

**THE RURAL EXODUS: THE
PROBLEM OF THE
VILLAGE AND THE TOWN**

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The Rural Exodus: The Problem of the Village and the Town by P. Anderson Graham

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P. ANDERSON GRAHAM

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SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY

EDITED BY H. DE B. GIBBINS, M.A.

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BY

P. ANDERSON GRAHAM

AUTHOR OF "NATURE IN BOOKS"

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PREFACE.

IF I were to write a list of the authorities consulted for the making of this little volume it would not consist of the names of books and of writers, but of obscure men who, in the rural districts of England, are doing their work and living their lives. For several years back, having been deeply impressed with the magnitude and importance of the migration to town, it has been my habit to discuss the question with all sorts and conditions of countrymen. The study, if I may dignify it with a term so austere, began in a semi-depopulated district that I have known since childhood. It was needless to ask questions there. Hardly has one family left without my knowing why, when, and whither it went. The knowledge thus acquired served as a basis of more. In any new district it was but natural to ask if the same conditions prevailed, or what other influences came into operation. And as I have wandered in most of the English shires, conversing freely alike with the landlord and the tenant, Anglican and Dissenter, the hind at his plough, the ratcatcher working ditches with ferret and terrier, the Agrarian lecturer, the village atheist, the poacher, the grocer, and doctor and land agent, it is my own blame if I have not obtained a tolerably correct notion of the ideas and aspirations of the English villager. My chief regret is, that I possess no equally intimate knowledge of foreign countries in order to determine how far a movement, world-wide in operation, is world-wide in its causes.

A conclusion I arrived at is that the problem is difficult, almost impossible, to be understood by any mere study of statistics. Many influences are at work that cannot be expressed in figures, and that is why I have devoted so much space to an attempt to realise the atmosphere in which the peasant lives. The talk he hears at the public house is, in determining his conduct, as important a factor as the condition of his cottage or the rent of his allotment. If symptoms of merriment crop up now and then, I hope it will be remembered that there is a difference between interviewing Hodge and driving a hearse; and that a good-humoured non-partizan is after all quite as likely to get at the truth as a solemn Tory or serious Radical.

It remains to be added that although I have frequently touched on this theme when contributing out-of-door articles to the *National Observer*, and in 1891 when I made a tour among the worst districts and wrote a series of letters to the *St. James' Gazette*, I have not reproduced any of those essays; for the very simple reason that doing so did not fit in with the general plan of the book. Furthermore, it may be useful to add that what I have written either to the journals mentioned or to others has invariably been from a perfectly independent point of view. It is no custom of mine before praising or blaming any scheme to stop and consider which political party is responsible for it. Whether a measure be Whig or Tory is of infinitely less consequence than the effect it is likely to have. It is the more necessary to keep this in mind because in the excitement of bidding against each other for the labourer's vote both political parties are in danger of rushing into some very foolish legislative experiments.

P. A. G.

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