved hoe (horse- or hand-), and destroying the grub of the cook-chaser."118

Some improvers endorsed the activities of the societies. Arthur Young in particular praised the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, which he was sorry to note in 1784 was not very fashionable. Its membership was composed of "people of no great account in life," but, Young believed, they had done far more good than three-fourths of the men of great property in the nation.119 On the other hand, the West Riding reporters for the Board of Agriculture in 1794 stated that they were "far from recommending an intermixture of proprietors and farmers together . . . . We heard of the Sheffield Society, where gentlemen, clergy, and farmers, met promiscuously; the consequence of which was, that the latter were in a manner prohibited from mentioning improvements, in case they should be a watch-word for the one


119 Annals of Agriculture, I (1784), 64.
increasing the rent, and the other raising the rate of tithes."120

The European Magazine questioned the value of such societies, noting that "In France there are innumerable societies for the promotion of agriculture; yet how great a proportion of the fertile and populous kingdom of France is absolutely waste?"121 The magazine did not deny that some good was done by them, but not as much as they pretended. However, the magazine added, "it is among the greatest advantages of public societies, that they call to their aid the powerful principle of vanity. We remark, in a long list of contributors to The Society of Arts, many names whom we never should have suspected of any great zeal for the promotion of arts, manufactures, or commerce."122

As agriculture became more profitable in the latter half of the eighteenth century it of course became more interesting to a growing number of important men. As they took up the practices of the new husbandry, lesser men, motivated by the herd-instinct as well as the profit motive, followed along, and then the trickle became a minor torrent; the inclination became a passion; agriculture became fashionable. The Berkshire reporter in 1794 wrote that among the leading causes for the advance of improvement was

120 Rennie et al., General View of the Agriculture of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 40.
121 European Magazine, October 1783, 282.
122 Ibid., 283.
the number of landed gentlemen who made the study of agriculture, their "chief rural amusement." An article in The Times in 1790 remarked on the "rapid progress of agriculture towards perfection," and attributed it to the patriotic attention of such great promoters of agriculture as the king, the earl of Orford, Arthur Young, and others who devoted much of their time to making husbandry "less intricate", and also to persuading mankind that "old prejudices are no longer useful, when new plans are adopted which produce much greater benefits to the farmer and landlord."

But not everyone's heart was delighted to see the popularization of agriculture as a fashionable pastime. William Marshall lamented it with even more capital letters than usual:

Until the present Century, Farming, like Religion, was an hereditary mystery, transferred from father to son, and had no other foundation than chance-produced CUSTOM: nor was actuated by any other motive than Self-EMOLUMENT.

Reason found her plodding through a narrow, blind-lane -- a by-road, full of sloughs and quick-sands. --He led her from the mire -- dressed her in a decent, rustic garb -- and introduced her to books. Books recommended her to SCIENCE. -- Science, unfortunately, threw her in the way of TASTE: -- and Men of Taste! mounted her on the Throne of ABSURDITY . . . . She is no longer an ART nor even a SCIENCE, but a chit-chat Companion to the FINE ARTS AND BELLES LETTRES!

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123 William Pearce, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Berkshire (London: W. Bulmer, 1794), 15.

124 The Times, December 6, 1790.
She resembles a ruddy, buxom, cottage-bred
Country-housewife, bedizened in mode and muslin,
parading the Mall of Taste amidst modern Petits-
Maitres.125

125William Marshall, Minutes of Agriculture (1778),
quoted in G. E. Fussell, "My Impressions of William
Marshall," Agriculture History, XXIII, no. 1, (January
1949), 58.
CHAPTER II
BRITISH AGRICULTURE
AT THE END OF THE AMERICAN WAR

When the American war ended in 1783 and Britain returned to the conditions of peace, her agricultural economy was already well on the way toward becoming a more productive instrument to meet the demands of an increasing population and a growing industry, a transformation generally termed the Agricultural Revolution. That revolution was not an event but a process, with no clearly defined beginning and no foreseeable end. To give a picture of British agriculture at the end of the war is to catch it on the wing, moving and on-going. It must be a description of conditions which had their origin before 1783 and continued after 1783. In that endeavor we will here examine the structure of landed society in the late eighteenth century and will look at the large estates which were characteristic of the time. We will observe the trend toward larger farms and will investigate the improved husbandry techniques and new crops which were introduced and the yields obtained. Finally we will consider the growth of population in the period, the parent of increased demand, and will see the state of enclosures in England and Wales about the end of the American war.
We will find that the rate of agricultural change, as measured by enclosure, the usual first step in agricultural improvement, leveled off or even declined slightly at the end of the American war and in the readjustment period which followed. The year 1783 then was not a time of frenzied progressive improvement; rather it was a time of pause, reassessment, and readjustment.

The ownership of land in Britain in the eighteenth century was concentrated in relatively few hands. The covering term "landed interest" was actually a rather elastic one -- in a strict sense it included only the landowners and farmers, about one-quarter of the families of the realm, but in a broader sense it might also embrace various other groups which depended either directly or indirectly on the land for their livelihood, such as agricultural laborers, country attorneys, rural clergymen, land agents, village craftsmen like blacksmiths and wheelwrights, and assorted tradesmen who utilized or transported the products of the land. From two-thirds to three-quarters of the population were in this manner dependent on agriculture.¹

The landowning class proper fell into three main social groups: peers, gentry, and freeholders. Before 1783 the number of peers remained fairly constant for a long

period at about 160 or 170; then Pitt loosed a flood of creations that resulted in a peerage of nearly 300 by the century's end, not including Irish titles.\(^2\) The gentry made up a large middle group of landowners whose numbers it is hard to determine precisely; contemporary estimates vary from as few as 8,000 families to as many as 20,000 families. At the bottom of the pyramid stood a considerable group of freeholders, perhaps as many as 160,000 families.\(^3\)

In point of size of property, about 400 families of great landowners in England and Wales at the end of the eighteenth century had estates ranging from 5,000 acres to over 50,000 acres, producing incomes which averaged £10,000 a year. Most but not all of the peers figured in this group of large landowners, and they were joined by a number of baronets and knights and even some untitled commoners. The estates of the great landowners totaled some six million acres, or about one-fifth of the cultivated area.\(^4\) Ranking next in importance came the lesser landlords or gentry, ranging from 700 or 800 families with incomes of £3,000 to £4,000 through a group of 3,000 to 4,000 families of squires with incomes of £1,000 to £3,000 down to a group of perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 modest gentlemen who subsisted on £300 to £1,000

\(^2\)Ibid., 6. \(^3\)Ibid., 6-7. \(^4\)Ibid., 19-20.
a year. The holdings of the gentry amounted to fifteen or sixteen million acres, perhaps half of the cultivated land.\(^5\) The lowest stratum of the structure was that of the small owner-occupiers, usually called yeomen, numbering probably about 100,000 families. Their holdings ranged from 20 to 150 acres, averaging about 50 acres, and constituted about fifteen to twenty per cent of the total cultivated arable.\(^6\)

Contemporary observers noted during the eighteenth century that the percentage of the population engaged in agriculture was tending to decline in comparison with such rising occupations as manufacturing and trade. Gregory King in 1688 supposed that agriculture produced 37.9 per cent of Britain's income, while Joseph Massie, working in 1760, concluded that only 27.7 per cent of the national income derived from agriculture.\(^7\) However, such figures cannot be relied on with complete confidence; they are only an approximation, and Arthur Young was on safer if vaguer ground when he estimated in 1787 that one-third of the population was employed in agriculture.\(^8\)

Great estates characterized British agriculture at the end of the eighteenth century. Great estates came

\(^5\)Ibid., 21-3. \(^6\)Ibid., 23-4.


\(^8\)The Times, November 23, 1787.
into being and modest ones were enlarged by a number of means, chief among which were fortunate marriages and inheritances, profits of public office, and purchase with professional and mercantile fortunes. In the political circumstances of the eighteenth century royal favor had relatively little to grant in the way of monopolies or lands forfeited by rebels, and not many government offices yielded sufficient reward to build a great estate. Newcomers from trade and the professions moved steadily into landed society in the eighteenth century, but the limited availability of land for purchase necessarily limited even the incursions of this class. Marriage and inheritance provided the principal means of enhancement of estates. Great landowners, whose titles and social position acted as an irresistible attraction, were able to win the richly-dowered daughters of City merchants and professional men as brides and used their bride-portions to repair finances and extend estates.

Hand-in-hand with the establishment of great estates went an extension of the legal device of entail, to

9Mingay, English Landed Society, 27.
10Ibid., 47.
11Ibid., 28; see also Christopher Clay, "Marriage, Inheritance, and the Rise of Large Estates in England, 1660-1815," Economic History Review, 2nd ser., XXI, no. 3 (December 1968), 503-18, for some qualifying observations.
protect against their future disintegration. Although Adam Smith might denounce entail as "completely absurd"\textsuperscript{12} in the conditions of the eighteenth century, the procedure steadily gained in popularity among great owners, although small owners tended to ignore it.\textsuperscript{13} Entail not only gave great landowners assurance of continuity of their estates, it also permitted them to borrow money on mortgage with greater facility. Lenders rarely contemplated foreclosing because a mortgage was usually safe and lucrative and could always be sold if necessary. Easier borrowing contributed to the further growth of estates, and the load of debt on entailed property rose significantly during the century.

Large landed estates were not always created or extended for purely economic reasons. Many landowners involved in aggrandizing their holdings were motivated mainly by considerations of social prestige and political power; very few of them were concerned actively with agriculture. Yet the very fact of great size of estates required the services of full-time managers who devoted all their energy and knowledge to the estate, imparting


an efficiency and coordination that usually were lacking on smaller estates.  

With regard to the economic functions of the various groups within the landed interest, the basic distinction was that between the landlords, who owned land but did not themselves work it, and those who actually worked land, whether they owned it or only leased it, that is to say, owner-occupiers and farmers. The landlords administered their estates and lived on their rents, and agriculture was not their only or even principal source of income—mines, kilns, timber, quarries, and urban residential property often constituted the main part of their felicity. But, as landlords, their chief function was to provide an environment in which good farming could take place—well-arranged, compact farms with appropriate buildings on reasonable terms at reasonable rents. Although an increasing number of landlords became interested in "improvement" in the latter part of the eighteenth century, to most of them the term meant increasing their rental incomes, and their contributions to improvement were in the nature of an investment. Many great landlords, moreover, seemed to lack the talent for active involvement in improvement. As Adam Smith  

15Mingay, English Landed Society, 57, 171.  
16Ibid., 172.
observed, it "seldom happens . . . that a great proprietor is a great improver . . . . To improve land with profit, like all other commercial projects, requires an exact attention to small savings and small gains, of which a man born to a great fortune, even though naturally frugal, is very seldom capable." Among landowners of a more moderate size, where the landowners did not exert themselves in improvement, conditions often remained unremarkable, as for instance in a district of Surrey where it was alleged that the only reason which could be assigned for lack of development was "that among the more opulent gentlemen of the county, by whom every improvement should be encouraged by example, it has not until lately been taken up with spirit." Conversely, in a district in Buckinghamshire, where several noblemen and gentlemen could be described as progressive, it was said that "to them may be ascribed, in great degree, those improvements that . . . have been made in the various parts of agriculture." Thus a landowner's encouragement of improvement could be important, but the farmer actually did the farming.

18William Malcolm, James Malcolm, and Jacob Malcolm, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Surrey (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 81.
19William Malcolm, James Malcolm, and Jacob Malcolm, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Buckingham (London: Colin MacRae, 1794), 10-11.
Small landowners were of two sorts: owner-occupiers and absentees. The tendency during the eighteenth century was for the number of owner-occupiers to diminish while the number of absentee-owners increased. The agricultural depression of the first half of the century, brought on by a run of good seasons and resulting in an extended period of reduced prices, injured the small owner-occupier to a greater degree than it did the great estate-owner whose income was derived from a variety of sources, and some of the small men disposed of their holdings. But only a small minority appear to have sold out for debt; more disposed of their land in order to employ the capital more profitably in trade or industry or as large farmers. It would be wrong, however, to imagine that the small owner-occupiers suffered constant erosion and final extermination; on the contrary, some prospered in the early, depressed part of the century, as is shown by the quantity of rebuilding and improvement of farm houses during the period, and many small holdings in various parts of Britain have survived to the present. That which most often tipped the balance toward success and survival for a small owner was a fortunate location relative to an expanding market and a spirit of

20 Mingay, English Landed Society, 80-1.
21 Ibid., 85.
22 Thirsk, Introduction to Johnson, Disappearance of the Small Landowner, xiii.
enterprise which discovered advantage in the fluidity of the economy and the society. In Lancashire, for example, dairy-farming and market-gardening near Liverpool and other industrial towns presented a profitable opportunity to small holders, so that "since the introduction of manufacturers, property has become more minutely divided." Enclosures of commons and wastes, which accelerated through resort to parliamentary act in the second half of the century, also had the effect of increasing the number of small owners as many simple folk received a few acres in compensation for loss of rights of common. Although some sold their portions, many retained their properties and leased them. By the end of the eighteenth century there may actually have been more absentee-owners than at the beginning.

A notable feature of the distribution of landowner-ship toward the end of the eighteenth century, observed in several counties, was that old-enclosed parishes were characterized by larger properties while in newly-enclosed parishes and open-field parishes property was

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23 Mingay, English Landed Society, 107.


25 Mingay, English Landed Society, 7.
"much diffused." And wherever there were small landowners, they labored under a common handicap: their properties offered little opportunity for taking advantage of the improvements of the age. If they were lucky with regard to soil and markets, they were always vulnerable to extended periods of low prices and they had little flexibility for shifting to alternate concentrations in their husbandry. Yet, in spite of their liabilities, they did not succumb, and, like the report of Mark Twain's death, the reports of their extinction in the eighteenth century have been exaggerated.

A clear trend in management of estates from the Restoration onward was the consolidation of strips belonging to the lord of a manor in order to form compact farms which would prove attractive to the larger and better sort of tenant-farmers. A "good estate", in the thinking of great landowners, was one tenanted by large farmers, holding two hundred acres or more, keeping all in good condition, and paying their rents on time. The early steps toward improvement -- consolidation of strips,


27 Mingay, English Landed Society, 81.

enclosure, and the replacing of indefinite leases for one or more lives by shorter leases for a definite term of seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years — were intended to achieve the building of good estates of that sort.29

Although it was a generally well-observed convention that old tenants should not be turned out of their farms as long as they lived, engrossment of farms proceeded apace during the eighteenth century.30 Wealthier landowners, providing more attractive facilities, tended to get the wealthier tenants, who were better able to stock and operate large farms,31 and it was felt by large landowners that farms of two hundred to five hundred acres could be most efficiently managed.32 While some contemporaries remarked that "the practice (but too frequently a pernicious one) of laying farms together, seems to be increasing,"33 the reasons were apparent: the large farmer reaped the benefits of a larger scale of operations,

29Habakkuk, "English Landownership, 1680-1740," Economic History Review, X (1940), 5.


31Habakkuk, "English Landownership, 1680-1740," Economic History Review, X (1940), 15.


33Thomas Wedge, General View of the Agriculture of the County Palatine of Chester (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 8.
he could afford to hold back his produce to take advantage of market fluctuations, he could hire the best laborers, he could make the most efficient use of his capital and could use his animals and implements more economically. Moreover, large farmers appeared to show greater enterprise, were more willing to try new ideas, had more opportunity to travel, and were always on the lookout for improvements which might prove profitable. Freed from manual labor, they had more time for supervision of their laborers and could take better care of their stock and their crops than small farmers.34 The Malcolm brothers, who were appointed by the Board of Agriculture in 1794 to conduct the agricultural survey of Surrey, wrote that although large farms were much criticized, "wherever these are to be met with, the greatest improvements, and the greatest regularity and good management are to be found, and, generally speaking, there only."35

Apart from modifications of the patterns of land-ownership and occupancy, the eighteenth century also saw the introduction and spread of new farming techniques, some of which had been practiced in the Netherlands as far back as the Middle Ages. There expensively reclaimed land could not be left fallow every third year, so a


35Malcolm et al., General View of the Agriculture of ... Surrey, 82.
variety of rotations with revitalizing crops had been developed. Most specialists agree that it was the introduction of new crops, rotations, land uses, and related procedures from the Low Countries which began the process of improvement in Britain.

Agricultural Britain is characterized by a scarp-and-vale topography which ignores political boundaries and divides the land into two main farming systems. The uplands are marked by free-draining light soils, chalk, limestone, fertile sands, and light loams; the vales and lowlands contain ill-drained clays and heavy loams. The innovations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries worked most effectively on the light soils, giving them an economic advantage over the heavy clays. In earlier centuries the light soils were considered too infertile for cultivation and suitable only for grazing; once ways were found, however, to keep the light, thin soils fertile, cereal crops could be grown more cheaply there than on heavy clays, and a shift of specialization began. More and more the former sheep downs of southern and eastern England came under the plow, while some of the clay lands went down to grass for fattening and dairying.36

Along with the piecemeal adoption of new farming techniques over southern England by 1700 went a fall in bread grain prices, resulting from a long run of good weather. The effects of this were harmful to the income of small farmers in northern districts and in common field parishes on Midland clays. Clay farmers could not expand production to offset low prices; gradually the inferior districts of north and west were edged into stock rearing, fattening, and dairying, and taking up domestic industries, while southern England became increasingly agricultural and old industries withered away.37

On the east coast in the eighteenth century the county of Norfolk gained preeminence as the center of improved agricultural techniques. A respected scholar of the subject lists five reasons for Norfolk's leadership: (1) an unusual medieval field system, (2) the influence of continental practices introduced early in the county, (3) the wide market, (4) the leadership of certain prominent agriculturalists, and (5) Norfolk's adaptability to wheat cultivation just when that crop was of the greatest interest to agriculturalists.38


The first point mentioned, the early field system, refers to the belief that East Anglian tenants at the time of the Conquest and later held lands in generally compact blocks, called "eriung," rather than scattered in a three-field system. The absence of the three-field system led to a complex variety of crop rotations, while the compactness of holdings led to early enclosures of properties. Even in some regions where the three-field system entered and prevailed scholars hold that a flexibility often existed which accommodated the introduction of the new techniques.

The thin, sandy quality of Norfolk's soil also helped. Such soil did not need fallowing, it needed fertilizing, and the most commonly used fertilizer, marl, was so expensive that the land had to be "rested" by planting a variety of useful crops. Norfolk farmers gladly followed the lead of the Dutch who had faced similar problems on their reclaimed lands, and Dutch clover, carrots, turnips, and artificial grasses were introduced. Convertible husbandry followed soon after, and the livestock brought in to consume the forage crops

39 Ibid., 19.
essential to the rotation plan produced valuable fertilizer for the sandy soil.\textsuperscript{41}

Some modern writers subscribe to a dissenting view that the original purpose of linking forage and grain courses together by the device of the sheepfold was to increase the output of livestock products;\textsuperscript{42} but the Board of Agriculture reporters for Essex in 1794 may have been nearer the mark when they stated that the farmer "endeavours to manage, so that the farming and grazing parts of his business, may mutually assist each other."\textsuperscript{43}

The introduction of the Norfolk system was, of course, a gradual process and did not spring full-blown from the head of Thomas William Coke at Holkham in 1776 or Charles Townshend at Raynham in 1733. Estate records indicate that extensive marling was taking place at Raynham as early as 1661, and turnips, sainfoin and clover were cultivated on a large scale there as early

\textsuperscript{41}Riches, The Agricultural Revolution in Norfolk, 151. A field system similar to that of medieval Norfolk is described for eighteenth-century Scotland in R. H. Campbell, Scotland since 1707: The Rise of an Industrial Society (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 20.

\textsuperscript{42}Jones, Introduction to Jones (ed.), Agriculture and Economic Growth, 10.

\textsuperscript{43}Messrs. /no names/ Griggs, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Essex (London: C. Clarke, 1794), 15.
as 1708, while Thomas Coke, Lord Lovell (1697-1755) was draining marshes and planting windbreaks of trees in the first half of the eighteenth century; this work served as a foundation for the work of Thomas William Coke of Holkham later in the century. Later accounts often portray Coke of Holkham as the inventor of the Norfolk system, rather than the Norfolk system as responsible for his success; yet the misconception is understandable as his "sheep-shearings," or private agricultural shows, held from 1778 to 1821, with as many as six hundred guests at a time, had the effect of publicizing and spreading the Norfolk system.

Gradually, on the light soils which were congenial to it, the Norfolk system took hold, although it by no means became the general basis of tillage in Britain. Many vast tracts continued to be devoted to rough grazing, or indeed to nothing at all, "as little improved by the labour of men, as if they belonged to the Cherokees, or any other tribe of American savages."

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44Riches, The Agricultural Revolution in Norfolk, 32.

45Ibid., 95.  
46Ibid., 153.


Arthur Young, after one of his early tours, in 1771 described the Norfolk system — and his version became in the public mind the Norfolk system. His famous seven points were: (1) enclosures without assistance from parliament, (2) use of marl and clay, (3) proper rotation of crops, (4) culture of turnips, hand-hoed, (5) culture of clover and rye grass, (6) long leases, and (7) large farms. The system he described was one of intensive agriculture and accordingly was generally limited to larger farmers.

William Marshall in 1787 described a course of rotation which had been followed in Norfolk "for at least a century past": wheat, barley, turnips, barley, clover, rye-grass, broken up about midsummer, and fallowed for wheat, in rotation. "Thus, supposing a farm to be laid-out with nineteen or twenty divisions of nearly equal size," he wrote, "and these to be brought into six regular shifts, each shift would consist of three pieces; with a piece or two in reserve, at liberty to be cropped with oats, peas, tares, buck; or to receive a thorough


cleaning by a whole year's fallow."52 This flexibility permitted endless variations, not only in response to soil problems but also in response to market opportunities.53 Marshall was persuaded that for "a shallow sandy loam, no matter whether it lie in Norfolk or in any other part of the kingdom, there cannot, perhaps, be devised a better course of culture; or, taken all in all, a better system of management, than that which is here in universal practice."54

Nathaniel Kent, another eminent agriculturalist of the day and an expert on the husbandry of Flanders, described a less complex six-course rotation in Norfolk, and observed that tenants often contract it to a four-course routine of wheat-turnips-barley-clover, which was similar to the practice of Flanders. But he warned that land grows tired of a frequent repetition of turnips and clover, and he suggested various acceptable substitutes.55

The elaborate rotations which Marshall and Kent and others described would not have been feasible without the

52Ibid., 133.


54Marshall, The Rural Economy of Norfolk, I, 134.

55Nathaniel Kent, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 13-4.
introduction of new crops, the most important of which was the turnip used as field crop. Known and grown in earlier years as a garden vegetable, by 1669 it was used as a field crop and by the end of the seventeenth century was fairly widespread.\textsuperscript{56} Turnips grown as winter feed made it possible for the land to support large numbers of livestock; turnip-culture also assisted in the cultivation of other crops because the hoeing practiced in turnip-husbandry cleaned the ground of weeds. Kent credited the Townshend family with having introduced turnips to Norfolk in the 1720's, and since then their culture had been rising to a peak of perfection. A good Norfolk acre of turnips, he said, would produce "thirty or forty cart loads as heavy as three horses can draw; and an acre will fat a Scotch bullock, from 40 to 50 stone; or eight sheep."\textsuperscript{57}

Artificial (sown) grasses -- rye grass, clover, sainfoin, and lucerne or alfalfa -- also played an important part in the new husbandry. These special varieties of hay, mostly introduced soon after the Restoration, not only restored nitrogen and other nutritive elements to the soil but also flourished on the


\textsuperscript{57}Kent, General View of the Agriculture of... Norfolk, 17-8.
poorer soils where natural grasses did not thrive and produced abundant quantities of sustenance for livestock. Once planted, these grasses lasted up to twenty years without re-sowing and actually improved as pasture with age. Unfortunately, the high prices of grain after 1760 caused many farmers to plow up their excellent pastures and sow them to wheat and oats.\textsuperscript{58}

Hand-in-hand with the introduction of artificial grasses went a spread of the technique of "floating the water meadows", that is, the irrigation of pastures along stream banks, a technique which began in the sixteenth century and gradually spread throughout eastern and midland England; by the late eighteenth century it was to be found in the west country and Wales. The production of corn depended primarily on the numbers of sheep which could be folded on the land to manure it, and their number depended on the quantity of fodder available to them through the winter. In the Middle Ages there had been no way to provide the necessary fodder, but floating the water meadows provided a breakthrough to abundant and earlier grass production. The floated meadow was a hot-bed for forcing grass.\textsuperscript{59} "The vegetation produced


by flooding," wrote a Board of Agriculture reporter in 1793, "is of such consequence to the Dorsetshire farmer, that without it, their present system of managing sheep, would be almost annihilated."\(^6\)

At the same period in Pembrokeshire the benefit of floating the water meadows "begins to be generally acknowledged in the county; and the opportunities for applying this valuable branch of improvement are almost every where to be met with."\(^6\) In Cardiganshire, abundant streams and springs were noted, "but little use is made of the water; where it is, the benefit is incredible."\(^6\)

In Somerset it was observed that some of the marsh farmers cut openings in the banks of the rivers in the winter months and overflowed their lands with the "thick water descending from the hills."\(^6\)

The new techniques of husbandry which perhaps reached a high level of sophistication earliest on the large enclosed estates of Norfolk soon spread throughout that county, even to open parishes. Records indicate that

\(^6\)John Claridge, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Dorset (London: W. Smith, 1793), 34.

\(^6\)Charles Hassall, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Pembroke (London: J. Smeeton, 1794), 11.

\(^6\)Thomas Lloyd and the Rev. Mr. Turnor, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cardigan (London: W. Smith, 1794), 9.

\(^6\)John Billingsley, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Somerset (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1795; 1798), 202.
by 1783 the Norfolk rotation was already fully adapted even in the open fields. The reason was simply to make money by the use of the new methods, and the substitution of profitable crops for fallow automatically produced increased income.

Livestock constituted a vital part of the husbandry in the new techniques. Sheep and cattle consumed the turnips and other restorative crops; sheepfolds provided dung for the fields; the carcasses and wool turned a considerable profit, supplying food for a growing population and raw materials for a growing manufacture; and the enriched fields produced larger crops of corn. Great numbers of beasts were driven from distant corners of the kingdom, and even from Scotland and Ireland, to the markets of England, especially to the London market at Smithfield. In the last part of the eighteenth century upwards of 100,000 cattle per year journeyed to Smithfield, along certain fairly well-established routes.

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65 Grigg, The Agricultural Revolution in South Lincolnshire, 2.

of 700,000 sheep per year were also sent to Smithfield for mutton.67

When agricultural prices started their upward climb after the middle of the eighteenth century investment was stimulated in road and canal construction as the fact became self-evident to many that improved transportation almost guaranteed money in the pocket. The 1750's ushered in a great age of turnpike building, and parliamentary acts continued to issue forth for this purpose and for canal building during the remainder of the century, giving agricultural producers access to the growing centers of population.

Population information for the eighteenth century is sketchy at best, and most figures are challenged by demographers. The best available figures are those gathered by John Rickman, the organizer of the first census in 1801. The data collected were not complete, but as modified and revised and supplemented by various experts, they show the population as follows:

ESTIMATED POPULATION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
(in millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>England and Wales</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1701</td>
<td>5.826</td>
<td>1.040</td>
<td>2.540</td>
<td>9.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1711</td>
<td>5.981</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.765</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1721</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1731</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>3.015</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1741</td>
<td>5.926</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751</td>
<td>6.140</td>
<td>1.250</td>
<td>3.125</td>
<td>10.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>6.569</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>7.052</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.530</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>7.531</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.048</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>8.247</td>
<td>1.500</td>
<td>4.753</td>
<td>14.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>9.156</td>
<td>1.599</td>
<td>5.216</td>
<td>15.972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most obvious feature of the figures for England and Wales is the population stagnation in the first half of the century and the accelerating increase thereafter. The reasons for the sustained increase after mid-century are much debated, and contemporaries as a matter of fact were uncertain whether population was really increasing. Dr. Richard Price, the Nonconformist minister, in 1783 presented much evidence to show England's population was actually declining because of enclosures, a conclusion with which Arthur Young warmly disagreed. "A man may ride a good horse to death," said Young, "before he will find any number of Baptismal registers in which a rapid increase of the people is not apparent." Arthur Young also explained why the population was increasing:


69Annals of Agriculture, I (1784), 33.
"Employment and industry create population in a modern society, not cheapness of provisions," he wrote, and most contemporaries agreed.70

In the first half of the century, while total national population remained nearly constant, the population of urban areas increased at a respectable rate, and after 1750 the rate of increase accelerated sharply. By the middle of the century population living in centers over 5,000 had increased from 13 per cent to 15 or 16 per cent of the total, and by 1801 it approximated 25 per cent. Liverpool is said to have trebled from 1700 to 1740 and to have increased by fivefold from then to 1800. Birmingham increased four and a half times in the century before 1760 and doubled between then and 1800. Manchester was the town of most rapid growth in the century -- it trebled in size in the last thirty years of the century.71 The trend toward urbanization of course meant fewer people were feeding themselves.

While population and urbanization were increasing rapidly in the second half of the century, the new farming techniques began to pay off with increasing yields of agricultural products. A modern authority estimates that wheat output increased during the eighteenth century from 29 to 50 million bushels per

70Ibid., 32.
year as a result of a combined increase in average yield from 20 to 22 bushels per acre and an increase in area sown to wheat of some 800,000 acres, mostly after 1750.\textsuperscript{72}

Wheat, of course, made up only part of the total corn production. Exports of corn tapered to a halt in the second half of the century, and a small quantity of imported corn became necessary most years, in spite of increased domestic production. The following table extracted from Dean and Cole illustrates the supply situation:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{llllll}
\hline
Population & Home consumption & + net exports & Net output & Gross output \\
(000's and 000 quarters) & & - net imports & & \\
\hline
1700 & 5,826 & 13,109 & 184 & 13,293 & 14,770 \\
1710 & 5,981 & 13,457 & 362 & 13,820 & 15,355 \\
1720 & 6,001 & 13,502 & 491 & 13,993 & 15,547 \\
1730 & 5,947 & 13,381 & 343 & 13,723 & 15,248 \\
1740 & 5,926 & 13,334 & 522 & 13,855 & 15,395 \\
1750 & 6,140 & 13,815 & 1,006 & 14,821 & 16,468 \\
1760 & 6,569 & 14,780 & 485 & 15,265 & 16,961 \\
1770 & 7,052 & 15,867 & -250 & 15,617 & 17,353 \\
1780 & 7,531 & 16,945 & -238 & 16,706 & 18,563 \\
1790 & 8,247 & 18,556 & -672 & 17,884 & 19,871 \\
1800 & 9.024 & 20,305 & -1,313 & 18,991 & 21,102 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Clearly, in the latter part of the century a market existed for a greater quantity of foodstuffs than was being produced.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 64-5.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 65.
Any proposals which might promise to increase supplies would certainly be given a hearing.

The growing population and markets in towns in the second half of the eighteenth century proved a strong encouragement to the small landowners of the neighborhood enjoying easy access and halted and sometimes reversed the trend toward larger and larger estates. The increasing demand from towns for milk, cheese, pork, poultry, vegetables, and fruit, along with easy access to markets, provoked something like prosperity among small owners. In Middlesex, where good roads led to London, kitchen-gardening was noted as widespread — "indeed, the character of farmer and gardener, are here, in general, united in the same person." Dairies were reported to maintain 7,200 cows to furnish milk to the metropolis. In Cheshire, waterways provided access to markets. The Staffordshire or Grand Trunk canal cut through the center of the county, while the Chester canal opened to the east, and other waterways connected (or were intended in 1794 soon to do so) with the Mersey, the Dee, and the Severn. As a consequence of such improvements in transportation, many small farmers were prospering as they supplied the food needs of

74 Peter Foot, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Middlesex (London: J. Nichols, 1794), 12.
75 Ibid., 80.
neighboring Lancashire and Yorkshire. But in those unfortunate regions where towns were too small, markets too remote, or transport too difficult, no such economic quickening took place. In Cornwall, for example, where no satisfactory road network connected the eastern and western parts of the county, the farmers in the east grew enough wheat and barley for the whole county, but they found it more convenient to sell their crops to export merchants than to carry any grain to markets in the western part of the county.

Population increase also speeded up the enclosure movement which had been under way spasmodically since the Middle Ages; enclosure was accelerated in the eighteenth century by the requirements of the new farming techniques for compact, individual farms to meet the increasing demand of the growing population and to take advantage of rising prices.

Until the eighteenth century, and during much of the first half of that century, the method of enclosing common fields and waste was by voluntary agreement of

76Wedge, General View of the Agriculture of .. Chester, 11.

77Robert Fraser, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cornwall (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 27.

78Mingay, English Landed Society, 179-80; Johnson, Disappearance of the Small Landowner, 87-9.
all the proprietors and persons having rights of common. Usually commissioners were appointed to allot the lands and the agreement was generally confirmed by the Court of Chancery. After the Restoration sanction by private act of parliament came into use.\textsuperscript{79} It is estimated that in 1750 about half the cultivated land in England was still farmed under the old open-field system.\textsuperscript{80} A report by a select committee of the House of Commons in 1797 stated that between 1710 and 1796 parliament passed 1,776 enclosure acts, covering an estimated 2,837,873 acres of common fields and waste (the proportions of each were not known).\textsuperscript{81} The number of acres covered by each act is unknown, but the average is about 1,625 acres per act. The report also included the following decadal tabulation:

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Acres Covered \\
\hline
1710-1719 & 2,837,873 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{79} Thomas Edward Scrutton, Commons and Common Fields (Cambridge: The University Press, 1887; Burt Franklin reprint, 1970), 130-33.


\textsuperscript{81} "Report from the Select Committee on the Cultivation of Waste Lands," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 221.
ENCLOSURE BILLS BY DECADE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade ending</th>
<th>Number of bills</th>
<th>Annual Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1735</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1745</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1755</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures give the impression that there was a veritable frenzy of enclosures from the middle of the century on, and while it is true that there was a significant increase after 1750, a word of caution is in order. The rate of increase appears greater than it really was, as nothing is shown in the figures for voluntary enclosures which, being simpler and cheaper than parliamentary enclosures, were usually carried out early, and resort was had to parliamentary enactment only later and in the more difficult cases.  

There was probably a tapering off of voluntary agreements in the first half of the eighteenth century and a simultaneous increasing of enclosure by act of parliament.

The figures also reflect the levelling-off and slowing-down of enclosure during the American war and in the following decade. Uncertainty, fear of the unknown,  

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82Ibid., 220.
and a weak market for agricultural produce reduced but did not extinguish the pressure for enclosure. From an average of about 75,000 acres per year enclosed from 1765 to 1785, the rate fell to about 60,000 acres per year enclosed 1785-95. Improvement was not slumbering but was drowsier at the end of the American war than it had been earlier.

Arthur Young calculated in 1784 that there were more than eight million acres of waste and uncultivated land in England and Wales. The House of Commons Select Committee Report on the Cultivation of Waste Lands in 1797 estimated there were 7.8 million acres of waste and 1.2 million acres of common fields; altogether at least one-fifth of England and Wales remained unenclosed at that time. There was no uniform pattern of common fields, waste, or enclosed areas. Grazing counties, such as Cheshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Sussex, Leicestershire, and Shropshire, and the north of England generally, had vast stretches of waste but few common fields. Some counties, such as Essex, Kent, and Suffolk, as well as

84 Annals of Agriculture, I (1784), 44.

85 "Report from the Select Committee on the Cultivation of Waste Lands," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 221. A committee report of 1795 listed the total extent of England and Wales as 46.9 million acres, of which 39.0 million were under cultivation and 7.9 million acres were uncultivated; Ibid., 205.
much of Wales, appear to have been enclosed in the sixteenth century; Durham seems to have been enclosed soon after the Restoration; Lancashire and the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire had very few common fields by 1790. Devon and Cornwall in the southwest had practically no common fields. But in other counties common fields were quite extensive, especially in the southern Midlands and Lincoln and Norfolk. Thomas Stone in 1794 found more than two-thirds of Bedfordshire in common fields or waste, and the inhabitants, with "a prejudice generally grafted in their minds against innovations," were said to be "apprehensive" that change might not be pleasant. However, where enclosure took place, the improvement was remarkable in most cases. "Probably no part of the kingdom," wrote the Gloucestershire reporter for the Board of Agriculture in 1794, "has been more improved within the last forty years, than the Cotswold Hills... The advantages are great, rent more than doubled, the produce of every kind proportionably increased."88

While lively criticism was levelled against the continuance of arable common fields, arguments against

86 Scrutton, Commons and Common Fields, 113-4.
87 Thomas Stone, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Bedford (London: E. Hodson, 1794), 19.
88 Turner, General View of the Agriculture of Gloucester, 10-11.
wastes and common pasture were even more intense and vocal. The benefits of enclosure were extolled and the disadvantages minimized. Most critics of the unenclosed waste admitted that the poor would suffer some harm by enclosure, but not enough to overrule enclosure. At Hounslow Heath in Middlesex, Thomas Baird wrote that the poor would suffer inconvenience as well as monetary loss from losing the right of pasturage, but the advantages redounding to the community at large clearly over-balanced any "trifling inconvenience" to the poor.

Enclosure has often been blamed for the disappearance of the small-owner, and in the earlier period of enclosure by voluntary agreement it is likely that purchase of the holdings of opponents to enclosure was a necessary prelude to the event itself. But in the later period no such extinction by purchase seems in evidence. Moreover, there was a high degree of absenteeism among small-owners, and not only were the absentees less anxious about retaining the open field system than were the small occupying-owners, but also many of them appear to have been active promoters of enclosure.

And of course, the first effect of enclosure was to

89 Baird, General View of the Agriculture of . . . Middlesex, 23.
90 Ibid., 22.
increase the number of small-owners, some of whom received an allotment of a few acres in lieu of rights of common. It was only later, in the winnowing competition of commercial agriculture, that the small owner's lack of capital and knowledge forced him to give up his property.92

One question remains: did enclosure depopulate the countryside and send multitudes of unemployed poor swarming into the towns? And the answer, as is so often the case, is both yes and no. Where common field arable was enclosed and then laid down to grass, the effect was to reduce the need for labor, and the surplus laborers had perforce to migrate in search of work. Also depopulation occurred when enclosure was not followed by improved techniques of farming: "Inclosure has certainly decreased population in this country," wrote the Lincolnshire reporter in 1794, "for want of an introduction of the Drill, and other systematic husbandry; and from the lands being laid out in too large farms."93 But when proper advantage was taken of enclosures and improved techniques were introduced, the results were gratifying, both in increased production and employed population. Nathaniel Kent, who drew up the Norfolk report for the Board of Agriculture, compared enclosed and unenclosed

92Thirsk, Introduction to Johnson, Disappearance of the Small Landowner, xii.

parishes with which he was familiar; the population of enclosed Felbsigg increased in seventeen years from 121 to 124, while unenclosed Wyburn showed no change. "Let the population of England," he wrote, "be compared with what it was fifty years since, and I presume it will be found increased nearly a third. If I were asked the cause, I should say, that I believe it is chiefly from inclosing." 94

From this discussion of the state of agricultural society in England and Wales about 1783 emerges a picture of a land of large holdings in which about seventy percent of the cultivated land was possessed by great landowners and gentry who leased farms to farmers, and the tendency was for the size of farms to increase. Transportation developments and the growth of urban markets during the century created opportunities for profitable commercial agriculture, and intelligent, progressive farmers, enjoying the economies of size, were best equipped to take advantage of those opportunities. Where large estates could be enclosed and cultivated or laid down to pasture, profit beckoned. But in 1783 the pace of enclosure was proceeding at a slower rate -- although population was continuing to grow, its growth was disputed and unclear, and the uncertainties of peacetime

94Kent, General View of the Agriculture of ... Norfolk, 23-4.
readjustment instilled a sense of caution which inhibited any spectacular rush toward further improvement. It was a time of pausing and assessing. For improvement to resume with energy and on a large scale, some major stimulus of demand and rising prices was needed. There was no such a stimulus until the war with France broke out in 1793.
CHAPTER III
PARLIAMENT AND THE LANDED
INTEREST, 1783-93

On several occasions in the 1780's and in 1790-1 agricultural matters came before parliament for discussion and legislation. On each occasion the landed interest felt that its prosperity and well-being were sacrificed to the convenience and profit of others. The landed interest perceived government as unfriendly, and although a majority of the members of the House of Commons were of the landed class, it appeared that the ministry was able to manipulate or otherwise circumvent them to serve the interests of the commercial and manufacturing classes. Frustration and anger at parliamentary injury were a common mood among the agriculturalists and improvers at the end of the American war and in the 1780's.

The process of terminating the American war was a tedious and drawn-out affair. The preliminary treaty with the United States was agreed upon in November 1782, but the definitive treaties were not concluded for nearly a year, and the treaty with Holland was not signed until May 1784. It was perhaps the slow pace at which peace was restored that prevented the occurrence of a wild
economic boom; instead there was a gradual growth of both
domestic and export trade stretching over the years
1782-4.

Those postwar years were also the first years of
William Pitt's ministry. Chief among his concerns was
the restoration of the financial health of the kingdom,
and the stimulation of commerce and manufacturing promised
to be beneficial for increasing the national revenue.
Pitt himself was not of the landed interest. His only
property was a rural refuge from the cares of office, not
a working estate. His preoccupation with financial ways
and means perforce meant that he would cultivate the
expanding and expandable advantages of trade and industry
rather than the more limited possibilities of a revenue
based primarily on agriculture. When the vital interests
of agriculture clashed with those of trade and industry,
Pitt's inclination would be in favor of the latter. It
should be remembered, however, that Adam Smith was a
favorite author of Pitt's generation, and a vigorous,
extensive interference by government in the economic
realm was not to be expected -- only an occasional "tilt"
in the direction of commerce and manufacturing. Two
notable examples of this "tilt" were made by Pitt in
1785 and 1786 toward that end. In 1785 he attempted to
carry an act to liberalize Anglo-Irish trade, but a
combination of English merchants and manufacturers, who
feared their interests would be adversely affected,
defeated any change in the regulations governing that trade. In 1786, however, those same interests supported the Eden Treaty with France because it promised to open a large market to British enterprise.\(^1\) The boost of the Eden Treaty caused a great leap in English trade. From 1789 to 1792 the value of English exports increased by nearly fifty per cent.\(^2\)

The growth of agriculture during this decade between the American and the French wars was somewhat slower in pace than theretofore. Although population increased during the 1780's by about nine per cent (from 7.5 million to 8.2 million), the number of private acts for enclosure, a barometer of improvement activity, declined significantly until the French war began. The following table illustrates the decline:

\(^1\)Donald Grove Barnes, *George III and William Pitt, 1783-1806* (New York: Octagon Books, 1939; 1973), 145

NUMBER OF ENCLOSURE ACTS IN EACH YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Acts</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concurrently, the harvests of the 1780's were irregular and spasmodic. The late 1770's to 1781 were marked by favorable weather and crops were plentiful. In 1781 the wheat mildewed. In 1782 crops were bad all over Europe, and there was a scramble to import grain from America. The year 1783 produced an improved harvest, but there were still serious shortages which provoked food riots. The following five years, 1784 through 1788, all experienced severe winters, but harvests were generally good. In 1785 a long dry period not only caused a "perishing of the finny tribe for want of water in the River Ex," but also forced a stoppage of mills in several towns for lack of water to work them, with the result that, as the press reported, "the inhabitants of these towns, like the members of opposition, have stood in want

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3 "Report from the Select Committee on the Cultivation of Waste Lands," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 220.

of the loaves and fishes." In 1787 there was much unusual atmospheric activity, including an uncommon display of Aurora Borealis which many persons considered a portent of war. A leading scientist warned that an earthquake was likely because the earth was highly electric -- "nothing more is necessary," he stated, "to produce an earthquake, than the approach of a non-electric cloud to any part of the earth." In 1788 there was excessive drought in the summer and excessive rain in harvest season; crops were somewhat deficient. The next year was bad everywhere. The winter was severe; the Thames froze over completely "and people walk to and from the different villages on the face of the deep . . . , and a fair is kept on the river." Heavy rain continued during most of the summer of 1789. The years 1790 and 1791, however, were excellent and the crops abundant, so much so that England was again able to export a considerable quantity of wheat. In 1792 the summer was cold and rainy and crops were short, but the following year was favorable again.

In brief, it can be said that in the 1780's the population was increasing by about nine per cent, crops

5The Times, July 26, 1785.
6Ibid., October 16, 1787.
7Ibid., January 8, 1789.
were deficient about half the years, and demand for food and agricultural raw materials was increasing. At the same time, however, the recent enclosures, which had averaged 39 per year in the 1760's and 66 per year in the 1770's, added to production, and the result was steady prices which offered no encouragement to further enclosures on a large scale in the 1780's.\(^9\)

Economists discern two "fluctuations" in the 1780's -- those of 1781-4 and 1786-9. Both were brief and of limited effect, yet their correspondence with activity on the part of manufacturers and merchants to gain legislative aid is noteworthy. In 1785 a first attempt was made to revise the regulations governing wool exports; in 1788 a second and successful attempt was made. Perhaps the failure of the 1785 attempt was related to the fact that economic revival had already occurred in 1784, while the success in 1788 may be related to the timing of the attempt, at a moment when the distress was still generally felt and discussed. Moreover, exports of woolen textiles were lackluster in the 1780's. In the period 1770-9 woolen textile exports totaled £3,991,000, but in 1780-9 they declined slightly to £3,518,000.\(^10\) At the same time cotton textile exports


were increasing rapidly in volume. These figures provide sufficient explanation of the attempts by woolen manufacturers to obtain a reduction in the costs of their raw materials by legislative prohibitions of exportation of raw wool.

In late 1785 The Times reported that plans were being made to halt entirely the export of sheep to France in order to deny to French manufacturers the fine short wool they could obtain from no other place. The paper alluded to investigations then in progress by a committee of the House of Commons into the illicit exportation of wool, live sheep, worsted, and yarn. In evidence a British resident in France stated that he had seen five or six of the smugglers' boats at a time at Boulogne loaded with wool, while John Anstie, chairman of a meeting of merchants, manufacturers, and dealers in wool, held for the purpose of enquiring into the illegal exportation of wool, declared that the manufacturers considered themselves harmed by the exportation of large quantities of wool. English combingwool, he said, was absolutely necessary to French manufacturers for producing certain kinds of goods, but English manufacturers were able to consume more than all the wool grown annually in the kingdom.

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11The Times, December 10, 1785.

In February 1786 the wool merchants and manufacturers decided to apply to parliament for relief by seeking repeal of all the current laws and passage of new legislation. In June 1786 a bill was introduced to prevent the export of wool, but the landed interest rallied in many places around the country, and parliament was inundated with petitions against the bill. A report in the Gentleman's Magazine reflected the excitement in Lincoln where a meeting of the landed interest condemned the new bill and its amendments as "by no means necessary to prevent the evil complained of," and declared the whole matter "highly injurious to the landed interest."

Arthur Young argued against the bill both before parliament and in print, to such effect, he reported, that the manufacturers held special meetings simply to plan how to refute him. Their "malignity" and "scurrility" spoke "the dread of frustrated designs, and the avowed confession of refuted assertions," he declared. "I considered it as a conspiracy of manufacturers against the landed interest, and I treated it accordingly." His actions and those of representatives of the landed interest in the Commons were crowned with success in 1786 as the wool bill was defeated, but only temporarily.

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13 Ibid.
15 Annals of Agriculture, VII (1786), 94-5.
Late in 1787 the manufacturers resumed the contest to tighten up the laws regulating wool exports. The woolen trade was drifting in the doldrums, and with the natural human tendency to assign human causes to all unpleasant phenomena, the wool dealers and manufacturers blamed their troubles on a slightly increased price of wool, which in turn they imagined was the result of the illicit exportation of wool to France; that nation was thereby enabled to produce woolen fabrics in competition with British goods. The Times in December 1787 reported that in Norwich the wool trade was so dead that hundreds of combers and weavers were unemployed, and the parish poor rates were so increased, that many persons were moving away from the town and retiring into country villages.\(^\text{16}\)

Having chosen their time carefully, the manufacturers organized subscriptions to support petitions to parliament for new legislation; reports from all over the country told of a generous response.\(^\text{17}\) Some publications were persuaded of the justice of the manufacturers' cause on this occasion, and The Times informed its readers that the French were unable to make any good cloth from their own wool without mixing one-third English wool with their own. For that reason it was necessary to support

\(^{16}\text{The Times, December 17, 1787.}\)

\(^{17}\text{Ibid., January 11, 1788.}\)
British manufacturers and prevent the smuggling of English wool out of the country when it should stay there and be made up at home.¹⁸

The Commons again appointed a committee to hear evidence about exports of sheep and wool. This time the evidence was more detailed and extensive, and more convincing. John Anstie, representing the wool manufacturers and dealers, presented customs accounts of wool seized in 1786 and 1787, showing about ten thousand pounds per year at various ports, and a letter describing an operation against smugglers at Penryn. He offered a report detailing the quantities of British wool imported into France, "in consequence of having employed a person to pass along the whole coast of France on those particular discoveries."¹⁹ Indeed, the agent (never identified) supplied facts and figures, purportedly copied from French customs records, to which he gained access, of monthly arrivals of wool, places of origin, quantities, current prices, and corroborative comments, covering the years 1783-7, for a number of ports in France.²⁰

On the basis of his information Anstie declared it was his opinion that there were imports into France

¹⁸Ibid.


²⁰Ibid., 311-5.
annually of at least 10,000 packs (of 240 pounds weight each) besides considerable quantities of woolen and worsted yarn.\textsuperscript{21} In later testimony Anstie amended his estimate to 13,000 packs.\textsuperscript{22} He estimated the annual clip of British wool at about 600,000 packs. As regards prices, he stated the average English price to be 19s. or 20s. per tod (28 pounds weight), while in France the price was 35s. per tod. He further asserted that "British Combing Wool is absolutely necessary for the support of particular French fabrics of the lighter kind, and that without the assistance of English Combing Wool it would be impossible to carry them on."\textsuperscript{23}

Anstie declared the manufacturers of woolens in Great Britain could consume all the wool grown in the kingdom, judging "from the scarcity of Wool in general, and from its present high price, and though the smuggling of Wool has been in some degree prevented by exertions of the manufacturers, yet the price of English Wool has been and is now increasing."\textsuperscript{24}

A woolen manufacturer from Leeds was asked by the committee whether the price of wool would be greatly reduced if the export of wool were stopped. No, he replied, explaining that if France were unable to produce those fine articles which required English wool, "the

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, 304. \textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, 307. \textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, 305. \textsuperscript{24}\textit{Ibid.}
great consumption of those articles in France and of countries bordering on France, would be demanded from this country."25 He also observed that the price of wool had risen greatly in the past two years while the price of his manufactured goods had not risen proportionably. Asked if the price of wool was too high to afford him a reasonable profit on his goods, he replied, "It is, upon the manufacturers of various denominations, many of whom have failed, and a great many others are now losing money by the prices at which they are obliged by necessity to sell."26

Outside parliament Arthur Young again unsheathed his pen and charged against the foe. He returned from touring in France in November 1787 and immediately began publishing articles in his Annals to refute the claims of the manufacturers. He steadfastly denied that any considerable quantity of English wool was smuggled into France, as the manufacturers declared. Rather, according to Young, the manufacturers were simply trying to depress the price of wool -- they were also, he said, guilty of a conspiracy to reduce the wages of wool spinners, with the result that a great number of spinners were thrown on the parish for relief as a burden to the landed interest.27

25Ibid., 308.  26Ibid., 309.  
The wool growers of Suffolk chose Young to support their petition against the bill, while Sir Joseph Banks, the president of the Royal Society, was similarly chosen by Lincolnshire.

In April 1788 Young presented the views of the landed interest in forceful terms, and Sir Joseph Banks gave the House an account of the exportation of English wool to France from 1781 to 1787, based on a paper entitled Balance du Commerce entre l'Angleterre et la France which, he said, was issued by an office in France and showed the import of only about 1,000 packs of wool each year. Moreover, he said, in 1787 the traffic declined to less than 500 packs because of the operation of the Commercial Treaty.

On May 1, 1788, Sir John Thorold spoke on behalf of the wool growers, accusing the manufacturers of gross exaggeration of the quantity of wool exported. He said that the evidence presented was extremely untrustworthy and did not indicate 3,000 packs left the country, much less 13,000 packs. Thorold asked why it was necessary to change the laws if so little wool was smuggled past them to France. The purpose of the bill, he declared, was to establish a partial monopoly for the manufacturers, and

28Parliamentary Register, XXIII, 496; Annals of Agriculture, IX (1788), 495.

29Annals of Agriculture, IX (1788), 495.
the bill's new severities would presume that every wool-grower living near the sea was necessarily a smuggler and would entangle him in a web of regulations, menace him with fine and imprisonment, and rob him of his birthright of trial by jury. Thus the manufacturing interest took care of the landed interest, said Sir John.30

After a long debate eventually Prime Minister Pitt blandly announced that he was glad to see there was really no unbridgeable difference between the commercial and the landed interests, because at bottom they were the same. Friends and foes of the bill might take opposing positions on whether it would more efficiently extend the spirit of the original laws or was contrary to the principle of those laws, but, he observed, as the wool-growers would gain very little and the manufacturers would lose very much by the rejection of the bill he thought it advisable to support the manufacturing interest on this occasion.31

By now The Times was completely on the manufacturers' side and crowed over the apparent vindication of justice and honor:

To the disgrace of the Gentlemen of landed property in this kingdom, it was a fact too well established by proofs to the present Administration, that many persons of considerable estates

30Parliamentary Register, XXIII, 531.
31Ibid., 536-7.
connived at the clandestine exportation of Wool. The profits on the raw material being by that means greatly increased. It therefore became the determination of the cabinet to put a stop to so pernicious a practice in the best manner possible, without hinting at circumstances, the publication of which, might have caused much popular clamour against the offending parties. Hence the Minister's support of the Wool Bill.\textsuperscript{32}

When the bill came up for its third reading on May 19, final arguments characterized the principle of the bill as "incorrigibly bad, originating in the mean and rapacious spirit of avarice and monopoly, and consequently producing acts of injustice and oppression, a spirit which has uniformly pervaded and contaminated all the legislative attempts of the manufacturers."\textsuperscript{33}

Another voice of the landed interest pointed out that the bill was calculated to promote the interests of the manufacturer at the expense of the wool-grower, and that it would "necessarily discourage the growth of wool, raise the price of mutton, and of course increase the price of labour."\textsuperscript{34} The bill passed the House of Commons by a vote of 72 to 24.

\textit{The Times} sniffed that the landed interest having failed to prevent the Wool Bill becoming law, "it is to be hoped their opposition is at an end; the poor weavers will have bread to eat very soon, which no doubt will be

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{The Times}, May 7, 1788.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Parliamentary Register}, XXIII, 707.

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, 708.
the case, when sheep farmers are prevented from sending our staple commodity to France."\(^{35}\)

The Gentleman's Magazine gave a somewhat more balanced assessment but chided Arthur Young and the landed interest. Traditionally the legislature watched over wool, it said, and the landed interest should not be "jealous of a commerce which had heretofore been thought to create that internal circulation so necessary to the prosperity of the kingdom," and which generated a great revenue, gave encouragement to the farmer, and constituted a large part of the exports "without which the nation would soon be drained of its property." Young and his kind were promoting an imagined interest and endangering a manufacture "hitherto considered as one of our highest and peculiar advantages." They pretended that keeping unmanufactured wool from England's rivals was an alarming monopoly and spoke of conspiracy among the manufacturers, which was "incredible." Young attacked "a respectable and useful class of our countrymen with a violence of language highly indecent and undeserved," and his information was suspect, coming as it did, from "some parsons, some farmers, and a Lieutenant Colonel. ... The difficulty of such people's comprehending the nature of manufactures appears by the manner in which

\(^{35}\)The Times, May 22, 1788.
their communications are expressed." The magazine con-
cluded that England at present was capable of manufactur-
ing the whole of its produce of wool, along with imports from
Spain, and that "for every pack sent away there is a
loss of employment and consequent gain of about five
times the natural value of the wool, this loss, calcu-
lated on thirteen thousand packs annually, comes to a
serious matter indeed, and the parish rates must feel
the consequence; thus the evil ultimately falls upon
the land, though the blow was aimed at the manufacturing
interest."36

For his part, Arthur Young rebuked the landed
interest for their "strange apathy" in the episode. He
had endeavored to rouse them to the coming assault, he
said, but only in Lincoln and Suffolk was there any
response. As a result, the measure had passed, "a
measure by which all the farmers in the kingdom, who
keep sheep, are stigmatized as guilty of crimes, without
proof, and even without suspicion -- are subjected to
severities unknown in the revenue laws -- shackled with
vexatious regulations that have no object but to tempt
informers to profit of the innocent breach of them --
and harrassed with restrictions as senseless as they
are new." All this new system of tyranny was stated
by government to be a favor which the landed interest

should grant to the manufacturers in order to permit them
to lower the price of woolen textiles, which, said Young,
were already cheaper in price than those of any competing
country. In parliament only the manufacturing interest
was heeded, while the landed interest was branded as
ungrateful for not recognizing that the cheaper it sold
wool the better. Young labeled these "monstrous absurd­
ities" as "the fabric of lunacy" and noted that the
landed interest received nothing but contempt and
negligence from government.37

Not only did government show its favor to the
manufacturing interest and ride rough-shod over the landed
interest with reference to the Wool Bill in the summer
of 1788, it also gave additional evidence of its slight
regard for the landed interest by passing an act to
prohibit the exportation of hay. The Hay Bill is not
subject to quite the same interpretation as the Wool
Bill -- the Hay Bill was not a manifestation of official
preference for the commercial and industrial parts of
the society, but it demonstrates government's readiness
to sacrifice the advantage of the landed interest to
a larger good.

In May 1788 The Times reported a springtime drought,
succeeding a dry winter, and predicted a short crop of
hay. The same thing happened three years earlier, and

37Annals of Agriculture, X (1788), 1-6.
now as then the meadows along the rivers "are in many places obliged to be flooded." In mid-June it was stated that "Prayers were offered in most of the Churches on Sunday for rain," and also that travelers arriving from Coventry, Birmingham, and Leicester reported no rain there for five weeks, and "everything except the wheat is burnt up." Hay was said to be selling at £4 10s. per load.

On June 16 Alderman Sawbridge of London introduced a bill to prohibit the exportation of hay, a repetition of a bill passed three years earlier, because the hay crops were extremely scanty, and there was a strong probability that other fodder would be also scarce. Henry Dundas concurred on the ground of "expediency sufficiently obvious," but Sir Joseph Mawbey objected that no necessity had been proved and that the majority of the country gentlemen, whose interests were involved, had "retired, to the superintendence of their private affairs." Sawbridge assured Mawbey that the bill was merely as a precaution against the danger posed by the extraordinary period of dry weather. The bill, he said, would contain a clause authorizing the king-in-council

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38The Times, May 26, 1788.
39Ibid., June 17, 1788.
40Parliamentary History, XXVII, 626.
to take off the prohibition when it seemed no longer necessary.\textsuperscript{41}

Opposition to the bill objected that no proof was adduced but only a "loose declaration" that hay would be scarce. It was stated that now there was a good crop of turnips, which had not been the case in 1785, and farmers would feed their cattle on turnips and would not consume so much hay. But other speakers confirmed a hay shortage -- Mr. Pye of Berkshire stated that in some parts of his county "where forty loads of hay used to be mowed, not above eight were likely to be procured."\textsuperscript{42} Then Sir Peter Burrell put his finger on the sore spot. He remarked with concern, he said, "that whenever an opportunity offered for the landowner to promote his interest, a Bill was introduced to prevent his taking a fair advantage of it." He saw no necessity for the present bill and regarded it "as an oppression on the landowner, which was neither requisite nor expedient."\textsuperscript{43}

Arthur Young, already smarting from the buffets of the Wool Bill, gnashed his teeth over this additional offense. The principle was wrong, he wrote, which prohibited the export of wool or hay or any other agricultural commodity. The temporarily high price of hay might cause some inconvenience but was no grounds for rushing

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Ibid.}, 627. \textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, 628-30. \textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, 630-1.
to restrictive legislation. On one hand, the high price became an encouragement to the production not only of hay but also of substitutes for hay, and on the other hand, he said, it should be proved that the high price gave the farmer a profit which was injurious to the consumer. The automatic reflex of prohibition and restriction, said Young, was in the spirit of the manufacturers who expected to force the farmer to produce wool by reducing the price of it. He concluded:

As long as the landed interest will permit such propositions to be received without an opposition at the first blush, they will never be free from the oppression of laws which are contrary to the first principles of that policy, which ought to cherish and protect the whole mass of national industry.44

If the Wool Bill and the Hay Bill represented instances in which the manufacturing and commercial classes imposed their will on the landed interest, the on-going story of the Corn Laws in the 1780's and nineties illustrates the confusion of principle and the complexity of detail that characterized the clash between the groups.

The Corn Laws took form in the period of the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution, granting a bounty on the exportation of grain when the domestic price was below a certain level and imposing a duty on imports which declined as the price rose, the purpose of

which, among other things, was to encourage tillage. After 1765, however, it often proved necessary to prohibit exports and encourage imports because of scarcity and high prices and distress to the poor. The Act of 1773 (Governor Pownall's Act) was drawn up with a view to obviate the necessity of suspending the bounty and stopping exports. The Act was in the nature of a compromise between the landed and manufacturing interests; the manufacturers would have liked to see an end to bounties and import restrictions altogether, while the landed interest would have preferred a higher level of import and bounty prices. The main provisions of the Act of 1773 were that wheat could be imported when the price at the port of entry was at or above 48s., upon the payment of a nominal duty of 6d. a quarter; export was forbidden when the price was above 44s., but a bounty of 5s. was paid on exports when the price was below 44s. per quarter. Moreover, provision was made for warehousing of foreign corn in bond, to be re-exported duty-free or sold in England upon payment of the prevailing duty. The chief purpose of this legislation was to provide a permanent arrangement, and government set about in the succeeding years to try to devise a workable system and to erect the necessary machinery to administer the law effectively. First, it was necessary to devise a method for ascertaining adequately and correctly the
prices of grain. A system had been devised in 1770 (Whitbread's Act) whereby weekly returns of grain prices were made based on from two to six markets in every county, and the justices of the peace at the Quarter Sessions used these figures to determine the import prices for the ensuing three months.

The system, however, was subject to fraud, and prices were often manipulated. Before a select committee in 1783 Claude Soctt, an eminent London corn-factor, testified that the persons making the returns were often unqualified, and even dishonest. Such persons sometimes bought the best grain at a premium and then made a sworn declaration that the price paid was the common market price of middling quality. In that way importation was improperly allowed.45 He also cited cases in which, after a port was opened by the manner just described, great quantities of foreign corn were imported and then conveyed coast-wise, duty-free, as English growth to other ports which were not open to importation.46

In 1781 an act provided for the appointment of an Inspector of the Returns of Corn who took a weekly report from every corn factor at Mark Lane, the London market, made an average for each kind of grain, and

45"Report from the Select Committee on the Importation and Exportation of Corn and Grain," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 32.

46Ibid., 33.
published the prices in *The London Gazette*, which determined whether import and export could take place and whether the bounty was payable.\(^7\) This practice was ordained only for London and Essex and Kent in 1781, but in 1789 it was extended to all the maritime counties which were divided into twelve districts, and the returns were sent to the collectors of customs in the various ports of the districts to determine import and export and bounty payment.

For some years after its passage, while government sought to improve its administration, there was general satisfaction with the Act of 1773 on the part of the landed interest. Arthur Young in 1785 praised the collection and publication of corn prices all over the kingdom as tending to bring those prices as much as possible to a general level, varying mainly by costs of transportation. Publication of prices also prevented discontents and riots by showing the common people that the high prices they paid were not unfair but were the result of scarcity and were being paid everywhere.\(^8\)

Young also discussed the matter of dividing the maritime counties into twelve districts. Writing in 1786 when the proposal was under consideration, he said that it was evidently "the intent of the bill to check

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\(^7\)Donald Grove Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws from 1660 to 1846* (1930; reprinted by Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), 50.

\(^8\)Annals of Agriculture, IV (1785), 363.
the too early admission of foreign grain into one part of the kingdom, at the time that other parts abound with the same species of our own growth -- a check that must tend to promote the interests of agriculture, and the coasting trade."49 Some merchants in Norfolk, he said, objected to the establishment of districts, under the apprehension that the purpose was to stop export from their county, by brigading it with others. Young asserted that he too would oppose any plan combining Suffolk, Norfolk, and Cambridgeshire in one district if it should prevent the export of corn from either when there was surplus above local needs. On the other hand, if the plan was to check free exportation when the price level indicated the likelihood of scanty crops or unusual demand at home, any sensible person must support it.50

While government went about its business and tried to improve its ways of regulating the corn traffic, the weather was generally kind in the 1770's; then 1782 was miserable -- "The wettest, coldest, and backwardest spring every known; great floods; wet and cold summer, with floods in August; mildew, and very little corn ripened or got in well."51 The remainder of the 1780's

49Ibid., VII (1786), 373.
50Ibid., 375. 51Ibid., IV (1785), 394.
passed off moderately well until 1789. After the poor harvest of 1782 government had to resume those temporary suspensions of bounty and export which the Act of 1773 had been designed to end.

The year 1789 began unpromisingly. Bad weather was common over much of Europe in January, crops were short, and the newspapers reported a number of countries rushing to purchase whatever grain they could find.52 In Britain, the temperature was reported at eight degrees below zero at Bury in Suffolk, and house-to-house collections were taken there and in Ipswich, Colchester, and Brandon to relieve the distresses of the poor, while in London the Lord Mayor acted to head off price rises by instructing the flour factors to open their store-houses on both sides of the river and bring corn and flour to the market.53 A letter from Danzig in March announced that "the exportation of corn . . . is stopped at all ports in the Baltic subject to the King of Prussia."54 In Amsterdam, the price of wheat rose to 62s. per quarter. France, normally an exporting country, offered bounties for importation; so desperate was the situation there that Necker asked Pitt for

52The Times, January 1, 1789.
53Ibid., January 9, 1789.
54Ibid., March 14, 1789.
20,000 sacks of flour as emergency relief. Various opinions were expressed in the House of Commons. William Wilberforce thought Britain should try to comply with the French request and "even submit themselves to the slight inconvenience of a small increase of price, rather than not afford the neighbouring kingdom relief." Another M. P. invoked the old maxim that charity begins at home and opposed aiding France, who, he thought, was "expiating her sins, for her interference with America." On July 9 the corn committee appointed to consider the request recommended against permitting the exportation. Soon thereafter Pitt announced in the House that by a fraudulent sale at a low price at New Shoreham, Suffolk, the price of corn fell there from 48s. to 44s., so that the dealer could export with the bounty, and 8,000 sacks of flour had been shipped for Havre de Grace. On July 22 a member commented on the events and wondered what the French must think when just after the committee reported that no relief could be granted, the price of wheat fell so low that it might be exported legally. When an attempt was made to do what the law allowed, the

56Parliamentary History, XXVIII, 227.
57Ibid., 228. 58Ibid.
59Ibid., 230.
exportation was stopped by customshouse officers who took it on themselves to suspend an act of parliament, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer not only congratulated them but also brought a bill to indemnify them for breaking the law. The member "reprehended this practice of suspending acts of parliament at the will of the first Lord of the Treasury."60

Public interest in the dearth was keen. In late July The Times speculated on the widespread scarcity which was clearly not confined to France and wondered what would be the "dreadful consequences" should Europe have a run of several bad seasons for grain. A larger supply of corn was needed, and that could be obtained only by cultivating more of the wastes and employing more people in agriculture. "Strange policy," mused the writer, "for countries to starve for want of bread, while land lies waste for want of culture, and thousands of poor rob, beg, or starve, for want of employment."61

The harvest of 1789, as feared, was deficient, necessitating in December an order-in-council to prohibit the exportation of corn and to permit importation on payment of low duties.62 More important, however, in

60Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 455.
61The Times, July 24, 1789.
62Parliamentary Register, XXVII, 126.
shaping the new legislation was the report of a corn committee of the Privy Council, largely the work of Lord Hawkesbury and submitted on March 8, 1789, for the consideration of both houses of parliament. The report, or "Representation," noted that Britain used to produce more corn than was necessary for its population but of late years had been forced to depend on the produce of foreign countries for a part of its supply. Barley, it appeared, was the only grain still yielding an exportable surplus. For purposes of illustration, the committee compared the nineteen-year period 1746-65 and the eighteen-year period 1770-88:

CORN EXPORTS-IMPORTS
(quarters)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exports, 19 years average, 1746-65, from England</th>
<th>Exports, 18 years average, 1770-88, from England and Scotland</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat and wheatmeal</td>
<td>359,810</td>
<td>108,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley and malt</td>
<td>306,974</td>
<td>99,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats and oatmeal</td>
<td>20,702</td>
<td>25,802</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>47,677</td>
<td>6,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual bounty paid thereon</td>
<td>£138,677 3 7¾</td>
<td>£32,968 6 4½</td>
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63 The Representation is reprinted fully in Annals of Agriculture, XIII (1790), 352-410.

64 Ibid., 353-4.

65 Ibid., 355-7.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>12,654</td>
<td>150,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>48,048</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oats and oatmeal</td>
<td>30,449</td>
<td>291,405</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>15,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans and pease</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>31,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual duties paid thereon</strong></td>
<td><strong>£1,569 8 4s</strong></td>
<td><strong>£7,620 8 3s</strong></td>
</tr>
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The report pointed out that in the earlier period England showed a net profit on corn exports of about £651,000 per annum, while in the later period there was a net loss of about £291,000 per annum by imports. In an age that was still mercantilist in many ways, this was a sobering thought. The committee attributed the increased imports to (1) increased population, (2) greater numbers of horses and cattle, and (3) a rising standard of living, "which has occasioned an increased consumption of all the necessities of life: for there can be no reason to suppose either that the agriculture of the country has of late declined, or that, for so long a continuance of years, the seasons can have been uniformly unfavourable." ⁶⁶

The committee expressed concern over this trend toward dependence on imported corn, because, in its view,

⁶⁶Ibid., 358.
the supply of corn in Europe was usually not much more than equal to the consumption of the population; and whenever the crops failed in any degree in Europe, the deficiency could only be supplied by the harvest of America.67

Corn could not be regulated on the same principles as other trades, the report continued, because a major miscalculation in the corn trade would produce a dearth, the consequences of which would be "general distress, and sometimes popular commotions." Accordingly, government had to consider not only the interests of the men who engaged in the corn trade, but also the subsistence of the people.68

For maximum efficiency and smooth distribution the circulation of grain within the country should be perfectly free, the committee declared, and "the number of its canals, and the excellence of its roads" gave England special facility in arranging that the heavily-populated manufacturing counties could draw their supplies from parts of the island which were less populous but more productive of grain.69 The inland trade should be as free as possible, but that freedom could not be extended to the unrestrained export of corn to foreign countries, as that would, in the committee's

67 Ibid., 358-9.  
68 Ibid., 359.  
69 Ibid., 360.
opinion, be "productive of the greatest evils."\textsuperscript{70}

Government must occasionally interfere with the trade to avert public distress.

The corn laws had two objects, said the report: first, to assure a reasonable price at all times to the farmer, and, next, to prevent that price from ever being so high as to injure the poor and the manufacturer.\textsuperscript{71}

To secure a reasonable price for the farmer, export was allowed, and even encouraged by a bounty, until the price reached 44s. per quarter, and import of foreign wheat was restrained by high duty until the price reached 48s. per quarter. To allow export with bounty when the price of wheat was under 44s. assured the farmer of the likelihood of his disposing of his surplus at a profit and thus assured an ample supply of corn.\textsuperscript{72}

The committee offered twelve points of advice, of which the most important suggested that the country should continue to be divided into a dozen districts; that when export was stopped in any district because the price exceeded the allowed export price, corn should not be carried coastwise to another district where export was still permitted; that wheat be permitted to be exported without bounty when the price was between 44s. and 46s.; and that emergency powers be given government

\textsuperscript{70}\textit{Ibid.}, 360-1
\textsuperscript{71}\textit{Ibid.}, 363.
\textsuperscript{72}\textit{Ibid.}, 364-5.
to prohibit export or permit import as it saw fit, when parliament was not in session.\textsuperscript{73}

The committee concluded with a recommendation that all legislation pertaining to corn be consolidated in one act, and said they were definitely of the opinion that a permanent system should be established so that the grower of corn would know how to frame his plans for the future, certain that no temporary measure would intervene to deprive him of the fruit of his labor.\textsuperscript{74}

After the Representations were submitted, a committee of the House of Commons framed resolutions based on the twelve recommendations in late March 1790. At once petitions from manufacturing towns came flooding in, and although a strong effort was made to reconcile the bill and the petitions, it came to nothing and the bill was postponed to the next session.\textsuperscript{75}

In February 1791 the House of Commons again took up the question of a corn regulation bill. On this occasion Lord Sheffield stood forth as the paladin of the landed interest and attacked the government's bill as being inimical to the landed interest. The proper intention of the bill should be to encourage agriculture and prevent dearth, he said, but in reality its tendency

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., 386-98. \quad \textsuperscript{74}Ibid., 400-1.

\textsuperscript{75}Barnes, \textit{History of the English Corn Laws}, 55.
was to discourage agriculture and make the country dependent on foreign corn. The mischief, he declared, derived from the Act of 1773, which had wrought a revolution in the corn laws; then it was that Britain departed from the good old arrangements which were intended solely for the encouragement of tillage, without regard to any other business than getting rid of the surplus. He asserted that the Act of 1773 was designed to keep down the price of corn by opening the ports to imports of foreign corn and closing them to exports of domestic grain at considerably lower prices than were thought reasonable in the previous century.

The bill was debated through many stormy sessions in March and April and went through the other necessary steps for passage and received the royal assent on June 10, 1791. The chief provisions with regard to exportation, bounty, importation, and duties are as follows:

On wheat exported, the price of which was under 44s. per quarter, a bounty of 5s. per quarter was payable.
On rye exported, the price of which was under 28s. per quarter, a bounty of 3s. per quarter was payable.
On barley, beer, or bigg exported, the price of which was under 22s. per quarter, a bounty of 2s. 6d. per quarter was payable.

76 *Parliamentary Register*, XXVIII, 415.
On oats exported, the price of which was under 14s. per quarter, a bounty of 2s. per quarter was payable. 78

Exportation of the various sorts of corn was prohibited when the price of wheat was at or above 46s. per quarter; rye, pease, and beans at or above 30s. per quarter; barley, beer, and bigg at or above 23s. per quarter, and oats at or above 15s. per quarter. 79

High and low duties to be paid on importation were as follows:

For wheat, if the price was under 50s. per quarter, a high duty of 24s. 3d. per quarter was payable; if the price was at or above 50s. per quarter, but under 54s. per quarter, a First Low Duty of 2s. 6d. per quarter was payable; if the price was at or above 54s. per quarter, a Second Low Duty of 6d. per quarter was payable.

Other sorts of corn paid proportionable duties. 80

The Act continued the division of the England and Wales into twelve districts, and Scotland into four, with an average price in each to be determined by an Inspector of Corn Returns to regulate the importation and exportation of corn. Moreover, the king-in-council was authorized, when parliament was not in session, to prohibit exportation and permit importation on the

78George III c. 30; see A Collection of Public General Statutes, 1768-1821, 1190.
79Ibid., 1195. 80Ibid., 1210.
lowest duties payable when the average prices stood at the appropriate levels mentioned in the table on prices. For ready comparison, the following table illustrates the chief differences between the Act of 1773 and the Act of 1791:

**WHEAT IMPORT-EXPORT PRICES, BOUNTY, ETC.**

(per quarter)

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<tr>
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<th>Act of 1773</th>
<th>Act of 1791</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Export:</strong></td>
<td>At or above 44s., prohibited.</td>
<td>At or above 46s., prohibited.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under 44s., 5s. bounty.</td>
<td>44s. to under 46s., export without bounty.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Under 44s., export with 5s. bounty.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Import:</strong></td>
<td>At or above 48s., low duty of 6d.</td>
<td>At or above 54s., second low duty of 6d.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 44s. to under 48s., first high duty of 17s.</td>
<td>50s. to 54s., first low duty of 2s. 6d.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not over 44s., second high duty of 22s.</td>
<td>Under 50s., high duty of 24s. 3d.</td>
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The Act also permitted warehousing of corn in Britain, at the importer's expense.

Not two weeks after the Act's passage, the press was reporting inclement weather and predicting a deficient crop and commenting that "Considering the state of our harvest, it has therefore been a very wise act to pass the Corn

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83 A Collection of Public General Statutes, 1768-1821, 1214-5.
Bill in the state in which it is. Monopoly will be prevented, and our ports lie open whenever a scarcity appears, for the importation of that principal necessary of life."  

The landed interest persuaded itself in 1790 and 1791 that government's policy with regard to corn had undergone a change for the worse in 1773, and the Corn Law of 1791 was only an invidious continuation of that hostile policy. In 1773, indeed, exportation was halted when the price of wheat reached 44s., whereas there was no export prohibition at any price under the older legislation. Yet, the landed interest accepted the Act of 1773 when it was passed and voiced little dissatisfaction during the years thereafter until 1790. The Act of 1791 was passed over the loud protests of the manufacturing interest and was passed by a parliament in which the landed interest comprised the largest bloc. The Act clearly provided a greater margin of protection for agriculture than was previously the case. Still the landed interest wailed and moaned that it was sore oppressed.  

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84 The Times, June 23, 1791.
All this coalesces into what appears to be a mildly paranoid state among the landed interest. As manufacturing became more flourishing after the American war, and as government took cognizance of the place of manufacturing in national affairs, the older child, agriculture, became jealous and imagined himself slighted and unloved. The Wool Act confirmed the suspicions, and the Corn Law of 1791, although not punitive, was labeled as such by the landed interest which simply rewrote its attitude of the years from 1773 to 1790 and expunged all memory of acceptance of the Act of 1773.

A clear illustration of the sour, paranoid mentality of the landed interest in 1792 is provided by Arthur Young's reflections on Pitt's State of the Nation speech of that year. Pitt attributed the general increase of the prosperity of the country, among other things, to the natural industry and energy of the people, their skill in improvements, the various inventions, the facility of credit, the success of the fisheries, the Commercial Treaty with France, and Britain's pre-eminence in commerce and manufactures. He credited "our free and happy constitution" and the long period of domestic tranquility that "promoted prosperity and happiness; that set in motion every spring to the aggrandizement of our empire; that excited industry in the peasant,
gave skill to the artizan, and spirit to the merchant, and created "pamnimity in all."\textsuperscript{86}

Arthur Young nearly gagged. He was shocked. Who, he asked, "can suppose that AGRICULTURE is of more importance in the minister's eyes than the trade of shoe-blacking?" The reference to "the industry of the peasant" caused Young to liken Pitt to a "French marquis under the old government." Pitt's speech was "a tissue of the common places of a counting-house, spun for a spouting-club, by a clerk of a banker. . . . These sweepings of Colbert's shop -- These gleanings from the poverty of Necker!\textsuperscript{87}

The landed interest, said Young, was never before placed in so contemptible a position as in this speech by the minister, who "sees no origin of wealth but trade -- no source of felicity but manufacture -- no national energy but in commercial capital." Young fulminated against the "infamous treatment" which the landed interest had received "on paltry and futile pretences in the case of wool, and of the injustice they recently felt in that of corn."\textsuperscript{88}

This "shop-keeping speech," Young declared, would convince anyone who might have thought of investing in landed property "that the agriculture of this kingdom,

\textsuperscript{86}Annals of Agriculture, XVII (1792), 370-2
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 372-3. \textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 373-4.
shackled with monopolies — burthened with taxes —
loaded with rates — oppressed with tythes — thus
impoverished, and then insulted for insignificance —
affords no temptation to investment comparable to other
countries." 89

It was a growing sense of frustration, of una­
chieved promise, of paradise thwarted which more and more
characterized the movement for agricultural reform in the
peacetime years before 1793. The need for further improve­
ment was patent to the improvers, and the opportunities
also, but many landowners and farmers hesitated in the
absence of any clear-cut sign of rising prices. Govern­
ment, meanwhile, added to the frustrations of the landed
interest in those years, not only by its apparent
partiality for the prosperity of commerce and industry
but also by preventing price increases for agriculture
through export prohibitions and other legislative
arrangements for wool, hay, and grain. It seemed that
government conspired to rob the landed interest of the
benefits which nature intended to bestow by the workings
of supply-and-demand.

89 Ibid., 375.
CHAPTER IV
THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR AND THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

The outbreak of war with France in February 1793 focused attention on Britain's inability to feed herself. Imports of grain, although not large, were necessary to supplement domestic production in most years to avoid high prices and acute distress among the poor. The fleet, of course, could be depended on to guard the sea lanes, but prudence dictated that measures be taken to increase domestic agricultural production. Improvement suddenly became not only popular but also necessary, and government was moved to bestow its blessing on the movement. An organization of the landed interest, along the lines of the Board of Trade, suggested itself to some of the improvers, to encourage and coordinate the energies of British agriculture and to seek national self-sufficiency through enclosure and cultivation of the wastes. The autumn of 1792 and the ensuing winter were cold and rainy, resulting in deficient crops and dearth, as if to emphasize the need for action.

In the chief financial dislocations occasioned by the outbreak of the war, Sir John Sinclair found a
way to be of service to the ministry by proposing and helping to carry a temporary issue of low-value exchequer bills, and while the issue was pending he arranged for some banker friends to remit their own funds to the area of shortage in the north, thus averting a more serious crisis. Pitt considered himself under obligation to Sinclair for these actions and offered as a reward to permit the establishment of a "Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement."^1

The present writer has discovered that Sinclair's original proposal for the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement was far more ambitious than that which was finally established, and would have gone beyond mere agricultural improvement to sweeping internal improvements on a national scale.

Sir John Sinclair had been toying with the idea of a board of some kind for a long time, but he was most interested in wool improvement, and thought at first of a board for the development of that commodity. He had worked with the Highland Society for the improvement of wool, and had inaugurated the British Wool Society in July 1791 for the furtherance of that aim. In late 1791 or early 1792 he published an "Address to the Public Respecting the Proper System to be pursued

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1Rosalind Mitchison, "The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)," *English Historical Review*, LXXIV (1959), 42.
for the IMPROVEMENT of BRITISH WOOL," in which, after praising the British Wool Society, under whose patronage "the greater part of the island has beensurveyed," he asserted that unless a board of agriculture were estab-
lished, for the purpose of directing the improvement of the sheep and wool of Britain and the cultivation and pasturage of the soil, the activities of private societies were to no avail; but under the protection of the govern-
ment and the superintendence of a board of agriculture, to be composed of men who volunteered their services, "every field would be cultivated to the best advantage, and every species of stock brought to the greatest possible perfection."\(^2\)

On January 5, 1793, Sinclair wrote Arthur Young that he was to see Pitt the following week about the proposed Board of Agriculture.\(^3\) Just what transpired in that meeting we do not know, but on February 27, 1793, Sinclair submitted to Henry Dundas, for forwarding to Pitt, a "General Idea of the Plan for establishing A Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement."\(^4\) The

\(^2\)Sir John Sinclair, "Address to the Public Respecting the Proper System to be pursued for the IMPROVEMENT of BRITISH WOOL," \(\text{n.d., xiv-xv, in Sinclair Correspondence, MS. 641, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.}\)

\(^3\)British Library, Add. MS. 35127, f. 216.

preamble noted that while every help had heretofore been given to trade, agriculture had been totally neglected. The farmer should not be let to imagine that his interests were slighted, and public encouragement "cannot fail to be attended, with the happiest consequences, in promoting agricultural improvements." Sinclair would assure that farmers received the fullest and best information about agriculture, and would encourage them with small premiums.

His plan called for a Board of twenty-four members, similar to the Board of Trade, but not restricted to members of the Privy Council, "as the President of the Royal Society, & other persons not even in Parliament, might be useful members." The advantage of having many members was to avoid having to pay salaries to any of them. Sinclair thought the Prince of Wales might become the head of the Board, and he mentioned, "as likely to enter with real spirit into such an idea," various prominent nobles and gentlemen with an interest in improvement.

He proposed that the annual budget of the Board be not less than £10,000, to cover the expenses of a secretary; procure foreign books, seeds, and animals; make regular annual surveys of the kingdom's agriculture.

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5Ibid., ff. 148-55. 6Ibid. 7Ibid.
and sheep farming; print the surveys; distribute premiums for improvements; and pay resident agents in various places to aid the activities of the Board.\textsuperscript{8}

The £10,000 for the Board might be raised by a tax on dogs, pigs, horses ("which are so destructive to agriculture"), or on weights and measures. Sinclair also thought to avoid some criticism by proposing the Board to be established for a five-year probationary period, to continue only if it had demonstrated its usefulness.

He reiterated the value of uniting husbandry and sheep-farming, which would bring agriculture "to perfection, whilst at the same it furnishes, the raw material of our most valuable manufacture." He believed that by dint of the improvements stimulated by the Board "from 3 to 4 millions per annum, on the smallest computation, will be added to the national wealth."\textsuperscript{9}

Pitt may have felt himself under obligation to Sinclair for his help with the financial crisis at the beginning of the war, but his gratitude did not ascend the heights revealed by Sinclair's Plan. Sinclair was apparently told to reduce his request to more manageable proportions, and in April 1793 he wrote Arthur Young: enclosing a revised plan "on a lower scale than I could

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid. \quad \textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
have wished, but Mr. Pitt would not agree to a larger sum."\textsuperscript{10} The revised plan resembled the earlier one in form, but annual expenses were slashed to £2,500, most of which was ear-marked for annual surveys and the printing of reports.\textsuperscript{11}

Under a section describing the advantages expected to result from the Board, Sinclair explained in detail what at that time must have been the chief purpose of the Board. The activity from which he expected the greatest benefit was a statistical survey of England for the purpose of ascertaining all facts which would be useful to the government. He expected to be able to complete the survey in five years and then would have complete information about the agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce of the nation and ways to improve them; about the population; the personal wealth of the people and how to increase it; the causes and cures of the diseases of the people; the occupations of the people, which should be encouraged and which discouraged; data about the poor and how to maintain them; about schools; and how to improve them; about towns and villages, and how best to regulate and police them; and about the manners and morals of the people "and the articles in

\textsuperscript{10}British Library, Add. MS. 35127, f. 248.

\textsuperscript{11}"Plan for establishing a Board of Agriculture and internal Improvements, as Intended to be Proposed in Parliament, by Sir John Sinclair," in Tracts Concerning the Board of Agriculture, British Library.
regard to which their situation is most capable of melioration and improvement." This fantastic program of intelligence-gathering, which would tax the resources of a late twentieth-century government, omits only the judiciary and defense establishment from its scope. Here was a project on a grand scale indeed.12

On May 15, 1793, Sir John introduced a motion in the House of Commons that an address be presented to the king praying him to establish a Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement, and representing to his majesty that although improved techniques were in use in parts of the kingdom, yet in most of the country the correct principles of agriculture were not sufficiently understood, nor the implements of husbandry or the livestock brought to that perfection of which they were capable. If the Board were established, inquiries would be made into the internal state of the country, and a spirit of improvement so encouraged that it would naturally tend to produce many important national benefits, and would be the means of "uniting a judicious system of husbandry to the advantages of domestic manufacturing industry, and the benefits of foreign commerce." The Board would be established for a limited time, and the Commons would defray the expense

12Ibid.
to the amount of £3,000 per annum. The figure of £3,000 was apparently a compromise between Sinclair's original request of £10,000 and Pitt's counterproposal of £2,500.

On May 17 opponents of the motion spoke up. Mr. Hussey said there was already a society in the Adelphi with similar aims, supported by voluntary contributions, and other societies existed elsewhere in the country; he said he could not agree to take £3,000 a year of the public's money 'for the purpose of trying projects.'

Charles James Fox objected to the proposal as "a mere job and likely to be converted into an instrument of influence." He noted it was to be done by an address, and consequently the ministers would have the power to nominate the members thereby extending their patronage.

Pitt denied that the board could become an instrument of influence or means of extending patronage, as it was to have only £3,000 a year which was not to be salaries for members but "merely for defraying the expense of clerks for doing the ordinary business of the board; and the rest of the sum was to be laid out

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13Parliamentary History, XXX, 949-50.
14Ibid., 951.  
15Ibid., 952.
in procuring useful information respecting agriculture, and disseminating it through the kingdom."\textsuperscript{16}

Others commented that this was no time to be voting money from the pockets of constituents for erecting boards and creating expense, when every effort should be made to find ways to reduce expense. But the motion was carried 101 to 26.\textsuperscript{17}

The Opposition press naturally had to agitate the issue a bit, and the \textit{New Annual Register} expressed the hope that the Board would not be perverted into an expedient for enabling the ministry to provide for "mendicant authors who may enlist in their service" or to gratify their supporters with sinecures.\textsuperscript{18} Perhaps the \textit{New Annual Register} had already learned of the correspondence of Arthur Young and George Rose, Pitt's patronage-manager, in which Young, on May 20, 1793, applied for the secretaryship, citing the support of Lord Sheffield and Sir John Sinclair and the fact that he had devoted the last thirty years of his life to mastering the "practice & the political encouragement of agriculture."\textsuperscript{19} Rose's reply is not known, but on May 28 Young wrote him again indicating he would accept

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 952-3. \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 953.
\textsuperscript{18}New Annual Register, XIV (1793), 118.
\textsuperscript{19}British Library, Add. MS. 35127, f. 259.
the post, although he was disappointed at the salary offered, "but it being adequate or not, depends entirely on the circumstances of attendance, duty, residence, &c." 20

Young's appointment as secretary was politically a sensitive matter. He had just performed a dramatic turn-about from critic to supporter of the administration with the appearance of his Example of France a Warning to Britain in February 1793. This work was drawn from several articles in the Annals in the previous autumn in which he reversed the pro-reform stand shown in his Travels in France. From the time of publication of the Example of France Young was a confirmed anti-French conservative to the end of his life. 21 Yet the reversal attracted much criticism, as Young was the only person to get a well-paid position with the Board.

Meanwhile Sinclair proceeded to ripen his plans for the organization of the Board. In an undated letter of late May 1793, he sent Dundas a memorandum expressing his fears that enemies of the plan "will endeavour to prejudice the King against it, and I beg therefore, that you will take an early opportunity, of recommending the plan to his Majesty's favour and

20 Ibid., f. 264.

protection."\textsuperscript{22} Sinclair suggested Arthur Young for the office of secretary, "if he does not entertain too high ideas, in regard to emolument."\textsuperscript{23} He also hoped the Board could be constituted promptly as there was much he wished to do immediately. A foreign correspondence could be started; an agricultural library could be collected; agricultural surveys could be started, and for this purpose he hoped to circulate questionnaires to the clergy, through the archbishops and bishops, and he expected more rapid response in England than he had received in Scotland on a similar project, because of "that gradation of Ranks which takes place in the English Church, that authority, with which the higher orders of the Church are intrusted, & the greater prospect of preferment."\textsuperscript{24} In this hope Sinclair was disappointed. He ran afoul the opposition of Archbishop Moore who feared that the Church's involvement in agricultural surveys might lead to an agitation of the tithe question. Accordingly, Sinclair was forced to fall back on the device of county surveys conducted by paid visitors.\textsuperscript{25}

The decision to give Arthur Young the secretaryship also almost ran afoul the Archbishop, who apparently

\textsuperscript{22}National Library of Scotland, MS. 641, ff. 156-7.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., ff. 158-60. \textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25}Mitchison, "The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)," English Historical Review, LXXIV (1959), 48; Dictionary of National Biography, XVIII, 302.
had in mind a candidate of his own for the position, a Dr. Shepperd. But on July 26, 1793, the Archbishop wrote that the appointment of a clergyman with a living with the cure of souls to a position as secretary of a board which would take much of his time and which was not concerned chiefly with religion might be objectionable. He therefore withdrew his recommendation.26

Sinclair, on July 27, 1793, wrote Young that he was making good progress with the legal problems of the Letters Patent and also with appointment of surveyors for some of the counties; Nathaniel Kent had just agreed to compile the Norfolk report; Sinclair was excited about the prospects and repeated his determination to have the whole kingdom gone over before Christmas in order to be able to lay a complete agricultural report of the kingdom before parliament at the beginning of March 1794.27

There were still obstacles to be overcome, however, before work could start. Sinclair had indiscreetly referred to passing under the Great Seal as a "mere form," and the Lord Chancellor, Lord Loughborough, was highly offended. As late as August 23, 1793, Loughborough had not approved the Letters Patent and wrote

26Sinclair Papers, Scottish Record Office, RH-4/49/2.

Sinclair that he entertained "considerable doubt as to the Legality" of the instrument. He needed to hear further from the attorney-general and solicitor-general before he could proceed.\textsuperscript{28}

Among his papers, Sinclair left a memorandum describing Lord Loughborough as "the most inveterate political enemy I ever had," and saying that it was with great difficulty that Pitt prevailed on Loughborough to affix the Great Seal to the Letters Patent.\textsuperscript{29} This comment refers to a record-setting achievement: Loughborough on August 23 said he would have to consider the matter further, yet four days later on August 27 the London Gazette carried the announcement of Letters Patent under the Great Seal establishing a "Board for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Internal Improvements."\textsuperscript{30} It was to consist of a president, Sir John Sinclair, and the following ex-officio members: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, the Archbishop of York, the Lord President of the Council, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, the First Commissioner of the Treasury, the First Commissioner of the Admiralty, the Bishop of London, the Bishop of Durham, the two Principal Secretaries

\textsuperscript{28}Sinclair Papers, Scottish Record Office, RH-4/49/2 ff. 296-7.

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{The Times}, September 2, 1793.
of State, the Master-General of the Ordnance, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the President of the Royal Society, the Surveyor-General of His Majesty's Woods and Forests, and the Surveyor of the Crown Lands.

In addition to those ex-officio worthies, thirty "ordinary" members were named to the Board, including three dukes, a marquess, seven earls, three barons, another bishop, and fifteen gentlemen, all of whom had demonstrated an interest in improved agriculture. Moreover, Arthur Young was named secretary, and Sir John Call treasurer.31

The Board thus was established as a typical eighteenth-century closed corporation, with official and ordinary members as just described, most of whom were of the "parliamentary classes." The president was to be elected annually, and each year five ordinary members were to be removed, usually those who had been most remiss in attending meetings, and five new members were to be chosen from the list of honorary members, who were drawn from the more enthusiastic gentry and farmers, who paid subscription and received publications of equal value. In theory the Board was to sit during the parliamentary season, normally nine months, but because the country gentry usually did not come to London before Christmas and left soon after Easter, the Board's active life was

31 European Magazine, XXIV (September 1793), 220.
only about four months a year. At other times the president carried on pretty much as he saw fit. The more active members, however, were given plenty to keep them busy -- much critical reading was necessary in connection with Sinclair's emphasis on publications.\textsuperscript{32}

At almost the same time the \textit{Gazette} announced the Board's creation, Sinclair released to the newspapers and journals an announcement regarding the county surveys which were to be undertaken, listing thirty-four questions to be asked relating to soil, climate, tenure, land use, crops, manures, farming practices, enclosure, wastes, wages, rents, prices, buildings, improvements, and the like. He declared that the surveys should require about five or six weeks, so they could be undertaken by men "who have a good deal of business of their own, without much inconvenience." The Board was prepared to pay £5 per week for expenses, and the reports would be printed quickly and circulated in the same county in order to get the observations and remarks of the farmers and landowners of the district. Corrected and supplemented, the reports were expected to reflect an accurate and exact picture of the agriculture of the county.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32}Mitchison, "The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)," \textit{English Historical Review}, LXXIV (1949), 43-5.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{European Magazine}, XXIV (September 1793), 221.
The Board assembled for the first time on September 4, 1793, and heard from its president what hopes were lodged in it and what services it might perform. He congratulated them on their creation and promised them a varied program. He noted that there existed in Britain a great "fund of solid ability and of useful information," along with a large quantity of "actual and efficient capital." He believed not much would be necessary "but to call forth that ability, and to collect that information, and to give the capital of the country a direction or tendency to increase internal wealth and cultivation . . . in order to make this Island . . . 'The Garden of Europe.'"34

If the Board persevered in its exertions, he was persuaded that in a short time many million acres of waste would be brought into cultivation, and "the stock of the kingdom would be improved to at least double its present value." The first step toward this goal was "to ascertain facts, without which no theory or system of reasoning, however plausible, could be depended on." To that end the surveys would accumulate a great mass of information which could be used to make clear to the parliament what it should do to promote agricultural improvement.35

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34 European Magazine, XXIV (November 1793), 387.
Neither Sinclair nor the other improvers were reticent about the possible usefulness of government to agriculture. Parliament, he asserted, should remove all discouragements and provide encouragements, which, to use his dainty figure, "operated like manure spread upon the ground, which insured a more abundant harvest." Here was an organization eager to be used, filled with enthusiasm for improvement and especially in the war years patriotically inclined to serve government in any way that it could.

Why, then, did government make no use of the Board? It is obvious that government did not try to employ it; one might even say government positively avoided using the Board. The food crises of 1795-6 and 1800-1 were situations in which the Board could have been useful. The Census of 1801 and the Crop Returns of 1801 were made to order, but government studiously ignored the Board.37

Part of the answer is Sir John Sinclair himself. He was cause for the Board to exist, and he was cause for it to fail. By common consent an exasperating man, self-righteously convinced that whatever business he was engaged in at the moment was the most important

36Ibid., 388.

37Mitchison, "The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)," English Historical Review, LXXIV (1959), 47.
business in creation, absolutely lacking that saving grace of seeing himself as slightly ridiculous, Sir John thought of the Board as his private property, and perhaps Pitt came also to think so. And Sinclair and Pitt found themselves politically at odds soon after the Board came into being. It is likely (but unproven) that Sinclair's thick-skinned hauteur caused the alienation; by autumn of 1793 a coolness subsisted between them. On November 8, 1793, Sinclair wrote Henry Dundas that he had received no reply from Pitt to his last letter, "and am very sorry to add, that he seems rather indifferent about any application from me, whether public or personal."38

Meanwhile the surveys moved ahead. Arthur Young was offended by Sir John's high-handed procedure -- he said he was "infinitely disgusted with the inconsiderate manner in which Sir John Sinclair appointed the persons who drew up the original reports, men being employed who scarcely knew the right end of a plough,"39 -- but he kept silent, which was perhaps the only thing he could do. Haste was everything to Sinclair; he wanted to lay a complete report of the whole kingdom before Parliament in


a single year; naturally he could not wait for a lot of ceremonial fol-de-rol.

Now it was that William Marshall came into contact with the Board. Marshall claimed part credit for having advanced the idea of a board of agriculture; in 1790, in his *Rural Economy of the Midland Counties* he had made such a suggestion. Later that same year Sir John Sinclair introduced himself to Marshall. Sinclair was then busy gathering material for his statistical work on Scotland and setting up the British Wool Society. In the spring of 1793, Marshall writes, Sinclair informed him of his intention to bring the matter of the establishment of the Board before Parliament; Sinclair showed Marshall his plan and "repeatedly consulted me on the subject." But, as there appeared little likelihood of success at the time, Marshall went about his business which took him to the Central Highlands, and when arrived there, he learned from "the public prints" that the Board was set up. Marshall suspected it was what "in the familiar language of politicians is termed a job; and the only doubt that remained appeared to be, whether the measure ... was adopted to avoid the

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opportunities, and quiet the . . . ambitious cravings of the President, or to embrace a fair opportunity of rewarding a recent change of political sentiments, in the Secretary." 42

After reading in the press of the Board's creation, Marshall had a note from Sinclair announcing that he had adopted Marshall's plan of "provincial surveys," and "with a firmness of nerve which few men are endowed with," enclosed a list of the surveyors, with Marshall's name included. 43 Mastering his indignation, Marshall agreed to provide editorial assistance and to survey the central Highlands of Scotland. He calculated that the work of the Board might be used by him in his own projects. 44 After he presented his report on the central Highlands in February 1794, he was made an honorary member, attended meetings when in London, and had "more private consultations" with Sinclair. 45

The other reporters, rapidly chosen and rapidly dispatched, were a mixed lot of varying quality. One suspects they were mostly acquaintances of Sinclair, drawn together by enthusiasm and eccentricity. There were, however, eminent and capable men among them, and although William Marshall later criticised them generally

42Ibid., xxiii.
43Marshall, Review of County Reports, I, xxiv.
44Ibid., xxiv-xxv. 45Ibid., xxv.
and specifically, he, too, recognized the merits of many. For example, John Bailey and George Culley surveyed Northumberland and Cumberland. Bailey was described by Marshall as the manager of an extensive landed property, a man whose scientific acquirements were evident in the report; Culley was a pupil of Bakewell and a well-known author on livestock, as well as "an arable farmer of high distinction;" together they were "peculiarly qualified" for the task. Thomas Wedge, who surveyed Cheshire, was unknown to Marshall, but was noted as "duly assiduous," with his mind "fixed on the best established practice of the county he is writing upon," and never obtruding "his own opinions, or preconceived sentiments. In this report, Mr. Wedge surpasses all his Coadjutors. . . . His Report, in most cases, agrees with my own observations." Other reporters were given qualified praise.

On the other hand, some reporters were excoriated. J. Bishton, who drew up the Shropshire report, "if Report it may be deemed," was among the worst. His report was "filled with effusions relating to the writer's own practice and opinions," and was so brief, only twenty-seven pages (of which "not seven relate, immediately, to the Agriculture of the County of Salop,") that the Board was compelled to send him a questionnaire, the answers

46 Ibid., I, 11.  
47 Ibid., II, 8.
to which extended the length to thirty-eight pages.\textsuperscript{48} It is difficult not to agree with Marshall about the unredeemed worthlessness of Bishton's report.

Arthur Young also felt the sting of Marshall's lash; Young's Norfolk report was no more than the work of "an enquiring tourist." The remarks quoted in it were mere conversations, off-hand observations, prejudiced opinions, "the incoherencies of the unintelligent; or possibly, the extempore answers of those who could scarcely have put the enquirer into the right road to the next market town."\textsuperscript{49}

The Rev. Arthur Young, son of the secretary of the Board, was given Sussex to survey, and Marshall was moved to pity — the younger Young "performed his task to the extent of his education; and better, be it put, than an unpractised 'man of letters' could well have been supposed to be be able to accomplish." But unfortunately, his mind was "reluctantly perhaps, led into the labyrinth of imagination, by the study of 'dead tongues' . . . ."\textsuperscript{50}

No one, however exalted, was immune to Marshall's criticism. Nathaniel Kent was well-known by "long and extensive practice, in different parts of the kingdom, as an estate agent of the highest class," and for his Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property, "a literary work

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Ibid.}, 171. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, III, 66.

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Ibid.}, V, 455.
of considerable merit," but in his Norfolk report he gave no evidence of being "a practical agriculturalist of minute attention, or mature experience." He wrote as an observer rather than as a practitioner, and in a few passages was "radically wrong."\textsuperscript{51}

William, James, and Jacob Malcolm, described by Marshall as nurserymen "on an extensive scale and of good repute," were chosen to survey Buckinghamshire and Surrey for the Board of Agriculture. Their Surrey report appeared to be satisfactory with regard to woodlands, planting, appropriation of uncivilized lands, and roads, but "on most other branches and subdivisions of natural, political, and rural economy . . . this work is defective."\textsuperscript{52} In the Buckinghamshire report Marshall complained that much of their brief sketch was "occupied by didactic recommendations of improvements! while . . . they might be said to be unacquainted with the groundwork and bearings of its established practices; -- strangers to the fundamental principles, and general state, of its existing management."\textsuperscript{53} Marshall concluded this indictment with a broad application:

This required censure is not peculiarly applicable to the performance under review; but might be used, with nearly equal force and propriety concerning a majority of the Board's Reports.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Ibid.}, III, 296-7.  \textsuperscript{52}\textit{Ibid.}, V, 353-4.  
\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Ibid.}, IV, 496.  \textsuperscript{54}\textit{Ibid.}
While the surveys were still in the making, Sinclair wrote Henry Dundas a long rambling letter on many topics. After complaining that Pitt had cooled toward him, as noted above, Sinclair commented on the unsettled times, the murmurings of the lower orders, the financial pinch, and the national danger. He suggested that Dundas should establish a network of informants to send him regular reports on all matters. "I am persuaded," said Sir John, "that your wish is, to find out how discontents can best be checked, before they go too far. Much may be done by attention to particular individuals. By employing some of the principal farmers in East Lothian (Rennie, Brown & _____) in the agricultural surveys, I believe Jacobinism will be much checked in that quarter." As the survey of the West Riding of Yorkshire was conducted by Messrs. Rennie, Brown, and Shirreff of East Lothian, one wonders whether the poor quality of many of the surveys of which Marshall complains reflects in any way the "political considerations" employed in the appointment of the surveyors. This is only speculation -- no other evidence is at hand.

In late 1793 and through 1794 the reports came in from the surveyors and were printed on quarto paper with wide margins in which additions or corrections could be made. Some useful supplementary information was obtained

in this way, but it was soon obvious that many of the reports were practically useless and that a common plan would be necessary for the future. But when the Board of Agriculture met on July 29, 1794, Sir John Sinclair was still a-quiver with optimism. The surveys, he said, "surpassed the most sanguine expectations;" seventy-four reports were already submitted, and he expected this part of the Board's work to be completed within the year. When the reports had all been circulated and returned with comments, the information should be condensed in "one great system," for which Sinclair put forward a "Plan of a General Report, on the present State of the Agriculture of Great Britain, and the Means of its Improvement," consisting of forty chapters on as many topics and subdivisions, along with five additional chapters of conclusions, respecting improvements.

The matter of improving waste lands, especially in years of dearth, came to occupy an increasingly larger share of the Board's attention. Sinclair reported in 1794 that a committee on waste lands and common fields had made great progress and that John Robinson, Surveyor-General of the Woods and Forests, had drawn up a valuable paper on the laws and customs pertaining to wastes.

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57 Ibid., 204-9.  
58 Ibid., 201-2.
In his report to the Board, Sinclair devoted much time to tediously drawn-out calculations of the advantages to be expected from bringing wastes and commons into enclosed use. He took Cambridgeshire as an example, where there were 319,000 acres to be improved in this way, he said. Enclosure would increase rent by about 9s. per acre, or a total of £146,262. Additional produce at £1-7-0 would yield £438,000. At thirty years purchase, that meant an addition to national capital of £13,140,000; and if it took £10 per year to support a person, the additional annual yield would cause an increase of population of 43,800 souls. "According to the computation of the celebrated Dr. Halley," said Sinclair, "Cambridgeshire is a seventieth part of England and Wales; consequently the above results are to be multiplied by seventy, in order to ascertain the improvable value and population of the southern part of the united kingdom." 59

This is the sort of counting-of-chickens-before-they-are-hatched which a number of improvers engaged in.

Sir John recognized that some people, "unaccustomed to such calculations, or perhaps from despondency of temper," might question their validity, but he adduced the stock arguments to buttress his position: improvement is done by private not public money; it increases the demand for labor; it occurs at home and not in a colony

59Ibid., 211-3.
which might declare its independence, and it has a multiplier effect on national prosperity. 60

Although Sinclair's spirits did not need boosting, a letter from R. F. Greville, by order of the King, on August 29, 1794, must have braced them up. The King declared his approval of the Board's proceedings under Sir John's presidency and indicated that "the general good of the Community at large" was being served. 61

For this and other reasons Sinclair began to think of himself as a notable national figure, if he ever doubted it, and when government considered agricultural matters, he felt constrained to step forward as the personification of the landed interest. We find him writing Henry Dundas on December 14, 1794, to suggest that the president of the Board of Agriculture should be made a member of the Privy Council so that he "may with propriety be consulted" when matters of an agricultural nature arose. He made the suggestion to Dundas because "Mr. Pitt and I, are not on very intimate terms at present," and was certain that "if the Board of Agriculture were put on a proper footing, it might be of use in many respects besides matters of husbandry." 62

60 Ibid., 213-5.

61 In Tracts Concerning the Board of Agriculture, British Library.

62 Scottish Record Office, GD 51/1-28.
Many county reports emphasized drainage. "Much has been done" in the East Riding, wrote the reporter, "and there yet remains much to do." Many inhabitants of the Riding had suffered the ague during winter and spring, but that affliction was becoming increasingly rare where drainage had been carried out, it was said. Meanwhile, Cumberland "has not been behind its neighbours," wrote the reporter there, and in Leicestershire Mr. Joseph Elkington, "who is supposed to be the first in that line in the world," was directing some improvements. So impressed was the Board by Elkington's performance that arrangements were made for the House of Commons to vote him a grant of £1,000 to induce him to instruct others in the art. Sir John Sinclair sent a circular letter to the chairmen of the Quarter Sessions in all the counties announcing the grant ("the first sum of money that ever was granted by parliament for any discovery advantageous to husbandry") and inviting the counties to appoint persons to be instructed, on terms to be agreed on. Subsequently, in 1796, Arthur Young

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64John Bailey and George Culley, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cumberland (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 36.


66Annals of Agriculture, XXIV (1795), 563.
had infinite difficulty in obtaining any specific information from Elkington for the Board. He kept no books or records, complained Young, and he had little recollection of what he had done or where he had worked. Such managerial laxness caused Young great consternation.\footnote{Gazeley, Life of Arthur Young, 349.}

The records nowhere indicate that Elkington was a fraud, only a vague and unbusinesslike sort, but in retrospect it is clear that effective under-drainage on a large scale depended on a kind of cheap hollow drainage tile the technology for which did not exist until the 1830's and 1840's.\footnote{John Thirsk, English Peasant Farming: The Agrarian History of Lincolnshire from Tudor to Recent Times (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1947), 283.}

Almost invariably, the Board's reporters listed the obstacles to improvement in their respective counties. These notations provide a broad list of the agricultural grievances and attitudes of the day. They also set out their hints for improvement, suggestions to be followed for progressive husbandry. The reporter for Cheshire complained of the tax on bricks which impeded work on drainage, "for which we have very few materials that are proper."\footnote{Thomas Wedge, General View of the Agriculture of the County Palatine of Chester (London: C. MacRae, 1794), 66.} He, along with nearly all the reporters,
declared that "the present impolitic and, in many instances, oppressive mode of collecting tithes in kind, must present itself first to our notice." He criticised short leases, as did most reporters. The Somerset reporter drew up the most comprehensive program of all:

1. Inclose and cultivate all waste lands susceptible of improvement, and divide the common fields.
2. Where lands are situate on bleak and exposed eminences, improve the climate by judicious & extensive plantations.
3. Wherever marl, lime, or chalk can be procured within a reasonable distance, neglect not a liberal use thereof; and if destitute of such resources, be careful to make as much dung as possible by folding sheep, housing all sorts of cattle, preserving urine, collecting woollen rags, malt combs, ashes, horn shavings, bones, &c. &c.
4. A regular and well conceived rotation of crops.
5. Enlarge the upland corn farms; erect proper buildings and conveniencies for the shelter of cattle in the winter months, thereby inviting substantial and well-informed farmers, of more enlightened countries, to settle upon them.
6. Improve the stock by a judicious selection of Males and Females for breeding; and be particularly careful to choose a Male handsome in those points wherein the Female may be deficient.
7. Lessen the number of horses, and encourage the use of oxen.
8. Amend the public roads.
9. Encourage the use of such ploughs, and other instruments, as are best calculated to expedite work and do it well.
10. Sow early in exposed and cold situations, and be particularly careful not to plough or harrow in wet weather.
11. Destroy Rats and mice.
12. Introduce threshing machines.
13. Let all unmaltered corn be sold by weight.

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70 Ibid., 69.
14. Grant long leases.
15. Sow more sainfoin on the stone-brash lands, and on all other soils congenial thereto:
16. Roll all grassland once a year at least, with a heavy roller, and abstain from ploughing your arable land in wet weather.
17. Set all your pease and beans in lines from North to South, and hoe them twice at least.
18. Devote at least one-quarter part of your turnip land to the Ruta-Baga or Swedish turnip.71

Early in 1795 the Board heard reports from its correspondents in the country concerning the likelihood of a dearth in the coming spring and summer because of the drastically short harvest in 1794. As a result a resolution was passed by the Board urging the increased cultivation of potatoes, calling for a committee to draw up a report on potatoes, and recommending that the Board's members promote the growth of "that valuable root" in their own neighborhoods. The Board also tried to obtain a prize from parliament; The Times reported that the Board had agreed to propose a premium of £1,000 to the person who produced the greatest quantity of potatoes on land which had never before been used for that plant.72

On February 20 the Board issued its report on potato culture which described the different sorts of potato and the advantages or disadvantages of each, the methods of planting and cultivating, how to harvest and

71 John Billingsley, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Somerset (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1795; 1798), 297.

72 The Times, February 14, 1795.
perhaps make two crops per year. The report also carried instructions for making potato bread. But some questioned the value of such publications. On his copy of the report Sir Joseph Banks jotted the question "Is there anything in this paper which was not known before the board of Agriculture was instituted?"73

Sir John submitted his second annual report to the Board on July 14, 1795, and voiced satisfaction with the progress which was being made toward ascertaining the state of agriculture in the kingdoms. Without mentioning that he had promised the same thing the year before, he assured his listeners that the last of the rough first reports would soon be printed. He hoped to be able to abstract from them some general points bearing on obstacles to improvement which he would present to the legislature in an effort to remove them. He also remarked on the Board's concern with the increasing price of provisions, and observed that when the deficiency of the last crop became known at the beginning of the year, a special meeting had been held at which it was decided to recommend the culture of potatoes as "the resource, the easiest to be obtained, and the most to be depended on."74 He believed that as a result of the Board's

73 "Hints Respecting the Culture and Use of Potatoes," February 20, 1795, in Tracts Concerning the Board of Agriculture, British Library.

74 Annals of Agriculture, XXIV (1795), 612.
activity fifty thousand additional acres of potatoes were planted, and calculated that their yield should feed nearly a million people for six months. The shortages and the high prices further suggested to him the obvious remedy of "cultivating the many millions of acres now lying waste and unproductive." On this matter he said he would address the Board early in the ensuing session. The Board's effort to obtain a General Enclosure Act is discussed in chapter VI.

Before we leave the young Board of Agriculture in 1795 to consider some of the food crises in a wartime setting, there remains one facet of the combined character of Sir John and the Board to be examined. On July 1, 1795, Sir John unveiled his "Plan of Agreement among the Powers in Europe, and the United States of America, for the Purpose of Rewarding Discoveries of General Benefit to Society." He remarked that his plan for establishing the Board of Agriculture owed part of its inspiration to ideas he had picked up in his travels on the Continent, and one important function of the Board of Agriculture was to correspond with foreign states on matters of mutual interest. Discoveries in one country gradually reach other countries, but the interval is often "tedious," and to speed up the process would be useful. He proposed that each nation pay a sum of money,

75Ibid., 613.
"according to the amount of its revenue," and grants could be made from that fund to inventors and discoverers for their inventions and discoveries. Sir John mentioned the grant which parliament had made to Joseph Elkington for information about draining, and suggested that other nations might wish to subscribe and avail themselves of that knowledge. He declared that it would be desirable for every nation to have a Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvements, to exchange information on subjects of general interest, and to investigate discoveries of a doubtful nature.76

In this chapter we have chronicled the establishment of the Board of Agriculture and have lamented the fact that its high hopes were never fully realized, for the Board's failure was the failure of the landed interest as well. Sir John Sinclair stated the position and the opportunity most clearly in a 1795 circular letter which he distributed to the chairmen of the Quarter Sessions:

The landed interest have it now in their power to make a more rapid progress in promoting the improvement of the country, than ever they enjoyed before. They have not only a common centre, to which all information may be sent, and from which every useful discovery will be circulated, but they have also the means of making applications to the legislature, in a manner the most likely to secure attention and success; and if the respectable characters in the different counties, will exert that zeal and spirit, which may be expected from those who have such deep

76 European Magazine, XXVIII (August 1795), 76-8.
interests at stake, we have every reason to expect that these kingdoms will soon reach a very high degree of internal prosperity.

These cheerful and optimistic words add the poignancy of unfulfilled hope to the failure of the Board of Agriculture. One has the feeling that much good could have come from the organization, and much was expected, but for various reasons the Board never had a fair chance to prove its worth. One feels that the personality of Sir John Sinclair accounts in part for the failure.

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77Annals of Agriculture, XXIV (1795), 566-7.
CHAPTER V
THE FOOD CRISIS, 1795-6: MUDDLING THROUGH

Although the establishment of the Board of Agriculture at the beginning of the war in 1793 gave focus and organization to the landed interest, and although the reformers proceeded patriotically to urge further improvement and greater yields, Britain's agriculture with good harvests was hardly able to keep abreast of the accelerating demands of the growing population. Enclosure acts in the early war years nearly doubled the rate of the 1780's, but consumption also increased inexorably. Just how thin was the margin between sufficiency and want was brought home strikingly with the onset of the food crisis of 1795-6. Just how ill-prepared government was to deal with such food shortages was also revealed. Government, moreover, had no organized system by which it could learn the quantity of foodstuffs in the country, or crop prospects, or prices of most commodities. Government was often forced to make decisions without adequate information, regarding large-scale public undertakings to meet the food shortages. In this chapter we will examine the nature of the food crisis, and will look at government's
attempts to respond, as well as at the effects of the food crisis on improvements in agriculture.

The wheat crop of 1794 was of excellent quality, but proved to be of deficient quantity. Moreover, there was no reserve of wheat on hand from previous years because no crop since 1791 had been large. In late 1794 distress began to appear throughout the land as the shortness of the crop was first realized and prices began to rise. Some farmers in Herefordshire, to prevent suffering among the lower orders, arranged to send wheat every market day "to be sold at half a Crown under the market price to the Poor, in pecks and half-pecks, or less quantities." 

The winter of 1794-5 was inclement in the extreme. Parson Woodforde's diary for January 1795 tells of bitter cold -- "the milk in the Milk-pans in the Dairy, was froze in a Mass. It froze apples within doors, tho' covered with a thick carpet. . . . It froze last Night the Chamber Pots above stairs." 

1Donald Grove Barnes, A History of the English Corn Laws from 1660-1846 (1930; reprint by Augustus M. Kelley, N. Y., 1965), 72.

2The Times, December 19, 1794.

As the pinch of cold and dearth began to be felt, efforts were made to find a culprit to blame. A report to The Times from Nottingham spoke of the "artificial" scarcity of corn, "occasioned by the farmers keeping their corn from market, until they can get their own price." Rising prices for meat were attributed to "monopoly among Graziers and their Agents," and landowners were criticised for letting their estates in large farms instead of small, a complaint which would be heard again and again in ensuing months. Government was already accustomed to suspending the corn laws when it seemed generally advisable, and on this occasion on February 13, 1795, suspended exports of wheat and authorized the import of a wide variety of foodstuffs.

Unseasonable weather continued through the spring and into the summer. In June the intensely cold and wet weather proved lethal to many newly shorn sheep; Wiltshire and Dorsetshire were reported each to have lost 2,500 head. In July there seemed an improvement in crop conditions, but hopes were dashed and the final yield was only scanty.

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4 The Times, February 11, 1795.
5 Ibid., March 12, 1795.
6 35 Geo. III c. 4.
7 The Times, June 23 & 25, July 2, 1795.
Prices, of course, responded to the crop deficiency. The following table illustrates the price fluctuations 1793-7, the first and last years being considered "normal":

**AVERAGE PRICE OF WHEAT IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

(per Winchester bushel)

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From late 1794 to early 1797 prices of wheat were unusually high, reaching a peak in August 1795, and distressingly high from July 1795 to September 1796.

In London, where the price of bread was fixed by the Lord Mayor and the Court of Aldermen depending on the price of flour, bread prices rose in June and July, week by week. The *Times* philosophized that the rise in bread prices might be painful to the poor, but it was wise to raise prices; if the price of bread were kept below the price of flour in other parts of the kingdom,

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the supply of flour to London would quickly dwindle, producing greater distress.

London was not alone in suffering the shortage and high prices. Appeals came to the Privy Council from all directions in June to supply wheat, and in July and August the appeals became more numerous and frantic. The reason, quite simply, was riot or fear of riot by the poor who felt they had no other recourse in their extremity. In late June in Birmingham, for example, some of the working people complained loudly of the high price of bread, and broke the windows in a miller's establishment and destroyed his account books and furniture; even after the riot act was read, the mob persisted in its menacing attitude, having been inflamed "by a malicious and unfounded report which had been circulated, that the miller had made use of unfeeling and brutish expressions to some poor people who had gone there to buy flour." Troops were summoned by the magistrates and, assisted by the Yeomanry Cavalry, dispersed the mob. Later two soldiers fired on the reassembled crowd; one man was killed; several more were wounded by bayonets, and seven or eight rioters were

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9*The Times*, June 17, 1795.


11*The Times*, June 25, 1795.
arrested. Almost simultaneously there was another out­
break of trouble at Stourbridge, and also at Bromsgrove,
occasioned by high prices of food. A mill was destroyed
by rioters at Stourbridge; four dragoons were killed by
a mob at Dudley, "and we fear the trouble is not yet
over in this place," said the correspondent.¹²

In early July a crowd of women in Tewkesbury
"riotously assembled in order to lower the prices of
provisions;" and a group of coal miners from the Forest
of Dean marched to Wilton on hearing a rumor that several
barges loaded with grain were preparing to sail to
Bristol. At about the same time another group of miners
went to Mitcheldeane and terrorized the town by
breaking windows. Eventually they moved out to a
Mr. Price's mill where several local gentlemen exhorted
them to remain peaceful; Price offered to supply them
wheat at 8s. per bushel, "but their object was revenge
from a report having been maliciously circulated that
he exported or rather smuggled corn to France; they
therefore wantonly destroyed the mill."¹³ At nearby
Blakeney damage was done by a similar mob, and troops
had to be called to quell the disturbance.¹⁴

¹²Ibid.
¹³Ibid., July 2, 1795.
¹⁴Ibid.
In the summer Arthur Young rebuked the riotous lower orders in his *Annals*, reminding them that it was unreasonable to go about "pulling down corn-mills, in order to lower the price of provisions," which of course had a contrary tendency, and in times of scarcity was the "only sure way to bring on a famine." He pointed out that it was only through corn-dealers, millers, bakers, butchers, and other tradesmen that they could obtain their food, and that "price will always regulate itself by the quantity." He recognized that the poor had reason to complain when their children were dying of hunger, but there was a "regular, legal, and quiet method of complaining," and he recommended them to the provisions of the poor laws: the rich might not suffer want to the same degree but "they are made to pay for their exemption to the direct ease of those in a worse situation." He likened the disturbances to what had happened in France, declaring that disorder and riot there only increased scarcity. And, he asked, who should want the disorder? Answering his own question, he alluded to those "ambitious, daring spirits, who, in every step to public confusion, hope to mount in the storm."  

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15 *Annals of Agriculture*, XXIV (1795), 536-45.
The poor paid little heed to Arthur Young's expositions. In late July at Berwick a crowd of women gathered because of high bread prices and seized all available flour and broke the windows in a number of houses. When miners joined the women, a call was sent off for troops, who arrived the following morning and established an uneasy quiet.16

At Bishop Stortford in early August a riot occurred because of the scarcity of bread and flour. The magistrates read the riot act but had finally to call the Surrey Fencible Cavalry.17 At Halsted, in Essex, a similar riot took place because of the price of bread. Cavalry had to be summoned when the civil authorities proved unable to control the crowd.18 In mid-October at Holywell, near Chester, an "assemblage of wrong-headed women" intercepted a cart load of wheat on its way to a neighboring town and locked it up to prevent its departure.19

The endemic disorders came to a sort of climax on October 29 when the king was jeered and assaulted as he drove to the opening of parliament. Parson James

16 The Times, July 23, 1795.
17 Ibid., August 8, 1795.
18 Ibid., August 11, 1795.
19 Ibid., October 20, 1795.
Woodforde witnessed the scene and wrote that the king was grossly insulted by the mob, and narrowly escaped injury when someone fired a shot through the window of his coach. On his return to St. James's he was hissed and hooted at, and the mob tried to open the doors of the coach, and all the windows were shattered. "The Mob," said Woodforde, "was composed of the most violent & lowest Democrats."20

Government was acutely sensitive to scarcities and the resulting high prices, and to rumors of Jacobin activity which magnified the dangers to be expected from the lower classes if ever they were goaded into tumult. When the British wheat crop of 1794 was shown to be deficient, the ministry negotiated for wheat purchases in the Baltic and from Canada. But the severe winter of 1794-5 kept the Baltic ports frozen in until well in 1795, and shipments from that quarter were delayed. In Canada, meanwhile, Spanish and Portuguese buyers moved more quickly than the British agents and contracted for most of the available wheat. The British countered by buying from the Spanish and Portuguese, and sent fifty-six vessels to load the grain. Unfortunately, the grain was loaded in hot weather and much of it spoiled; only about half the ships returned with cargoes. The

1795 crop in Canada turned out poorly, and the governor laid down an embargo in September.21

The crop in the United States was deficient in 1794; the 1795 crop resembled the British crop: it looked good in the fields but turned out light in the harvest. Little was available from America in 1795 for British use.22

In the spring of 1795 voices were raised in criticism of government's conduct. The Times spoke up in defense of government against the "calumny against Ministers in the Opposition Papers," and declared that "so long since as the beginning of the last year, precautions were being taken to import large quantities of wheat, both from America and the Baltic."23

There is some question whether The Times was correct in stating that government had commenced purchasing wheat as early as the beginning of 1794; one student of the subject labels as absurd the newspaper's report that government had been taking precautions for years or even months.24 On the other hand, a government purchasing agent hinted in January 1795 that some


22Ibid., 177.

23The Times, March 21, 1795.

purchases had already been made by that date, and all the wheat imported in 1795 is said to have been purchased on government's account and shipped in vessels owned by or chartered to government.25 Meanwhile, there is a contemporary claim that government decided in February 1793, at the beginning of the war, to enter the foreign corn trade in a big way in order to deny supplies to France.26 If government did pursue such a policy, it was not effective, and imports in 1795 were in the neighborhood of only 300,000 quarters.27

In July 1795 The Times was again defending government from the sniping of the "Jacobin Papers," and reporting that supplies were on the way from Hamburg. It answered a charge that private mercantile activity was stifled by government's taking into its own hands the purchase of all the wheat from Danzig and from Canada by declaring that no private merchant could have risked as greatly as government had done, and the nation was considerably relieved by the success of the ventures.28

25 Ibid.
26 Barnes, History of the English Corn Laws, 75-6.
27 Ibid.
28 The Times, July 11, 1795.
Through August and September indications were reassuring that the 1795 crop would be abundant and the reports were lyrical, but by October it was clear that the wheat yield was disappointingly short, although other grain yields were normal or better than normal. The high prices which prevailed were explained by The Times as the result, first, of the recent scarcity of wheat, during which all the old stock was consumed, and, second, of the state of the present harvest, which was now known to be not three-fourths of a normal crop. The paper added that it thought "every good man will feel it his duty to be as economical as possible in the use of flour in his household."

Earlier in the year, before adjournment, parliament had taken several limited steps to encourage economy in the use of wheat. A duty of one guinea per year was imposed on all persons who used hair powder, which was made of wheat starch, with the exception of the royal family and their servants, clergymen of annual income of less than £100, military and naval personnel under a certain rank, and "any Person who

29* Ibid., August 7, 8, 11, 17, 23, 25, September 1, 1795.

30* Ibid., October 16, 1795.

31* Ibid.
shall have more than Two Daughters unmarried."\textsuperscript{32} This tax, as is well known, wrought a revolution in fashion. Whigs began to wear their hair short à la guillotine, as it was called, while Tories who paid the tax and continued to wear hair powder were called guinea pigs.\textsuperscript{33} Another measure, passed in June, was an act to suspend the distillery of any grain.\textsuperscript{34}

During the summer private charity tried to cope with the distress of the lower orders. Subscriptions were opened in a number of places, to supply the poor with bread until harvest time at 9d. for a shilling loaf, with the difference to be made up to the bakers by the subscription.\textsuperscript{35} Additionally, the Bank of England sent £500 and the Sun Life Office sent £100 to the Lord Mayor for the relief of the industrious poor.\textsuperscript{36}

Early in 1795, when fears were voiced regarding the adequacy of the crop, but there was no certain knowledge because there was no regular information-gathering system in existence, Arthur Young set about to obtain accurate information through a questionnaire

\textsuperscript{32}35 Geo. III, c. 44.  
\textsuperscript{33}Woodforde, The Diary of a Country Parson, 519.  
\textsuperscript{34}35 Geo. III, c. 119.  
\textsuperscript{35}The Times, July 2, 1795.  
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., July 11, 1795.
published in his *Annals of Agriculture*. He asked his correspondents to send him answers to ten queries relating to stocks on hand, prices, substitutes, and prospects for grains, meat, potatoes, and dairy products, as well as information on wages, coal, wool, hay, and other matters. The Board of Agriculture made arrangements in the summer to establish a network of correspondents for gathering information about production and supplies. Government, also, was becoming increasingly concerned, and in late October took steps of its own to ascertain the details of the situation. The home secretary, the duke of Portland, sent a circular letter to the lords lieutenant of the counties asking for information of the size of the grain crop as compared with previous years. Government was about to discover the difficulties of information-gathering.37

When parliament reassembled on October 29 the prime minister wasted no time in bringing forward the high prices of grain for the consideration of the House. Pitt said he wished to find remedies which would be of lasting effect and utility, but he urged caution and circumspection in order not to injure either commerce or manufacturing or agriculture. For the

present he had in mind three measures: (1) to amend the law to permit making and selling bread not entirely of wheat but mixed with other grains; (2) to prohibit the making of starch, and (3) to prevent obstruction of the passage of grain or other provisions within the kingdom. Other measures might also be proposed, he said, but he would rather await the findings and recommendations of the select committee, which he asked to be appointed.  

A member of the House, a Mr. Lechmere, replied that no remedy could be found until the cause of the evil was identified, and he was sure that the principal cause was the aggrandizement of farms, which enabled one large farmer to withhold his grain from market while a dozen small farmers would be compelled to sell. He also pointed to jobbers of corn and cattle as "instruments of great oppression to the people." His object was "but to relieve the distress of the poor, and to make the heart of the cottager leap with joy," and he believed that public granaries all over the kingdom might be the way to proceed.  

Charles James Fox rose to observe that scarcity resulted from either deficient production, or increased consumption, and it should be determined which of

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38Parliamentary Register, XLIII, 66-9.
39Ibid., 69-70.
these had the most influence on producing the present scarcity. Bread was not the only thing extremely dear, he said; meat, butter, and other foods were mentioned, and the causes were various. He remarked that much of the distress resulted from the fact that the wages of labor had not kept pace with the increased cost of provisions. He lamented that "in every inclement season, the industrious poor are obliged to depend for subsistence on the supplies afforded by the charity of the rich." He thought that the wages of labour should be increased and the majority of the people of England "freed from a precarious and degrading dependence." But he said he purposely avoided introducing politics into the discussion and hoped that the investigation would sift the problem to the bottom and provide a remedy. 40

Pitt replied that the causes of the scarcity were various and complicated. Among other causes, the war of course tended to create scarcity, but the very wealth of the nation was an important contributing factor -- "it must be evident that luxury in all the ranks of life ... must have increased very largely, and must operate for a time, as one of the causes added to the others of the present scarcity, as the improvements in agriculture had not kept pace with this prosperity in other respects." He also announced that government was

40 Ibid., 70-5.
resolved to continue the stopping of the distillery for another year.41

Next, a member inquired whether the rumors were true that government had employed agents to buy up grain supplies in Britain, as he had heard government was employing agents abroad to purchase corn. Pitt replied that government had employed no agents at home in that way -- perhaps contractors buying to fill their contracts were mistaken for government agents. He acknowledged that government had purchased foreign grain, and although he doubted it interfered with the business of private individuals, he felt the "exigency of the times" justified the action. French agents were buying at any price, and they could be met only by government. He realized that private merchants were confused and uncertain, and he endorsed the general principle of avoiding any interference in their affairs.42

Fox commented that although there might have been extraordinary circumstances the previous year which justified government in taking special measures to meet the crisis, he could not approve the principle of government's action, and it was his opinion that the market would have been better supplied if government had left

41Ibid., 75-7.  
42Ibid., 78-9.
it to the free competition of the merchants and had not interfered in the natural course of affairs.43

After this discussion a select committee, chaired by Dudley Ryder, was appointed to consider the high price of corn. Ryder obtained leave to bring in bills to amend the law respecting the price and assize of bread, to prohibit the making of starch from wheat, to continue the prohibition of distillery of grain, to prohibit distillation of potatoes, as well as to prevent obstructions to the free passage of grain and other provisions within the kingdom.44

During the following two weeks the select committee heard evidence from a variety of persons who had knowledge of local conditions in the country. On November 16 the select committee made its first report to the House and stated that while the harvest of other crops had been fairly abundant, the wheat crop was so deficient as to require immediate measures to alleviate the evil.45 The obvious means of supplying the deficiency was importation from abroad, but the committee doubted that enough wheat could be obtained from foreign nations. Nevertheless, the committee considered the best method

43Ibid., 79-80. 44Ibid., 81-2.
45"First Report of the Select Committee appointed to take into Consideration the present High Price of Corn," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 45.
of effecting importation and studied whether government should purchase corn on its own account, in which case it would likely be the only purchaser, or whether private trading should be relied on. The committee concluded that restoration of the trade in corn to its normal channel, with the additional encouragement of a bounty, was the best way of procuring supplies from foreign parts.46 The committee proposed that government should refrain from any further grain purchases, should make a public declaration of quantities it held, and should sell its stock in limited quantities at the market price. Bounties were suggested as follows for importation before August 31, 1796: 20s. per quarter on wheat from the Mediterranean, up to 300,000 quarters; 15s. per quarter on wheat from the United States, up to 500,000 quarters; and 15s. per quarter on wheat from other parts of Europe, up to 500,000 quarters (10s. bounty on any excess over the stated quantity). Smaller bounties were proposed to encourage the importation of Indian corn and meal. But the committee warned against expecting importation to solve all the nation's problems. It enjoined strict economy in the consumption of wheat and flour, and recommended the substitution of other articles of food wherever possible.47

46 Ibid. 47 Ibid., 46.
The committee report occasioned little discussion except of details. One member thought the quantities named on which bounties were to be paid were too great -- there was no possibility of getting such quantities, and authorizing the import of such quantities would lead people to think the need was greater than it actually was, and might lead to still higher prices.48

Fox could not resist tweaking the ministry about its wheat purchases which the committee had condemned. It would have been better, he said, "if Government had left this subject last year as it was proposed to be done now."49 But he wondered whether government was prepared to resume its purchases if private traders appeared unable to obtain a sufficient quantity of wheat within a short time. Pitt replied that to reserve to government the right to interfere if the present plan did not meet expectations seemed to him a bad policy. Two systems could not succeed at once, he said. "For if the merchant had the possible prospect of competition with Government, his motive for speculating would be damped; and therefore he was ready to say, that unless Government were to take the matter altogether into their hands, they should have nothing to do with it."50

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48 Parliamentary Register, XLIII, 250.
49 Ibid., 252. 50 Ibid., 254.
On December 8 the select committee submitted its second report, recommending a bounty of 10s. per quarter of rye imported, up to 100,000 quarters. That grain also appeared to be in short supply. A third report was presented in two parts on December 9 and 23. By that time the crop returns made to the home secretary by the justices of the peace in charge of records in each county had arrived in greater number, and although the returns were unclear and confusing, the committee believed the wheat crop of 1795 to be deficient by one-fourth to one-fifth as compared with an average crop, while the barley and oat crops appeared to be at least one-fifth better than an average crop. The stock of wheat on hand at the beginning of the harvest was much less than usual, and more than the ordinary amount had been used as seed; these were factors contributing to the high prices. The committee suggested that special efforts be made to see that such a situation not be repeated in the coming year. It also warned again that it would be unwise to place any great reliance on imports

51"Second Report of the Select Committee appointed to take into Consideration the present High Price of Corn," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 49.

52"Third Report of the Select Committee appointed to take into Consideration the present High Price of Corn," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 53.
to fill the country's needs. But the committee pointed out that the country could rely on other resources, which were an economical use of its wheat stocks and its abundant crops of barley, oats, and potatoes. The committee described experiments conducted by the Victualling Office and by the Board of Agriculture in mixing wheat flour with the flour of other grains and of potatoes, and concluded that good bread might be made from any of those mixtures, using no more than three-fifths or two-thirds wheat flour. It recommended that people be urged to substitute such mixed-flour breads for wheaten bread, but they did not wish to make such a measure compulsory. The committee proposed that the members of parliament should set an example for the country by voluntarily subscribing to an agreement to reduce by at least one-third the quantity of fine wheaten bread consumed by their own families, and to diminish the use of wheat in other foods as much as possible.

Lord Sheffield took it upon himself in the debate of December 11, 1795, to explicate the committee report,

53Ibid.  
54Ibid., 54.  
55Ibid.; The Times, January 1, 1796, announced that the Home Secretary was instructed to ask the custodes rotulorum and city/town magistrates to encourage following the example of both Houses; also churches in England and Soctland, places of confinement, the universities, etc., were to be asked to cooperate, and any bread distributed to the poor was to be made of mixed flour.
and in a masterly and lucid presentation he drove home the gravity of the situation. The people should not be led to believe the case was better than it was or that a large quantity of wheat might be obtained from abroad. Old crop stocks had been depleted; consumption of the new crop had begun earlier than usual, and the new crop was smaller than normal. Britain imported about 225,000 quarters of wheat in an average year. To that must now be added a deficiency equal to about three-months consumption, or 1,500,000 quarters. Sheffield doubted that 400,000 quarters could be imported. 56

He observed that Britain had never been able, except twice, to import more than 500,000 quarters in a single year, and then only in periods of peace. France was at the moment an active buyer, and supplies were low. Only in the north of Europe and in the American states were crops better than average, but the greatest supplies from those places in the past were 93,724 quarters from the United States and 329,281 quarters from the north of Europe. Bounties, he said, could not increase the last crop. However, Britain had an abundant crop of oats, barley, and potatoes, and so could make up any deficiency in wheat; "it cannot be considered an an insufferable calamity, if we should be obliged to make up one-fourth of our usual consumption on an exigency, by such substitutes,

56 Parliamentary Register, XLIII, 724-5.
or by such wholesome or palatable mixtures."\(^{57}\) He con­
cluded by stating that it would undoubtedly be generally
wished to reserve as much wheat as possible for the poor,
not only because they normally depended on that commodity
for a major part of their diet but also even to satisfy
their prejudices and feelings of comfort,\(^{58}\) and he
recommended that the legislature should seek some means
to prevent a future dependence on foreign supplies.

Another member asserted that voluntary reductions
in the consumption of wheat flour and bread would prove
ineffective and proposed prohibiting at once the making
of bread from wheat flour alone. In that way, he said,
the rich would be compelled to eat the same sort of bread
as the poor.\(^{59}\) The discussion ranged over a variety of
other possible measures to ameliorate the situation, but
finally it was agreed to establish a voluntary subscrip­
tion to "reduce the consumption of wheat in our families,
by at least one-third . . . and . . . prohibit in our
families the use of wheaten flour in pastry, and
diminish, as much as possible, the use thereof in other
articles than bread."\(^{60}\) When the proposed subscription
was moved in the House of Lords, the duke of Bedford
characterized it as "altogether futile and absurd, and

\(^{57}\)Ibid., 725-7.  \(^{58}\)Ibid., 728.
\(^{59}\)Ibid., 729.  \(^{60}\)Ibid., 736.
inadequate to the distress which they proposed to relieve."61 He believed that some stronger legislative enactment was necessary.

On December 16 when the House of Commons considered a bill to permit bakers to bake bread made with mixed flour, one member, Mr. Francis, doubted the success of the venture. In a similar effort of the sort in the previous year mixed flour bread was wasted by his servants, he said, in far greater quantities because it was "ill made and unpleasant." Moreover, bakers often had difficulty finding millers to supply them with the appropriate quality of meal, and some bakers refused to make the coarser bread because the poor would not buy any but the finest and whitest wheaten bread. It was, then, a problem of contending "with unwilling millers, unwilling bakers, unwilling servants, and above all, with an unwilling poor."62 He proposed that the law require bread to be made of mixed flour.

The bill's manager, Dudley Ryder, countered that formerly mixed bread was forbidden, now it would be permitted, and government would like to see the result of the experiment before enacting any compulsion; moreover, the distress of the previous July and August had probably served to "prepare the minds of the people

61Ibid., XLV, 210. 62Ibid., XLIII, 784-5.
with respect to the expediency of diminishing the consumption of wheat."\(^{63}\)

Shortly before Christmas several acts received the royal assent: on December 18 an Act to prevent obstructions to the free passage of grain within the kingdom, and on December 24 an Act to permit bakers to make and sell bread of mixed flour, and an Act for allowing bounties on the importation of wheat, flour, Indian corn, Indian meal, or rye.

In the spring of 1796 the gentry tried to set a good example to the lower orders by reducing their consumption of wheat. Parson Woodforde dined with a dozen friends in April on the following Spartan fare:

Salmon boiled & Shrimp Sauce, some White Soup, Saddle of Mutton rosted & Cucumber &c., Lambs Fry, Tongue, Breast of Veal ragoued, rice Pudding the best part of a Rump of Beef stewed immediately after the Salmon was removed, 2nd. Course. A Couple of Spring Chicken, rosted Sweetbreads, Jellies, Maccaroni, frill'd Oysters, 2. small Crabs, & made Dish & Eggs. N.B. No kind of Pastrey, no Wheat Flour made use of and even the melted Butter thickened with Wheat-Meal, and the Bread all brown Wheat-Meal with one part in four of Barley Flour. The Bread was well made and eat very well indeed, may we never eat worse.\(^{64}\)

Meanwhile, when parliament reassembled, in February 1796, some members still sought scapegoats to blame for the scarcity. Mr. Lechmere again "flattered himself that he had discovered the source of the evil"

\(^{63}\)Ibid., 786.

\(^{64}\)Woodforde, The Diary of a Country Parson, 520.
the practice of consolidating farms. The great farmers were able to engross large quantities of grain and keep the price up. As long as large farms were not broken up "the great farmer would revel in luxury and voluptuousness, and the small one starve with his family in a cottage."65

In March as severe weather drove the price of wheat to almost the highest monthly average for the period, over 125s. 6d. per bushel, Lechemere returned to the attack on large farms, but now extended his list of villains to include mealmen and flour-dealers and some unidentified scoundrels who were exporting large quantities of wheat to Guernsey and Jersey from which it went on to France. The scarcity, he contended, was mainly "a mere bugbear, held forth to the people, under which the opulent farmers contrived to keep up a gross and scandalous monopoly, a mere pretense for alarming the nation, and promoting the selfish views of these suckers of blood from the people."66 He proposed that inspectors be appointed in each parish to report annually on the produce of every farm, and that the excisemen report on stocks held by every corn-dealer, and if anyone were apprehended in illegal exportation, the punishment should be death.67

65Parliamentary Register, XLIV, 56-7.  
66Ibid., 213.  
67Ibid., 213-4.
Other members tried to counter the notion that the scarcity was fictitious or artificial and branded such talk as mischievous, but there seemed to be a growing mental condition that would accept no other explanation than human agency. General Smith declared that there was a "combination between the miller and the farmer, and perhaps the merchant, to keep up the market." General Tarleton thought "jobbers in corn were the cause of the present high price of bread, which every gentleman of feeling and philanthropy must deplore."  

The Chancellor of the Exchequer eventually rose to damp such charges and claims. He reiterated the findings of the select committee and stated his conviction that the scarcity did not result from the activities of monopolists and jobbers, and that it was mischievous to incite the public against the various middlemen who were links in the chain that bound together a commercial country. It was reprehensible for men who from their situation in society should have more enlightened views, to "lend themselves to confirm vulgar errors and strengthen vulgar prejudices, to mislead ignorance, and enflame discontent."  

In summary, the legislative enactments in the course of the scarcity were few and for the most part

[68]Ibid., 219.  [69]Ibid., 220.  [70]Ibid., 224.
limited. The manufacture of starch and hair-powder from wheat was prohibited; distillery was forbidden; bread made of mixtures of wheat flour and the flour of other grains was recommended for public consumption; bounties were offered for wheat imports as an inducement to private merchants to supply the nation's needs, and obstruction to the free movement of corn within the kingdom was made a crime. To have attempted to go further than this would not only have run counter to the engrained conventional wisdom against governmental coercion of the public, but also any large scale effort, such as rationing, would have strained the abilities of government. Moreover, the times were politically tense, and a policy of Jacobin meddling with the people's food could not appear a wise one.

The dearth of wheat naturally enough stimulated renewed interest in enclosures. Sir John Sinclair, taking advantage of the moment of expensive foodstuffs and the interest it created in making Britain self-sufficient, made a vigorous effort to bring about a general enclosure act. The need for increased food supplies, and the opportunity of profit, encouraged even simple villagers in some parts of the country to petition parliament for permission to enclose commons and wastes in small farms. 71

71 The Times, August 7, 1795.
The expenses of enclosure, however, were great—a multitude of fees had to be paid, as well as the costs of ring-fencing and roads—and each enclosure required a separate act of parliament. Sinclair and the Board of Agriculture hoped to simplify the procedure and lighten the financial burden, thereby making enclosure less an obstacle to improvement of waste lands. Resistance to a general enclosure bill came largely from the Church, which feared for its tithes in a commutation, and from the lawyers and the clerks of the Houses, who stood to lose fees. Sinclair would have needed the active assistance of Pitt to obtain passage, and, as we know, he had alienated the minister long since.

Nevertheless, on December 11, 1795, Sinclair moved the House of Commons for a select committee to consider means of promoting the cultivation and improvement of the waste, unenclosed, and unproductive lands of the kingdom, in order to prevent any recurrence of the scarcity and distress that then prevailed. He was acting, he said, on behalf of the Board of Agriculture, and he hoped for the general and unanimous concurrence of the House.72

A committee was appointed and in less than two weeks made a lengthy report, composed largely of information submitted by the Board of Agriculture and its

72 *Parliamentary Register*, XLIII, 734-5.
surveyors. When the bill was introduced, based on the report, a member proposed that there should be two bills: one for "enabling proprietors to agree amongst themselves, and carry into effect, the inclosure of common lands," and the other "to compel those who were not willing to assent." He said he would agree to the former but would oppose the latter. Sinclair replied that such a measure would defeat the purpose of the bill, and that "the minority should be obliged to comply with a measure for the general interest." Lord Sheffield seconded Sinclair, declaring that the object of the parliament should be "not only to facilitate but also to encourage, and as much as possible to force an inclosure." He said that as matters then stood Great Britain did not produce enough food for her population, but that the cultivation of the waste lands would overcome that dependence on foreign supplies, and "so great a good should not depend on the insignificant whim of a few individuals."

Meanwhile, in the press many correspondents were galvanized into second thoughts about enclosure, and reservations were stated. Open fields should not be included with wastes, said one writer, as he noted that newly enclosed parishes which had formerly produced

73Ibid., XLIV, 334. 74Ibid., 335. 75Ibid.
considerable quantities of wheat produced far less after enclosure; he knew four parishes where the loss was about two thousand quarters. 76 Another correspondent suggested that the law should not permit lots to be more than 30 to 50 acres each, and no person should be allowed to take more than one, "for it is from small farms, and farmers of small capital, that we are to expect a reduction in the price of grain, pork, poultry, butter, &c." 77

In March and April 1796 Sinclair hoped that Pitt would whip the bishops and lawyers into line in support of the bill, and by May he was prepared to compromise somewhat on some provisions if that was required to obtain anything at all. An early adjournment for a general election, however, ended the bill's career. 78 Sinclair tried again in 1797 but the excitement of the food crisis had abated and did not recur to such a degree until 1800. 79

Even without a general enclosure bill to reduce the cost and simplify the process, enclosure acts increased from 42 in 1794 and 39 in 1795 to an astonishing

76 Gentleman's Magazine, LXVI (February 1796), 104
77 The Times, February 5, 1796.
78 Rosalind Mitchison, "The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)," English Historical Review, LXXIV (1959), 53.
It was, of course, the attraction of high prices and the opportunity of great profit that precipitated this near-doubling of enclosure acts. But improved husbandry techniques, more efficient production, increased yields also promised great profit, and improvement did not languish in the crisis period.

It would be gratifying if one could say that the profit-opportunities of the food crisis of 1795-6 were of sufficient magnitude to carry British agriculture uniformly over the top, to the perfection of efficiency, organization, technique, and production. But such was not the case. While a significant increase in enclosures occurred, and while improvement spread farther afield than before, perfection continued to be an ever-receding goal. The very fact of an unearned increment of profit, resulting from abnormal prices based on crop deficiency, in some cases made improvement appear unnecessary.

The landed interest emerged from the food crisis of 1795-6 with a slightly tarnished reputation for philanthropy. Individual examples of charity notwithstanding, the landed class generally appeared callous, opportunistic, and greedy. The wages of labor, which were regulated by the justices of the peace, were

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prevented from rising commensurately with the cost of living, and the great profits which their labor helped produce were not shared with the laborers.

Government, on the other hand, responded to the crisis in a rather fog-bound and directionless way. After an initial endeavor to meet the crisis by importing wheat on its own account, government seemed to suffer from a sense of sin -- it had eaten of the fruit forbidden by Adam Smith. Once its transgressions were made public, government contritely returned to orthodoxy and seemed fully determined to do nothing, because, as it is written, that government is best which governs least. And perhaps it was impossible for government to do anything on a sufficiently large scale. The result was a number of mainly negative and trivial measures designed to encourage the nation to economize on consumption while removing obstacles to importation and granting some encouragement to it. The prohibition of starch, hair powder, distillery, and fresh bread, and the agreement of the upper classes to reduce consumption of wheat bread and wheat flour in their families by one-third were essentially negative measures. The encouragement of importation by means of bounties was the only really positive step.

The failure of government to make more use of the Board of Agriculture in coping with a crisis that stemmed
so largely from agricultural causes seems incomprehensible to an age familiar with departments of agriculture as integral parts of the national bureaucracy. But, as explained in the previous chapter, Pitt did not look on the Board of Agriculture as an instrument of government which would hear and obey; rather, it was in his eyes a manifestation or personification of the landed interest, called into being as a reward to Sir John Sinclair for services rendered, and not fully amenable to the minister's discipline. The minister chose instead to work through the regular channels of government, such as the home office, lords lieutenant, justices of the peace, and local officials. Their uncoordinated and inexpert efforts to gather information for use in formulating remedial measures were almost useless. Government thus should have been warned and should have made provisions for a possible next time. Government did nothing of the sort, however, and the next food crisis was to be met at first with much the same sort of response.
CHAPTER VI

THE FOOD CRISIS, 1800-1: USES OF ADVERSITY

The food crisis of 1795-6 ended with the return of good weather and good harvests rather than as the result of any particular measures taken by government. The harvests of 1797 and 1798 were both reasonably good, and food was again in plentiful supply. But in 1799 and 1800 Britain suffered another agricultural catastrophe, worse even than that of 1795-6, and again the authorities groped for information respecting the extent of the calamity while ill-informed "experts" hurled charges of conspiracy and malfeasance. The lower orders bore the greatest distress as wheat prices and the prices of most other foodstuffs spiraled ever upward, leaving the poor in their desperation with no alternative but riot. Yet on this occasion government's attitude to its own role in the crisis changed significantly, and although many of the remedies administered were repetitions of measures taken in 1795-6, new features were introduced to provide government with more precise information on which to base its decisions. Moreover, the severity of the scarcity of 1800-1 so overwhelmingly impressed all sorts and conditions of men with the necessity of increasing tillage in Britain
that a bill to facilitate enclosures, albeit a truncated and distorted version of the original, was passed through both Houses and assented to, making it somewhat simpler and cheaper thereafter to enclose waste lands, improve them, and make them productive.

The crops of 1799 started well, but rains in August seemed incessant and indeed continued almost unabated into the autumn. Farmers reported the harvest unpromising, and prayed for a few dry weeks to "recover all the mischief," but soon they despaired of the season altogether. By October 1799 the newspapers were bewailing the high price of corn and the likelihood of its being still higher, and insisting that government should take action without delay to avert the impending calamity. And if the crop failure were not enough, it was reported that "the rot has made its appearance among the sheep."2

As if to reassure the press and the importers of corn, as well as the general public, the prime minister made a comforting statement in early October 1799, but the Monthly Magazine was apparently the only journal to report it. Pitt announced that British ports would be open until September 30, 1800, for imports of grain,

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2 The Times, October 10, 1799.
and government would not engage in any purchases which might interfere with the business of private merchants.  

The condition of the crops in December was not reassuring; grain prices were high and moving higher. Mutton prices were on the advance, as were cattle prices, which had been temporarily cheap because so many half-fed animals had been hurried to market shortly before.

The distress of the poor cried out for relief. London responded with "soup-houses," which had been first introduced in 1797. So successful were such establishments that the newspapers carried information and recipes with which private persons might set up similar institutions in their neighborhoods, and the home secretary, the duke of Portland, circularized the lords lieutenant extolling soup houses to relieve the poor. He also recommended that standard wheat bread composed of three-fourths wheat flour should be distributed in charity.

As early as September 1799, parliament took the usual first steps which seemed advisable when scarcity threatened. The distillation of any grain was suspended

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3 *Monthly Magazine*, VIII (1799), 821.
4 *The Times*, December 4, 1799.
in Scotland, while distillation of wheat was forbidden in England. Moreover, the crown was authorized to permit the free import of all sorts of grain and to suspend the export of corn.\textsuperscript{8} The great rise in wheat prices in 1799 was staggering: from 49s. 6d. in January they soared to 93s. 10d. in December.\textsuperscript{9} Public disorder followed almost logically.

The Times tried to stabilize the volatile situation with the following

\textit{FRIENDLY ADVICE, TO THE INDUSTRIOUS POOR; Or, How to make much of a Little in Times of Scarcity.}

The poor man who roasts or broils his meat -- throws it half into the fire.
The poor man who boils it -- throws half away in the water.
The poor man who turns it all into a broth, with a little flour, oatmeal, rice, or pease, according to their price, wants the less bread, and has twice the quantity for his money.

They that can scarce keep themselves, or a child, should never keep a dog.

Gin is poison; he that drinks it gives himself false spirits for a while, and rots his liver all the while. If a gin-maker be not the greatest enemy to the public, a gin-drinker is the greatest enemy to himself and family.

Sugar and tea were never in general use till about 60 years ago; since the poor have become tea-drinkers, half of them have been beggared and starved.

The poor man's profit is to be found in his time. And lost time is never to be found again. Laziness travels slow; and poverty soon overtakes it.


\textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
The Fear of God will make a man think well and act well; and, when he needs it, God will provide him a friend. Did you ever find a sincere but poor Christian a common beggar?

Remember Sin is the greatest evil; the Salvation of Christ, the best good; and Grace to change the heart, the poor man's richest treasure. Let the poor man then find his way to the cheapest market on the Saturday, to that place of worship where he can meet with the best advice on the Sunday; and go like an honest man to his labour on the Monday; following these simple rules, and he will be happy twice over; happy in time, happy to all eternity.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, the poor did not see wise saws as a sufficient answer to their problem. In their desperation they took matters into their own hands, and there were reports of riots in a number of places.¹¹

In parliament, a select committee, appointed earlier by the House of Commons to consider means of dealing with the scarcity, proposed on February 10, 1800, as interim recommendations, that all individuals be urged to practice strict economy in the use of wheat; that day-old bread would be consumed in smaller quantities than new bread; that charity and parochial relief should be given in other articles than bread, flour, and money; and that substitutes for wheat, such as soups, rice, and potatoes, should be promoted. The committee also thought it important to emphasize that government had agreed to abstain from purchasing corn in foreign markets, and

¹⁰The Times, January 6, 1800.
¹¹Ibid., February 10, 1800.
instead was leaving the procurement of such supplies entirely to private merchants. 12

These recommendations were discussed at length in both Houses, and an act was passed requiring that bread be at least twenty-four hours old before sale. The Company of Bakers subsequently reported that this measure reduced the sale of bread in London by at least one-sixth. 13

On March 6, 1800, the committee's second report proposed that bounties should be reintroduced to encourage grain imports from the Mediterranean and America; that the importance of individuals' reducing wheat consumption in their families should be stressed; that millers be required to grind wheat to different specifications to utilize more of the grain; that the use of rice, Indian corn, potatoes and fish, be encouraged; and that the distillery of grain be stopped. 14

With regard to the proposed bounty, the committee expressed concern that merchants would be afraid to speculate on importation, because of the great losses

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14 Ibid., 83.
some of them suffered in 1796, unless they received some assurance from parliament. Accordingly, the committee proposed a "conditional Bounty" whereby if the price of wheat imported before October 1, 1800, should fall below 90s. per quarter, government would make up the difference between the market price and 90s. In other words, the merchants were to be guaranteed against any losses this time. 15

On the matter of regulating millers, it appeared some millers were refusing to grind the appropriate flour for making brown bread — "it may be expedient to subject Millers to some new regulations" — and on the matter of stopping distillery, the select committee noted that in England the distillers were already forbidden to use wheat, and the barley used was of a damaged and inferior sort, unfit for human consumption. Moreover, the mash or refuse of the distilleries provided food for large numbers of cattle and swine in the neighborhood of London, and to cut off this supply would inevitably cause a diminution of the meat available and a rise in price. 16

Lord Hawkesbury, named to manage the bill, moved resolutions on the topics of the report, but an opposition member, Mr. Nicholls, asserted that the measures proposed would not provide relief "against the magnitude

15Ibid. 16Ibid., 83-4.
of the evil." Corn in America, he said, was too dear for Britain to expect any considerable quantity from there; the other major source of wheat was the Baltic, but prospects were uncertain from that quarter. Moreover, little was to be expected from British merchants in the present circumstances because they had been so ill-handled in 1796. Where then, he asked, could Britain look for relief "more immediately than from France? ... Why not, then, open a commerce with France, and the remedy of our wants would be at our door? The only adequate relief was in putting an end to the war."\textsuperscript{17}

The Chancellor of the Exchequer immediately informed the member that even if relations should be opened with France, that country did not grow enough wheat for her own use.\textsuperscript{18}

Outside parliament the scarcity was the subject of a lively discussion. Arthur Young, his amour propre bruised by comments made in debate in the House of Lords about his competence as an agricultural expert, responded with a hundred-page pamphlet entitled \textit{The Question of Scarcity Plainly Stated}, in which he explained his views that the scarcity was real and severe and caused by a bad season, not artificial and the result of greedy manipulation or war. He discussed, and generally approved,

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Parliamentary Register}, XI, 15-6.

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, 17.
the variety of economies which had been proposed to remedy the immediate distress, but he thought it wise to offer others of a permanent nature, in order to assure a more regular price of wheat. He proposed that the prices of grain should be ascertained and made public; a general enclosure act should be passed; land should be given to cottagers, so they could help maintain themselves; parochial aid in food should be given in articles other than wheat; the number of the population should be determined; and a register should be kept of the number of acres sown to wheat and rye.19

In the spring, after the parliamentary session ended, the distress of the populace continued unabated as prices kept up their steady climb. Reason gave way to rage against persons imagined to be responsible for the scarcity and high prices. Passions were fanned by newspaper articles which identified the guilty wretches for the public as regraters and forestallers, exploiting the people's distress.20 With feeling running high against supposed conspiracies of middlemen, many outbursts of violence were directed against millers and bakers as well as corn dealers.


20The Times, July 2, 1800.
In July 1800 public passion was further inflamed by the trial of John Rusby in London for the common law crime of regrating. A corn factor convicted of buying and re-selling on the same day in the same market, Rusby became the focus of popular attention, and the arguments of the prosecution along with Lord Kenyon's summing up for the jury had a most unfortunate effect on the mob, in London and in the provinces. From September to December a crescendo of riot and outrage, given impulse by the court's foolish behavior, built up to its height. Riots were reported everywhere around the country, while societies were formed for the purpose of prosecuting forestallers. At year's end the earl of Warwick reported in the Lords that "within these few months past, there were ... no less than 400 convictions throughout the country for forestalling, regrating, and monopolizing." The press reported burnings of barns and ricks in rural areas, and dealers in corn found themselves in double jeopardy, from the danger of trial and conviction for regrating and forestalling and from the danger of mobbing for some other fancied offense. Many


22The Times, September 11, 12, 13, 15, 1800.

23parliamentary Register, XIII, 409.
dealers simply closed their shops and ceased to conduct business, with the result that prices were further increased by the contraction.\textsuperscript{24}

In late September, as the disorders continued, the home secretary, the duke of Portland, sent circular letters to the lords lieutenant of the counties, informing them that according to the most optimistic estimates, the produce of the current crop "is not likely to amount to more than 3/4ths of an average crop."\textsuperscript{25} This unfortunate official pronouncement had the effect of triggering a near-panic. People were persuaded that famine was impending, and deep foreboding pervaded all levels of society. At the same time a crisis was gradually building through the late summer and early fall with respect to the Baltic, which eventually resulted in November in the Armed Neutrality and the stoppage of trade to Baltic ports, where Britain normally purchased the bulk of her wheat imports.\textsuperscript{26}

At the end of October, as the time approached for the assembling of parliament, The Times summoned it to its serious business, and warned against letting party divisions obstruct the "just remedy of the grievous extortions which devour us." Parliament must get to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24}Barnes, History of English Corn Laws, 82.
  \item \textsuperscript{25}Parliamentary Register, XIII, 264-5.
  \item \textsuperscript{26}Galpin, The Grain Supply of England, 17.
\end{itemize}
the bottom of the trouble and correct the faults of those
who had brought it on: it must push the landed interest
to revive the productive class of small farmers which
it had imprudently destroyed; it must restrain the
private banks and monied interest which were governing
markets and raising prices in a manner dangerous to the
country and to themselves; and parliament must act quickly
and decisively -- "whoever thinks the evil can be palliated,
is working (however innocent his intention) for insurrection
and revolt." 27

In his speech from the throne, prepared by the
ministry, the king declared that the present high price
of provisions had induced him to call parliament together
earlier than otherwise intended, and he urged that measures
be taken to prevent a recurrence of the distress by
promoting enclosures and the improvement of agriculture,
along with measures to encourage importation of all kinds
of grain from abroad, and to encourage economy and
frugality in the consumption of corn. He recommended
that investigation be made of any guilty combinations,
or fraudulent practices, but cautioned parliament to
"be careful to distinguish any practices of this nature
from that regular and long-established course of trade
which experience has shewn to be indispensable, in the

27 The Times, October 31, 1800.
Almost immediately Dudley Ryder, who was named to chair the Commons' select committee on the high price of provisions and to manage the administration's bills, introduced resolutions with respect to bounties on the importation of different kinds of grain. He remarked on the superiority of the system of an indemnity against loss, and proposed that the new schedule of bounties should be, on grains imported before October 1, 1801, the difference between market price and 100s. per quarter for wheat, and appropriate bounties for other grains.29

On November 24 Ryder's committee recommended laws for encouraging importation of grain by means of bounties, prohibiting exportation of foodstuffs, permitting duty-free import of provisions, prohibiting the distillation from grain and the use of wheat in starch, permitting damaged barley to be made into malt, allowing sugar to be used instead of malt in brewing, and lowering the duty on import of hops.30 There was nothing new in these proposals; they had all been tried and proved in the

28Parliamentary Register, XIII, 2.
30"First Report of the Select Committee on High Price of Provisions", Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 89.
earlier food crisis. The committee observed that it had available to it returns from inquiries made by the home office through the clergy, the Receivers of the Land Tax, and the Boards of Taxes, Stamps, and Excise, and although no separate set of returns was considered reliable, the general result, confirmed by local inquiries by members of the committee, was considered trustworthy. It showed a general deficiency of the wheat crop of one-fourth, of barley and oats as average but varying greatly from district to district. Stocks of British grain at harvest time were far below normal and in many places absolutely exhausted. Increased demands for seed were taking a greater part of the present crop, as more land was being sowed to wheat, and this added to the temporary distress, while also delaying the threshing of barley and oats. This report displays a greater air of confidence than some earlier ones, resulting from a greater range and variety of information available for consideration. The committee noted that grain imports into Britain in the year ending September 27, 1800, were as follows:

1,261,932 Quarters of Wheat and Flour, 1,261,932
67,988 - - - Barley, 67,988
479,320 - - - Oats. 479,320
300,693 cwt.- - Rice. 300,693

Prospects for the coming season showed north European wheat superior in quality and fairly abundant; in America

31Ibid., 90.
both wheat and rice appeared unusually plentiful. The committee supposed that Britain could expect the supply from foreign lands would at least equal to that of last year in wheat and flour, and the supply of oats and rice would greatly exceed it.32

The committee proposed that the king issue a proclamation urging strict economy in the consumption of wheat as a measure to help relieve the distress. It also proposed encouraging the expansion of the fisheries and finding and using substitutes for wheat.33

The debate, which raged long and heated, can be summed up as an exchange of political slurs and sneers, charges of Jacobinism taking advantage of the sufferings of the poor, and, from the other side, that "the war, and the vicious system upon which every thing was conducted," were the real causes of the distress.34

A theme constantly harped on by opposition members during debates on the dearth was the idea that the war with France was the root cause of all the troubles. Nearly every discussion came round eventually to blame the war and to suggest that the only remedy for scarcity was to make peace. In the discussion of a committee report in the House of Lords, the earl of Suffolk slyly

32Ibid.
33Ibid., 91.
34Parliamentary Register, XIII, 256.
pointed to the large number of cavalry regiments in the country as a cause of heavy consumption of oats, which could be better used as food for humans. The earl declared, there were in Britain twenty-nine regiments of light cavalry, a regiment of hussars, and seven regiments of dragoons, where there was no need whatever for them.\textsuperscript{35} In the House of Commons a similar question was asked the next day, and a spokesman for the administration replied that the member's object was not to reduce the quantity of oats consumed, but to reduce the number of horses in the cavalry. If you were to have cavalry for the public service, he said, they must be in good condition.\textsuperscript{36}

On December 31 the select committee on the high price of provisions submitted its last report to the House of Commons before the first parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland assembled. The committee made a statement outlining the savings which it expected would result from the measures which it proposed. The committee supposed that the usual consumption of wheat in Britain was about 7,000,000 quarters, but as the average annual import of wheat for the previous ten years was about 325,000 quarters, an average crop may have amounted to about 6,700,000 quarters. The last harvest, then, was probably about 5,000,000

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 375. \textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 381.
quarters, and the deficiency to be covered between October 1, 1800, and October 1, 1801, should be about 2,000,000 quarters, of which normally only about 300,000 quarters could be expected from abroad. The committee stated that since October 1, 1800, some 170,000 quarters of wheat had arrived from the United States, and, because of the abundant crop in America, flour in barrels equivalent to about 580,000 quarters of wheat could be expected. A small quantity of Canadian wheat would also be available. More importantly, rice, one pound of which was equivalent to eight pounds of flour, would be available from the United States and from India, to the equivalent of 630,000 quarters of wheat. The various economies enacted by parliament would add to the supply. Following is the committee's estimate, admittedly imprecise:
WHEAT OR EQUIVALENT AVAILABLE, 
OCTOBER 1, 1800, TO OCTOBER 1, 1801

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quarters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importation of Wheat since the beginning of October, above</td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importation of Flour from the United States equal to</td>
<td>580,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importation of Wheat from Canada</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice equivalent to</td>
<td>630,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoppage of Starch Manufactory</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoppage of Distilleries</td>
<td>360,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Coarse Meal</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrenchment</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,510,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although wheat prices continued their steady rise in November and December, ending the year at 137s. per quarter, there was no great tumult throughout the country in those months. The fact that parliament was in session and grappling with the problem of scarcity and dearth undoubtedly contributed to the relative tranquillity.

Nevertheless, feeling still ran high on the subject, and letters to the editor of The Times severely criticised the profiteering farmer who felt himself "entitled to riot on the very vitals, and fatten on the misery of the Public, by charging twenty times as much profit as the most luxuriant crop would have afforded him."  

And there was some disorder. A stack of wheat was burned in Kent, while threatening letters to farmers

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37 Parliamentary Register, XIII, 321-2, 592.
38 The Times, December 25, 1800.
were reported from York, Essex, Worcestershire, and Northamptonshire.39

During January 1801 the weekly average prices of wheat actually declined slightly, from 139s. on January 1 to 136s. on January 24, but they jumped up again at the end of the month to 140s. per quarter and continued a steady climb to the peak week ending March 21, when the average price was 156s. 2d.40

On January 31, 1801, Parson Woodforde in Norfolk noted in his diary that he had sold a load of wheat that day for the equivalent of 150s. per quarter, and he was apologetic:

I confess indeed and sincerely wish that it might be cheaper e'er long for the benefit of the Poor who are distressed on that Account -- tho' much alleviated by the liberal Allowance to them of every Parish. Pray God! send us better Times and all People better.41

In the spring, while prices continued their upward spiral and parliament continued its deliberations, the exasperated populace acted in its usual direct fashion. Riots were reported from Birmingham, Taunton, Exeter, Wellington, Liverpool, Hereford, Gloucester, and other

39Ibid., December 29, 1800.


places. In late April the disorders in the southwest were so acute that a correspondent of The Times declared that if something were not done, "this part of Devon will be as unsafe as Ireland." 

Large quantities of grain, however, were in the process of being imported. During 1801 more than 1.4 million quarters of wheat were brought into Britain, along with nearly a million quarters of other grains.

The arrivals of these large quantities began to produce a softening effect on prices in May and June. Following are weekly average prices of wheat from the high of the week ending March 21, 1801:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week ending</th>
<th>s. d.</th>
<th>Week ending</th>
<th>s. d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 21</td>
<td>156 2</td>
<td>June 13</td>
<td>129 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>154 2</td>
<td>June 20</td>
<td>129 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>154 8</td>
<td>June 27</td>
<td>129 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 11</td>
<td>153 4</td>
<td>July 4</td>
<td>129 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 18</td>
<td>150 6</td>
<td>July 11</td>
<td>132 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 25</td>
<td>148 6</td>
<td>July 18</td>
<td>136 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2</td>
<td>143 11</td>
<td>July 25</td>
<td>141 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9</td>
<td>135 8</td>
<td>Aug. 1</td>
<td>138 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 16</td>
<td>127 4</td>
<td>Aug. 8</td>
<td>132 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 23</td>
<td>120 5</td>
<td>Aug. 15</td>
<td>124 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 30</td>
<td>124 4</td>
<td>Aug. 22</td>
<td>113 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6</td>
<td>126 8</td>
<td>Aug. 29</td>
<td>99 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

42 The Times, March 28, 1801.
43 Ibid., April 28, 1801.
45 Ibid., 213.
On June 9 riots were reported in several parts of Lancashire and troops moved to the troubled areas to keep control.46 Thereafter, reports of importation "to an extent infinitely beyond our consumption"47 and rosy prognostications of the coming harvest ("promise of the most abundant harvest perhaps ever known"48) took the pressure off the keepers of the peace. The harvest of 1801 indeed turned out to be moderately abundant, and for a margin of safety, government issued orders that the bounty on importation should continue until further orders.49

An act to facilitate the enclosure of waste lands, as we saw in the previous chapter, was introduced during the food crisis of 1795-6, but failed of passage largely because the Church feared for its tithes and also because of the opposition of lawyers and the clerks of the two Houses who stood to lose fees.50 The moderately abundant crop of 1796 undermined the urgency of bringing additional land into cultivation, and it was not until scarcity again stalked the land that it was possible to contemplate a successful general enclosure bill.

46The Times, June 9, 1801.
47Ibid., June 15, 1801.
48Ibid., July 6, 1801.
49Ibid., October 5, 1801.
50See above, page 202.
On March 18, 1800, Sir John Sinclair asked the House of Commons to appoint a select committee to consider ways to bring the waste lands into cultivation. He did not, however, propose a general enclosure act which would enable the parties to divide and allot waste lands by consent of the majority in a parish, without parliamentary approval. He felt that such a measure would attract such opposition as to insure its defeat. Instead, he sought ways to make the present system simpler and less expensive.\(^{51}\)

Sir John's committee heard the evidence of a number of persons who had participated in enclosures in various capacities, and on April 17, 1800, reported to the House. The typical enclosure procedure was described, with roughly a dozen steps just to get parliamentary approval before the actual enclosure could take place. Each step along the way involved a welter of fees and charges, in addition to the great expense of the enclosure proper. On many occasions the presence of witnesses and solicitors was required at Westminster to give consent before the committees of both Houses. The committee introduced resolutions to simplify and cheapen the procedure by permitting affidavits, by regulating solicitors' duties and fees, and by incorporating in one general act all clauses which appeared in general practice to be usual.

\(^{51}\)Parliamentary Register, XI, 59.
in bills of enclosure. The committee avoided angering the clerks of the Houses by stating it found no reason to object to the usual fees charged by the clerks, as they did not generally appear to operate as a discouragement, but the committee suggested that consideration be given to cases of small acreage or low value where regular fees might be out of proportion to the total cost. A table of the fees payable in both Houses was appended to the report, showing an average charge of about £170 per bill of enclosure, which sum might discourage some enclosures. The incorporation of all customary clauses in one act, which could be referred to, would have the effect of shortening all the official documents and petitions and thereby reducing the cost of charges made on a per page basis.52

Outside parliament Arthur Young tried to whip up public support for the measure and declared that there could be no doubt about general opinion toward the bill, but it had been quiescent and shown mainly in conversation. If the rest of the country felt as the county of York felt and expressed itself so, the table of the House of Commons would be covered with petitions, "and the speaker in his chair smothered with parchment."53

52"Report of Select Committee on Bills of Inclosure," Reports from Committees of the House of Commons, 1715-1802, IX, 229-38.

Only quibbling opposition was met in both Houses to the principles of the resolution -- the Lord Chancellor doubted whether any legislative regulations could serve to promote the cultivation and improvement of waste lands and commons, but believed rather that enclosures depended on the spirit, activity, and ability of private individuals who felt it was to their advantage to enclose.\textsuperscript{54}

On July 11 the Lords agreed to the resolutions, but parliament adjourned for the summer before any further action could be taken.\textsuperscript{55}

When parliament reassembled on November 11, 1800, the king's speech from the throne opening the session urged parliament to adopt measures "to alleviate this severe pressure, and to prevent the danger of its recurrence, by promoting, as far as possible, the permanent extension and improvement of our agriculture," which meant enclosure.\textsuperscript{56}

Yet not all opinion acclaimed enclosure as the panacea. A correspondent to the \textit{Gentleman's Magazine} criticized the Board of Agriculture for its proposals which were too sweeping and ill-considered; gradual enclosure, fair to all, was urged.\textsuperscript{57} Another

\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Parliamentary Register}, XII, 238.
\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Ibid.}, 352. \textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}, XIII, 2.
\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Gentleman's Magazine}, LXX (October 1800), 941.
correspondent attacked enclosures as the cause, not the cure of high prices; enclosures "certainly tend to the reduction of small farms; consequently, enable gentlemen of property to conduct their own farms, and by that means store the grain, and bring the same to market as they please." 58

During the spring of 1801, although wheat prices reached their zenith and desperation broke into violence in many places, no progress was made on the enclosure bill, perhaps because of the political crisis related to Pitt's resignation in February. However, on May 15 Lord Carrington, president of the Board of Agriculture, presented a new bill, a general enclosure bill, "Providing for the Inclosure and Improvement of certain Waste and Uncultivated Lands in England and Wales, without special application to Parliament in such cases." 59 In explaining his bill to the House Carrington said it aimed at economy and dispatch by means of a simplified procedure. It provided that any two proprietors of rights of commonage on waste lands might appeal to the quarter sessions for enclosure, after which the matter would be put to vote among all the proprietors of such rights, and if a

58Ibid., 944.

59Parliamentary Register, XV, 290.
majority decided for enclosure, those who opposed would nevertheless have to join in the expense.\(^{60}\)

At once the lawyers and bishops gathered against him. They quibbled and amended the bill to death while proclaiming all along their devotion to its principles.\(^{61}\)

The Lord Chancellor questioned the source of the bill; its origin, he said, was "with certain bodies of men /the Board of Agriculture/, to whose consideration it was proposed before Parliament was resorted to. To these bodies of men, as such, the Constitution of this country by no means entrusted the investigation of such topics."\(^{62}\)

The earl of Rosslyn (Lord Loughborough) voiced his distrust of the measure as likely to infringe on old established laws and customs interwoven in the constitution, and believed that in such times as the present "the greatest caution should be observed in introducing any system of innovation."\(^{63}\)

The bishop of St. David's went on record as opposed to any alteration of the laws regarding tithes.\(^{64}\)

Trifling side issues and irrelevancies were brought in

\(^{60}\)Ibid., 376-7.

\(^{61}\)Rosalind Mitchison, "The Old Board of Agriculture (1793-1822)," English Historical Review, LXXIV (1959), 58.

\(^{62}\)Parliamentary Register, XV, 377.

\(^{63}\)Ibid., 378.

\(^{64}\)Ibid., 380.
and discussed at length, until after two weeks the bill groaned under two hundred amendments; Rosslyn then suggested that the proper procedure would be to withdraw the present bill and start again. Lord Carrington persevered until the bill's opponents insisted that the incumbent, the patron, and the bishop should all have power of veto over the commutation of tithe. Then, recognizing that the "greatest legal talents in the country had arranged themselves in opposition to it," Carrington and the committee decided on June 5 not to try to proceed further with the bill in that session.65

But in the House of Commons an effort was made to salvage as much as possible of its bill. The old bill was withdrawn and a new one brought forward "for consolidating in One Act certain Provisions usually inserted in Acts of Inclosure; and for proving the several Facts usually required on the passing of such Acts." It passed through the various stages in the House in three days, was slightly amended by the Lords, and received the royal assent on the closing day of the session.66

Pitt's biographer, J. Holland Rose, lays the blame for the earlier failures of the enclosure bill at Pitt's door, saying that his failure to avert the hostility of

65Ibid., 448.

66Journals of the House of Commons, 1547-1900 (Readex Microprint ed.) LVI, 560, 621, 622, 635, 656, 665.
the bishops and lawyers of the upper house "convicts him either of apathy or of covert opposition," while the success of Addington's bill in 1801 demonstrates that the obstacles to such a measure were far from insurmountable.  

The "Act for consolidating in One Act certain Provisions usually inserted in Acts of Inclosure" enacted those matters which were customarily included in parliamentary enclosures, such as appointment of commissioners, oaths, surveying of parishes, record keeping, appeals procedures, roads and fences requirements, the admission of affidavits instead of personal appearance, and other such provisions, unless otherwise provided in individual enclosure bills.

The act was a disappointment to many persons. Lord Sheffield declared that the Act might be useful, in saving some expenses for witnesses, but was not adequate to the need. Indeed, the procedure of parliamentary enclosure continued as before the passage of the Act, and a parliamentary committee still had to be satisfied; however, the private act thereafter became much shorter, as so many of

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68 41 George III, c. 109.  
69 Ibid., clause XLIV.  
70 Parliamentary Register, XV, 754.
the usual provisions had been enacted once and for all. The consequence of the Act was to make the process of enclosure "less onerous and expensive."71 Certainly the annual number of enclosures rose between 1801 and the end of the Napoleonic wars. The following table, extracted from a select committee report of 1836, illustrates the increase:

BILLS OF ENCLOSURE, 1783 to 181272

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<th>Year</th>
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Government's information-gathering ability improved greatly in the period of the food crisis. Gradually and piecemeal, government came to realize that it needed

71 Thomas Edward Scrutton, Commons and Common Fields (1887; reprint by Burt Franklin, 1970), 155.

72 "Select Committee on Agricultural Distress" (1836), British Parliamentary Papers, Agriculture, VII, Pt. II, 501.
better information regarding availability and consumption of foodstuffs. But the establishment of an information-gathering service was not the work of a day, and government was reluctant to arouse public hostility needlessly by inquiring too closely into the possessions and intentions of subjects. Without adequate information, however, government was forced to make decisions blindly. Early in the food crisis of 1800 Arthur Young wrote that "Without undoubted facts, we can have only principles to appeal to."73 Others pursued this line of thought and proposed ways of determining the magnitude of the scarcity and the size of the grain stocks on hand. An opposition member of the Commons, Mr. Dent, stated on March 17 that much harm had been done by the alarms which the activities of the committee on the high price of provisions had circulated through the country. The committee should first have ascertained whether the scarcity really existed, and perhaps this could have been achieved through the clergy.74 But government's attitude in March 1800 was still pre-modern; the Chancellor of the Exchequer expressed shock, and replied that not only could there be no possible means of determining the quantity of grain in a man's possession, but also to inquire about it would

73 Young, The Question of Scarcity Plainly Stated, 5.

74 Parliamentary Register, XI, 49.
have the effect of raising prices and adding to the alarm. Moreover, he said, there could be "no greater violation of the rights of subjects, than to attempt thus narrowly to investigate their possessions and property." He also disapproved of employing the clergy in such a "degrading" way.75

However, because of the growing seriousness of the food crisis, a fundamental change took place in the summer and fall of 1800 in government's attitude toward information-gathering. In October 1800 the home secretary, the duke of Portland, made use of the clergy as information-gatherers when he had the bishops send questionnaires to the incumbents relative to crops, prices, and substitute foodstuffs.76

Simultaneously, other projects were set in train in 1800 to collect information for government's use. The Times reported at the end of October that the lords commissioners of the treasury had ordered the surveyors of every district in the kingdom to report by November 5 on all the corn stored in their jurisdictions.77 The Board of Trade conducted similar inquiries in late 1800. Yet, apparently, very little use was made of the information, except to confirm what the members had learned during the recess,

75 Ibid., 50.
76 See above, page 221.
77 The Times, October 31, 1800.
although all the data were transmitted to the Commons' select committee inquiring into the dearth.

By November 1800 some members of the Commons were becoming clearer in their own minds what they felt would be useful. Mr. Sheridan declared that an inquiry should be made into the amount of corn produced, the number of acres that produced it, and the districts in which it was located. The purpose, he said, was "to possess real knowledge upon the subject, that we might not be legislating in the dark." 78

Determining the size of harvests and quantity of stocks on hand was, in the view of many persons, only half of the work to be done. Equally important was to learn the number of mouths which would consume those foodstuffs. Arthur Young never tired of reminding people that he had advocated a census many years before it came about. In the spring of 1800 he brought up the subject again, noting that in 1771 he had published a pamphlet entitled Proposals to the Legislature for numbering the People. He wished in 1800 to repeat the suggestion, and to it added another "which would enable Administration to form nearly an accurate judgment of the proportion between the food raised

78 Parliamentary Register, XIII, 254.
and the mouths that eat it," that was, to obtain an annual return of the acreage sown to wheat in the kingdom.79

It should be remembered that Sir John Sinclair's plan for the Board of Agriculture, as first conceived, provided for ascertaining "the amount of population of the state, and the causes of its increase or decrease."80 This project, along with so much else that Sir John hoped to do, was pushed aside by the twists of fate.

In the event, however, Charles Abbot rose in the House of Commons on November 19, 1800, and proposed a bill to ascertain the population of Great Britain, which, he declared, would be a measure of great usefulness and neither greatly difficult nor time-consuming. He believed that in times like the present it was important to know the size of the demand for which a supply was needed. The country needed to know, he said, whether an increasing population was one of the main causes which had turned Britain from a wheat-exporter to a wheat-importer in the last thirty years. There were three million acres of land fit for the plow but lying uncultivated on the island; one could determine what proportion should be put to use for public subsistence and also to prevent a recurrence of the scarcity. Abbot's plan was to follow

79Young, The Question of Scarcity Plainly Stated, 83.
80See above, page 143.
a procedure used in 1786 for obtaining information about the poor rates. All that would be necessary, he said, would be to pass an act requiring the resident clergy and parish officers in every parish and township to answer a few questions.81

No concerted opposition to the bill was expressed, although the usual hair-splitting and nit-picking took place. Several members stated that the bill would fall short of its goal, which they took to be to determine the causes of the present high prices, because the bill did not also provide for investigating the amount of corn grown. It would be pointless simply to know the number of people unless one also knew the quantity of corn available to feed them.82 In the Lords a more serious objection was raised by Lord Grenville, who thought it improper that the clergy should be charged with such a duty. He upheld the principle of keeping the civil functions of the State from being mixed with the ecclesiastical, and wished to avoid assigning a compulsory civil task to the clergy.83 When it was pointed out that clergymen served as magistrates and as commissioners of the land tax, he replied that those tasks were optional, and an amendment was carried to exclude the clergy from the gathering of population information, except for

81 Parliamentary Register, XIII, 190-2.
82 Ibid., 195. 83 Ibid., 495.
information relating to births, baptisms, marriages, and burials, which records were already kept by the parish clergy.84

The Act was accepted on December 31, 1800, and provided for the overseers of the poor in England on March 10, 1801, to go from house to house in their parishes and determine the number of males and females in each house and their occupational classifications, whether employed chiefly in agriculture, manufacturing or handicraft, or other. Clergymen were to provide information respecting burials and baptisms, from their records for the year 1700 and every tenth year thereafter to 1790 and for every year after 1790, and information on the number of marriages for every year since 1754. In Scotland these same questions were to be answered mainly by schoolmasters. The data were to be sent to the home secretary who should prepare an abstract to be laid before parliament.85

The execution of the Act seemed at the time to go off smoothly enough, although Prime Minister Addington felt compelled to make a few veiled threats to get all the required data from some county officers.86

Britain's melancholy experience in the food crisis of 1800-1 gave painful proof, if proof were needed, that

84Ibid., 501-3.
8541 Geo. III, c. XV.
86Parliamentary Register, XVI, 378.
the country's agriculture had not kept pace with the growth of population. Administratively, however, a significant change occurred in government's view of its task and how to perform it. The do-nothing philosophy of the past gave way to an understanding that a more active role was required, and full knowledge of the facts needed. Government, and perhaps society at large, came to a realization that their impressionistic intelligence system was unequal to the challenge. One might "suspect" that the national harvest was deficient by one-fourth, but the precise degree of deficiency was wanted. One might "feel" that the population had increased in the past generation, but the exact numbers were needed. National policy could not be intelligently framed or efficiently conducted in ignorance of the facts.

The agricultural interest emerged from the food crisis of 1800-1 as the hope and the despair of the nation. Every eye, albeit glazed from the recent experience, was on the waste and uncultivated lands which were to be improved as a bulwark against another onslaught of the Second Horseman. And, of course, it was the agricultural interest which should preserve the nation inviolate against famine, but the nation's feelings about its preserver were decidedly ambivalent. Might not the landed interest continue its movement toward larger farms, to the extermination of the yeoman farmer?
Might not large farmers gain monopolistic control of the food supply through their wealth which permitted them to withhold crops from the market until prices were suitably extortionate? Some aspects of improvement did not seem a betterment.

At any rate, the sustained high prices of food in the crisis of 1800-1 acted as a spur to further enclosure, the prelude to improved agricultural practices. More land would be cultivated in the future, and more food would be produced for the burgeoning population.
CHAPTER VII

THE STATE OF BRITISH AGRICULTURE IN 1801

The eighteen years covered by this study, culminating in the passage of the Enclosure Consolidating Act of 1801 and almost equally divided into periods of war and peace, illustrate both the change and the continuity which were present in British agriculture at the end of the eighteenth century. The spirit of improvement invigorated many members of the landed interest and impelled them to cast off old restraints and to experiment with new methods toward the goal of increasing yields and profits. Such behavior was both patriotic and rewarding. Some other members of society, however, entertained doubts about the effects of the new methods and questioned the social and economic costs of many of the innovations. Not every change is an improvement, they pointed out, and a wistful longing for the tranquility of ancient days and ways inspired contempt for new-fangled theories and practices in agriculture. Moreover, the high prices of corn brought on by the war presented farmers with a kind of unearned increment, for which they had to put forth less than commensurate effort. Accordingly, the pressure of competition which heavy clay lands had
felt from lighter sandy lands ceased to operate as all profited alike, and the advantages of improvement were felt only relatively.¹

The dazzling profits of the dearth years, however, depended on having crops to sell, and the years of great scarcity were not golden ones for every occupier. The Farmers Magazine in 1807 wrote that "In 1799, many farmers could do little more than pay their rents, notwithstanding the amazing prices given for grain."² But certainly, on the whole, the upward trend was an enjoyable one for farmers, and acted as a spur to improved agriculture.

Arthur Young in 1801 presented a calculation showing that doubling the price of corn resulted in nearly trebling the net profit of the farmer.³ He also presented a comparison of the expenses of stocking a farm to yield £500 per year in 1788 and 1801. The cost rose from £3,928 in 1788 to £5,897 in 1801, or a fifty per cent increase. In the comparison Young records an increase of rent of twenty per cent (from £500 to £600) in that thirteen-year period; other writers mention a greater rise over a longer period of time. William Morton Pitt, who surveyed Worcestershire


³Annals of Agriculture, XXXVII (1801), 351-2.
for the Board of Agriculture in 1794, 1805, and again in 1807, quoted a local informant as saying that in 1776 common field and arable land rented for 10s. to 20s. per acre, pasture at 20s., and water-meadow at 30s., and the rental of the whole county was estimated at £300,000 annually. In 1807, when Pitt re-surveyed Worcestershire, he estimated that the rent had at least doubled since the first calculation. In Norfolk the rental value of Thomas William Coke's estate increased in a similar proportion, roughly doubling from 1776 to 1816.

Some landlords, however, claimed to be greatly forebearing about raising rents. During a debate in the House of Lords in 1800, relative to the high prices of provisions, the earl of Warwick said he was renting some of his land at 20s. per acre and he knew that the farmer of the land was making £30 per acre on it! At such profits farmers could easily afford the extravagant and luxurious style of life for which they were becoming notorious. Moreover, at such profits they could afford to leave a third of their lands uncultivated and still make more than tidy returns on the remainder. When the earl had

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recently offered one of his estates for sale, he said, the only person who could afford to purchase it was a farmer. Farmers as a class, he declared, were making fortunes more rapidly than anyone else, and it was the public who paid.  

The Times in late 1801 carried an analysis of the price-rent relationship and speculated on the likely consequences of the increased levels. It quoted Arthur Young to the effect that before 1795 a farmer was amply remunerated for all his expenses and twelve per cent interest on capital if the produce of the land sold for five times the rent. In those years barley sold for less than 3s. per bushel and the farmer was content. In 1801 barley was selling at nearly 6s. per bushel, and efforts were being made to increase the price on the pretext that growers needed to be encouraged, although the price of 6s. worked out at about twelve times their rent. The newspaper theorized that "the landlord has taken advantage of the recent state of our markets to advance his rents to the price of grain, and has now succeeded to raise the price of produce to this increase of rent," and it asserted that the end result would be to raise the price of labor, until England found herself undersold abroad and ruined.  

6 Parliamentary Register, XIII, 160.  
7 The Times, December 21, 1801.
What actually resulted was a rush to enclose more land to be let at such delightful rents.

A generally accepted concomitant, if not cause, of the higher level of prices and rents was the amalgamation of many small farms into fewer large farms. It was not human perversity and wickedness but long-run economic forces which gave large farms an advantage of efficiency, capital, and opportunity in the market, and the tendency had been operating throughout the eighteenth century. Even so, there were some areas where small farms multiplied during the period because of local forces working in the opposite direction, and England in 1800 was characterized as generally still a country of small farms. Precise data are not available respecting the distribution of large and small farms before and after enclosure; we can only arrive at impressions for parishes and counties. Lincolnshire, for example, is usually described as composed mainly of small farms -- a typical parish was said not to have a single farm over forty-eight acres.

But the men of the time viewed the tendency toward large farms as a great social evil. Not only did amalgamation of farms reduce the supply of foodstuffs, one


great farm often yielding no more garden produce than one small one had previously yielded, but also the breaking up of the living accommodations of small farmers and their families attendant on amalgamation brought a crisis through the countryside. The dispossessed small farmer thereafter had only his weekly wages for the support of his family. The Board of Agriculture in 1800 urged landowners to provide cottages and small acreages for tenants who were distressed by throwing small farms together.10

Enclosures were also blamed because they were thought of as clearly tending to the reduction of small farms,11 and the result of enclosures was the disappearance of the yeoman and his replacement by large operators who were not simply farmers but agricultural businessmen, functioning as graziers, grain dealers, livestock dealers, millers, brokers, and sometimes as partners in country banks.12

Individual landlords who sought to bring about improvements of their estates often paid careful attention to the provisions of the leases on which their lands were let. The duke of Bedford, a preeminent improver, chided his tenants in 1801 for their slackness. His Grace's

10The Times, September 23, 1800.
11Gentleman's Magazine, LXXI (October 1800), 944.
12Ibid., LXXI (July 1800), 588-9.
agent read the tenants a letter from the duke calling attention to the covenants which were agreed to but not always observed by the tenants. They injured themselves, as well as the public, by their failure, he said, and the duke urged them to see for themselves the good effects of proper management, and the improvement of the land, which resulted from a strict adherence to the provisions of the leases.¹³

Other landlords used leases in the war years as a means of inducing tenants to undertake alterations and extensions of buildings; rent was sometimes held to a moderate level in return for the tenant's agreeing to pay for certain permanent improvements on the farm. However, by the end of the eighteenth century the tendency of leases was toward rack renting, or full annual value, with the landlord supplying fixed capital in the form of buildings and facilities and the tenant providing the working capital.¹⁴

Much attention was given during the period to the improvement of livestock by means of selective breeding. Both carcass and fleece of sheep were important to the breeders, and various experiments were essayed. Notable

¹³The Times, January 8, 1801.
¹⁴Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, 228-9.
was the king's flock of Spanish merino sheep, which he imported in 1792 and from which he occasionally gave rams and ewes to serious improvers. Sir Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society and member of the Board of Agriculture, was entrusted with the management of this venture by the king. The superfine wool of these sheep was intended to be the start of a new branch of Britain's cloth industry. Lord Somerville, second president of the Board of Agriculture, stood up for the native produce and in 1800 pledged never to wear any fine cloth of Spanish wool, but in 1801 we read that his native flock has been improved "with a judicious mixture of the Spanish wool," and he was selling his fleeces at attractive prices.

The business of acquiring the right breeding stock led to an inflation of prices which testified to the liveliness of the improving spirit. The duke of Bedford in 1800 gave 700 guineas to a breeder for one Leicestershire ram for one season, while Thomas William Coke was reported in the press to be promoting the cause of improved breeding, à la Bedford, by holding his own agricultural shows, although he had been doing so for many years. In

15 *European Magazine*, XXXVIII (September 1800), 174-5.
16 *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXX (June 1800), 560.
17 *The Times*, August 22, 1801.
the summer of 1801 it was reported that Coke's sheep shearing, attended by many eminent persons, exhibited some excellent specimens of Down and Leicester sheep, and many lots of Down ewes were sold at high prices. During the course of the meeting Coke announced his plan to award premiums for promoting the improvement of livestock breeding.\textsuperscript{19}

Admirable as was such public-spirited generosity, a correspondent of \textit{The Times} wrote that the result of selective breeding was stock too expensive to afford and too fat to eat. Both breeders and agricultural societies were condemned for having "done harm, and very much harm." The monthly publications of the societies were accused of creating "a great deal of speculation and market-government, if they do not actually regulate both crop and market." The fancy prices of breeding stock brought on high-priced beef and mutton because the beasts must "fetch back to the Farmer the price of their nobility." The whole pattern of agricultural society was charged with deterioration -- when the peer turns farmer, the farmer apes the peer and "learns to devour poultry instead of selling it." His wife and daughter feel themselves too grand to work, and the daughter learns to "dance or jabber school French."\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., July 8, 1801. \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., November 25, 1801.
The pressure of high prices caused a group of people at Exeter to form a kind of buyers' co-operative to purchase sheep and fatten them for sale to members at cost, by which means, although they had been "fattened with much care, and at more than ordinary cost, yet the expence to the subscribers was only 5½s. per lb., being nearly 3d. per lb. below the current price of the market."\(^21\) Extremely high prices for beef and mutton were heard of, and while they provoked numerous complaints, they also encouraged more vigorous activity among improving breeders and growers to take advantage of the opportunities for profit.

While high prices urged along the improvement of agriculture in 1801, the Board of Agriculture also did its part to stimulate increased activity. But the Board's performance in general was disappointing. Lord Somerville, who succeeded Sinclair as president in 1798, noted that the Board "has not in the country been a popular institution."\(^22\) By-passed by government and viewed as an aristocratic oligarchy by the majority of the gentry and farmers, it dwindled in effectiveness.\(^23\) But it continued

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\(^{21}\)Ibid., December 28, 1801.

\(^{22}\)"Address to the Board of Agriculture, on its Meeting, the 8th of May, 1798, by Lord Somerville," Gentleman's Magazine, LXVIII (September 1798), 770.

bravely to encourage and exhort. Under Somerville, who observed that "farmers are not a reading class of people," publications were radically decreased, and premiums were distributed as an incentive to improvement.24

Until the French war began improvers showed little interest in machinery or labor-saving devices in agriculture. But the absorption of several hundred thousand men by the armed services created enough of a shortage of labor to make threshing machines and other labor-saving devices interesting.25 Early in the war period the Lancashire reporter for the Board of Agriculture wrote that although his county was not corn country, yet, labor being dear, several threshing machines had already been introduced, one of which worked by water and "thrashes, winnows, and grinds (or crushes, the corn for provender), all at the same time."26 Other hand-machines were mentioned, such as churns, hay-cutters, lactometers for testing milk, winnowing machines, and a machine for cleaning corn of 

24"Address to the Board of Agriculture, . . . by Lord Somerville," Gentleman's Magazine, LXVIII (September 1798), 772.


pebbles or dirt "of which foreign cargoes are, sometimes, too full." 27

The agricultural societies awarded prizes for ingenious machines and publicized numerous inventions and improvements, especially of plows. In 1798, when the earl of Egremont held his annual plowing contest at Petworth, the first prize went to a clergyman's improved Rotherham plow, with one pair of oxen and an eight-year-old boy as driver. Among the losers was Lord Somerville, president of the Board of Agriculture, "who started with his improved double-furrowed plough, which beat the Royal ploughs at Windsor." 28 In 1801 before an array of worthies, including the Prince of Wales, the Prince of Orange, and many noblemen, gentlemen, and farmers, a prize was awarded to a Mr. Lester of Northampton who "exhibited in the field a Chaff Engine upon an entire new principle, which from its simplicity, expedition, and accuracy of work met with universal approbation, as being the completest and most useful machine for that purpose ever seen in the County of Sussex." 29 But much experimentation and technical development were still necessary before machinery would play a significant role in British agriculture.

27 Ibid.

28 The Times, November 29, 1798.

29 Ibid., August 19, 1801.
Improved land and water communications continued to demonstrate their utility, and canal-building proceeded throughout the period and beyond, while in some places "road clubs" were formed to see to road construction and repairs. The value of improved communications was admitted, and those who improved them were praised, such as, for example, Lord Coventry in Worcester, who, it was said, "had brought a million of money into Worcestershire, from his skilful exertions in making roads through the county."

It is paradoxical that the wages of labor should have remained at a low level during a period of wartime labor shortage and while the prices of nearly everything else rose sharply. The paradox is doubly striking when it is remembered that laissez-faire was the accepted philosophy of the day, yet the wages of labor were kept low by administrative action, on the grounds that the forces tending to raise wages were of only a temporary nature and would soon dissipate. In relatively "normal" years laborers in husbandry often did not earn enough to cover the expenses of subsistence; in years of dearth the gap between income and expense widened drastically and forced many families to seek relief from the parish authorities.

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30 W. Pitt, General View of the Agriculture of ... Worcester, 262-3, 268-73.

31 Ibid., 261.
The Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601\textsuperscript{32} placed the responsibility for poor relief on the parishes and provided for the appointment of overseers of the poor who should "raise weekly or otherwise, by taxation of every inhabitant," a sum of money to acquire a stock of "flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron, and other necessary ware and stuff, to set the poor on work."\textsuperscript{33} If any individual parish was unable to raise a sufficient sum, two or more parishes might be united for the purpose.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1662 the Settlement Act provided for returning the unemployed poor to the parish where they were last legally settled, thus preventing them from going where work was available.\textsuperscript{35} In 1722 the practice was begun of providing poor houses in which the poor who sought parish relief were required to reside.\textsuperscript{36} In 1795 it was enacted that no one should be removed to the place of his last legal settlement until he actually became chargeable to the parish where he was residing,\textsuperscript{37} and in the following year an act provided that overseers might in special cases relieve industrious poor persons in their own houses.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{32}43 Elizabeth c. 2.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35}13 & 14 Car. II c. 12.
\textsuperscript{36}9 Geo. I c. 7.
\textsuperscript{37}35 Geo. III c. 101.
\textsuperscript{38}36 Geo. III c. 23.
At the end of the eighteenth century the combined effects of growing population, deficient harvests, the war, and lagging wage levels created a horde of distressed and unemployed poor whose plight demanded the attention of government and society. Yet, as Sir Frederic Morton Eden pointed out in 1797, "Paupers, comparatively speaking, are but rarely found among those employed in agriculture." On the contrary, "manufactures and commerce are the true parents of our national Poor." It was the vicissitudes of industry that generated the legions of unemployed whose maintenance became the burden of the landed interest and others who paid the poor rate. In 1800, when parliament was considering a measure for the relief of the poor, Robert Peel said that he hoped the bill would not throw a burden on the landed interest which properly should be borne by the commercial interest, for many of the unemployed had previously been employed in a parish other than that of their settlement, and those who had received the benefit of their labor should share the responsibility for supporting them. Certainly, he said, landed property should not bear the whole burden.


40Ibid., I, 61.

41Parliamentary Register, XI, 55.
Even though agricultural workers as a whole might have more employment than industrial workers, their wages were inadequate, especially during periods of dearth and high prices, and they had to seek parochial relief. When the question was raised in parliament whether parochial relief was charity or the workers' due, an opposition member declared in ringing terms that relief of the poor was not charity, rather it was their right, based on the policy of government. If government kept down the wages of labor, so that his wages would not support a laboring man, he was entitled to relief.42

The wages of labor varied greatly from place to place and from job to job, so that exact wage figures are of very limited value, but some general impressions can be obtained. W. M. Pitt, in his surveys of Worcestershire, compared wages in 1794 and in 1805, and stated that the wage level of 1805 might be supposed at least twenty per cent higher on average.43 In the same period the prices of provisions increased at a faster rate: wheat rose from 7s. 6d. per bushel to 11s. 6d. (53 per cent) while beef increased from 3½d. per lb. to 6d. (71 per cent).44 These figures suggest the national condition.

42Ibid., XIII, 426.
43Pitt, General View of ... Worcester, 252.
44Ibid., 257.
Employers, meanwhile, were shifting the burden of maintenance of the poor to the parish under the system of relief which was called the Speenhamland system, whereby the parishes supplemented the wages of the poor. A table was drawn up by the magistrates showing what should be the weekly income of single persons and families of various sizes when the price of the gallon loaf of bread rose penny by penny. The parish then supplemented the income of laborers by the difference between their wages and the suggested figure.45

The Speenhamland practice spread widely through Britain after 1795, but the scarcity in 1800-1 again brought the distress of the poor to a point of agony. In 1800 Samuel Whitbread sought to introduce a bill to regulate the wages of artificers and laborers, observing that although the charity of the rich was "exemplary," the problem was that the "farmers would not raise the price of labour," and there was nothing in the statute book to compel them to do so.46 By the act of 5 Elizabeth c. 4 justices could regulate the maximum wages of labor; a law therefore appeared necessary, he said, to permit


46Parliamentary Register, X, 464.
the justices to regulate also the minimum wages of labor.\footnote{Ibid.}

Pitt opposed the motion, declaring that it required cool and deliberate consideration. He stalled and fenced and averred that it seemed highly improper to interfere by legislation in what should be allowed to take its natural course. Besides, he said, the proposal would not be effective because it set up one standard for wages, and did not take into consideration whether an unemployed man were young, old, sick, well, single, or father of a large family. He said the poor would best be relieved by parochial aid administered by those who had intimate, personal knowledge of the matter.\footnote{Ibid., 466.} As a result of Pitt's opposition, Whitbread's bill was voted down.

The tendency for employers to pay insufficient wages, expecting the difference to be made up from the poor rate, continued and grew in the scarcity of 1800-1. A correspondent of the Annals of Agriculture observed a demoralizing effect at work, saying that laborers began to feel that "industry and maintenance are every day in their case less and less connected." It mattered little whether they were paid 14d. or 18d. in wages, as "neither the one nor the other can form any considerable part of their maintenance; therefore the labourer is now more
indifferent concerning his wages than I have ever before observed." 49

If the poor seemed indifferent regarding the source of their upkeep, the same could not be said of those who were rated for poor relief. In the Leicestershire village of Wigston the sum spent on the poor in the early 1750's was about £100; in 1802 it was £1776. 50 In the Cheshire township of Great Warford £28 was spent on poor relief in 1750; in 1801 the total was £220 18s. 51 Sir Frederic Morton Eden calculated that the average expenditure for poor relief in England and Wales in 1783-5 was £2,004,238, which was an increase of thirty-one per cent over the 1776 expenditure of £1,529,790, 52 and he estimated that in 1796 the expenditure probably exceeded three million pounds. 53

Modern students of the subject point out that the Speenhamland system, in spite of its admitted faults, was really a "sensible expedient to meet the distress caused by a temporary dearth of corn," but unfortunately the


52 Eden, The State of the Poor, I, 371.

53 Ibid., I, 575.
temporary dearth stretched out for twenty years.\textsuperscript{54} It was a system developed in the low-wage area of the south of England as a response to conditions of surplus labor and low wages which already existed; it did not cause pauperism among the able-bodied poor, but was an attempt to deal with it.\textsuperscript{55}

Other plans for dealing with the problem of poor relief usually had as their foundation the enclosure of wastes and giving of plots to the poor for growing their own food. Arthur Young, who had agitated for years to bring about the enclosure of wastes for the sake of improvement, in 1801 combined that object with the current concern for maintenance of the poor and declared "that of all the methods of improving waste land, none are so important or so profitable as applying them to the support of the labouring poor."\textsuperscript{56} He cited many instances observed on a tour he made in 1800 through eastern England of the lightened burden of poor relief that resulted from allotting an acre or so of land from the common to cottagers. For example, at Blofield, Norfolk, "Thirty families have taken 39-3/4 acres of land

\textsuperscript{54} Chambers and Mingay, \textit{The Agricultural Revolution}, 120.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} "An Inquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the Better Maintenance and Support of the Poor," \textit{Annals of Agriculture}, XXXVI (1801), 498.
from the common and built very good and comfortable cottages . . . . Average of land 1-1/3 acre, average of livestock 1-2/3 head . . . . 150 souls thus established have cost the parish (by a very inflamed account) 24l.; while 110 others, the rest of the poor, burthened it 150l. in the same half year. "57

Young stated that on his tour he had investigated the effects of enclosures on food production, population, poor rates, and the situation of the poor, and he found the poor were injured by enclosure in twenty-five cases out of thirty-seven. Usually the small man's allotment was too small to support a cow, so both his cow and land were usually sold to rich farmers. 58

The Times ruminated on Young's proposals and concluded that, indeed, savings might be realized. Moreover, the lot of the poor could be improved, and the poor rate could be reduced. From £40 to £60 would build a cottage, provide a cow and seed and basic food for a family, as well as fence in three or four acres. If up to £100 were spent per family, borrowed on the security of the rates, the interest would run only 2s. per week, while the regular parish allowance was not less than 5s. 6d. to 8s., and more in times of scarcity. If the recipients of such aid were permitted to enjoy the property only as long as they applied for no additional

57 Ibid., 499. 58 Ibid., 516.
relief, they would be encouraged to industry and frugality. 59

But disagreeing with Young and the Thunderer was Thomas Robert Malthus who declared in 1803 that he would consider the adoption of a system of granting the poor ample land for a cow and a potato garden "as the most cruel and fatal blow to the happiness of the lower classes of people in this country that they had ever received." 60 Such a plan, he said, would "operate in the most direct manner as an encouragement to marriage and a bounty on children." 61 This, according to Malthus, was the tendency and flaw in the whole system of the poor laws:

It may perhaps be said that our poor-laws at present regularly encourage marriage and children by distributing relief in proportion to the size of families; and that this plan which is proposed as a substitute would merely do the same thing in a less objectionable manner. But surely in endeavouring to get rid of the evil of the poor-laws, we ought not to retain their most pernicious quality; and Mr. Young must know as well as I do that the principal reason why poor-laws have invariably been found ineffectual in the relief of the poor is, that they tend to encourage a population which is not regulated by the demand for labour. 62

59 The Times, May 27, 1801.


61 Ibid., 452. 62 Ibid.
A present-day student of the subject, Dr. J. D. Chambers, states that there is no way of knowing precisely how influential Malthus was in determining the course of policy, but he was "swimming with the tide of interests -- tradesmen, farmers, and most landlords," and in the final assessment he probably cemented the alliance between vested interests and economic theory which demolished Arthur Young's plan for cow-pastures for laborers.

The poor were perhaps a casualty of the age of improvement, a cruel debit to be balanced against the many credits on the list of achievements of the period. Their plight was brought on and aggravated by simultaneous developments in agriculture and industry during the eighteenth century. As suggested above (page 73), agricultural improvements involving corn and turnip rotations succeeded best on the light sandy soils of the south and east and less so on the heavy loams and clays of the north and west. The heavy soil areas found it advantageous to shift from arable farming to stock raising and dairying and to domestic industries which

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had a potential for development into manufacturing enterprises. The burgeoning population of the second half of the eighteenth century found the north and west better able to absorb their increased numbers in expanding industry than could the south and east where, although improving agriculture employed more hands than previously, the total increase could not find employment. The result was a permanent surplus of able-bodied laborers for whom no work could be found. In the best of times their prospects were bleak -- in years of deficient harvests their suffering was acute and evoked both massive outpourings of charity and fearful governmental solicitude lest they erupt in a frenzy of Jacobinism. But neither of these responses sufficed to raise the level of wages. Employers and the landed interest conceived the distress conditions to be only temporary while a rise in the level of wages would be both permanent and inconvenient. Accordingly, the poor did not share in the benefits of improvement which their labor helped bring about.

While the plight of the poor casts a dark shadow across the record of improvement, the positive accomplishments of the age must also be emphasized. During the last two decades of the eighteenth century, when the population of England and Wales was rising from 7.5 million to 9.1 million, what would have been the plight not only of the poor but of everyone had not the movement for agricultural reform carried to its fullest
extension the program for improvement? During the last two decades of the century about 1.25 million acres of common fields and waste were enclosed and brought into useful production. During the last two decades of the century total corn production was increased from about 16.7 million quarters to about 18.9 million quarters.

Although precise statistical information is lacking in most cases for those twenty years with regard to increases in acreage sown to wheat, yields per acre, and numbers and weight of sheep and cattle, it is known that significant increases occurred in the eighteenth century in those categories, and it is suggested that a large part of those increases occurred toward the end of the century. In spite of abundantly improved yields of flesh and grain, however, the demands of the burgeoning population were greater still, and recourse to imported supplies was also necessary in the last decades of the century. But what, one wonders, would have been the case if Britain's population had increased so lushly, as indeed it did all across Europe, and the movement for agricultural reform had not expanded the available food supply?

The accomplishments of the movement were grand and impressive -- the improvers dreamed greatly and did greatly, and their credo and monument are best expressed by Sir John Sinclair, who wrote in 1801:

> I have ever wished that the improvements of this country should be carried on, not on a trifling, but on a great scale; and I have no doubt, however problematical it may appear, that it is much
easier to carry on a general and extensive system of improvement, than one of a partial and insignificant nature. With only a trifling object in view, there is no real anxiety or exertion; the business is conducted with languor, and must necessarily terminate either in total disappointment or in a manner but little likely to give much satisfaction: whereas, when a number of important objects are in contemplation, all the powers of the mind are roused. Success in one attempt tends to promote success in another; and emulation is excited among all ranks and descriptions of persons, and the whole is carried on with a degree of energy which cannot fail to be successful.65

A correspondent of the European Magazine in March 1801 remarked that a regular farming mania existed in the country; those who did not actually farm at least wrote about farming. He noted improvements made in implements, chemistry of fertilizers, and other matters. It appeared to him that although much work remained to be done in improving the art of husbandry, great progress had recently been made, and "the acme of agricultural perfection is not far distant."66

In some respects it might appear that Britain was simply lucky in breaking out of the age-old cycle of population growth controlled by periodic famine. Britain was indeed fortunate in her array of resources and


66European Magazine, XXXIX (March 1801), 177-8.
alternate employment for a population made agriculturally redundant by improvement. But the capacity of British agriculture to feed a greatly expanded population was not accidental. The unflagging zeal of the men of improvement and the increased productivity which resulted made possible in large part the transformation of Britain in the nineteenth century into the world's first industrialized society.
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