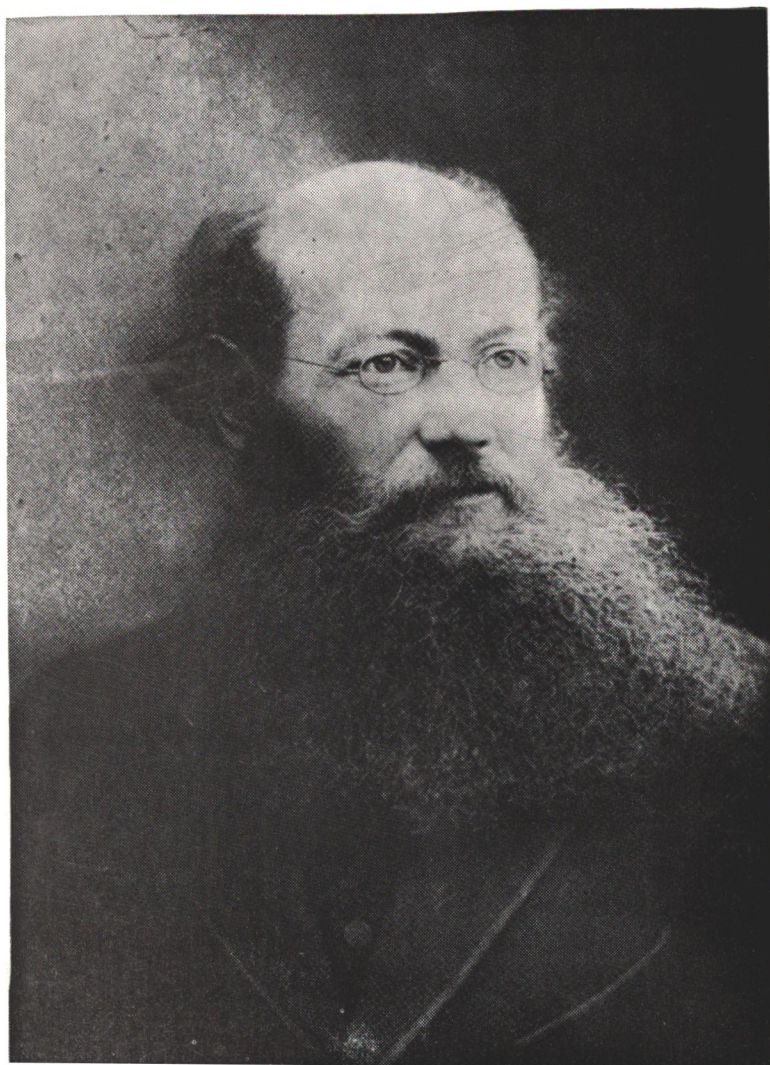


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AND  
THE CHANNEL ISLANDS**



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By

James Glyn Ford



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## PRINCE PETER KROPOTKIN AND THE CHANNEL ISLES

### INTRODUCTION

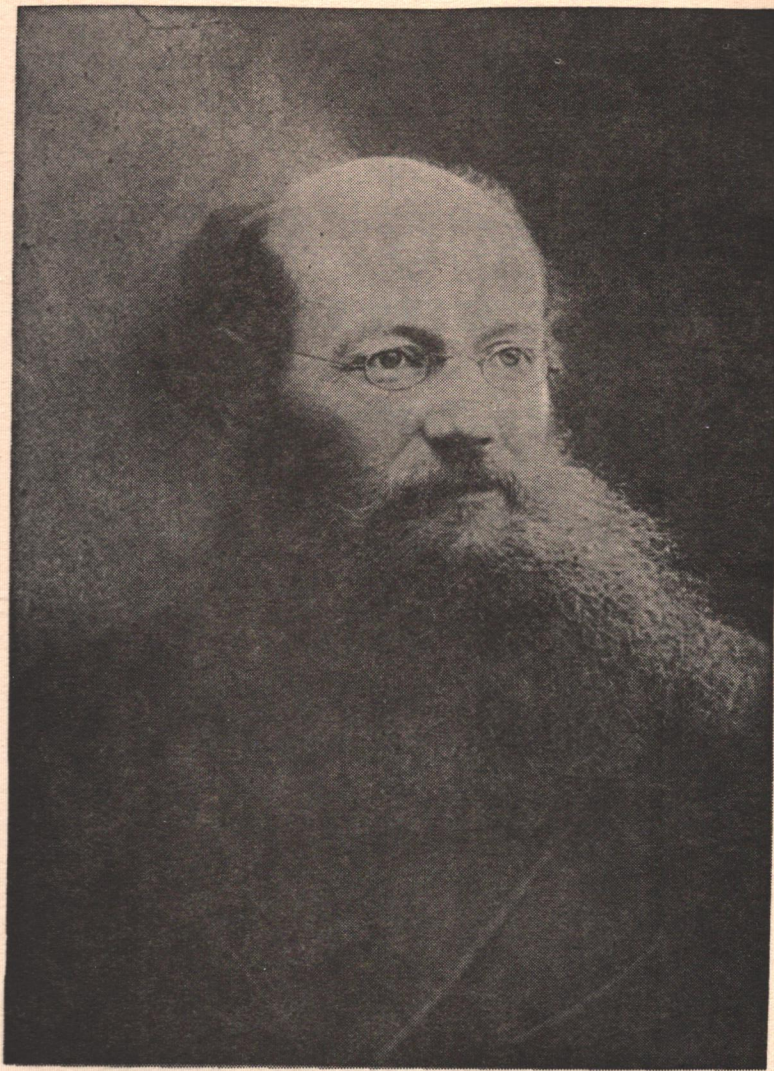
Peter Kropotkin, Europe's leading anarchist, propagandist and theoretician at the end of the last century and beginning of this, visited the Channel Isles on at least three occasions during his exile in England. He came in 1890, 1896 and 1903. These visits are not mentioned in his autobiography *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1899), although the vast bulk of this concentrates on his life before coming to England. More surprising is the failure of these to be noted by his biographers for they appear to have been significant in the development of one line of his thinking.

He used these visits to acquaint himself with the advanced agricultural and market gardening techniques practised in Jersey and Guernsey at the time. He incorporated the information he had gleaned into articles he wrote, for such periodicals as the *Nineteenth Century* and *Forum*, attempting to demonstrate the possibilities of a viable anarchist society. Subsequently this information appeared in a revised form in two of his books: *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (1898), *The Conquest of Bread* (1906). While in the Channel Isles Kropotkin attributed the advanced state of agriculture and horticulture to the fact that they had escaped the blessings of Roman Law and landlordism along with the spirit of local co-operation.

These views of the Channel Isles did not remain with him, for at least one other major socialist author borrowed Kropotkin's (sic) research to support his own vision of a future society. This was Robert Blatchford of *Clarion* fame who incorporated some of the Channel Isles material into his *Merrie England*.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Peter Kropotkin born in Russia in 1842 was a direct descendent of the Riurik dynasty who had been the first rulers of Russia in the fourteenth century. The succeeding five hundred years had seen the family fall — but not far — in the social hierarchy. Peter's father Aleksei (1805-1871) was a wealthy nobleman steeped in military bureaucratic ethos prevailing under Tsar Nicholas I. Peter, following family tradition, entered the Corps of Pages at St. Petersburg when he was fifteen to receive his training for a life in the Court circle. By 1861, in his last year in the Corps and in recognition of his abilities he was made *page de chambre* of Tsar Alexander II. He seemed destined for a distinguished career. But the endless and tedious ceremonies that filled his life dissatisfied him. He was aware that Russian society must adapt to modern conditions or die and these futile formalities seemed to him to indicate a refusal to come to terms with the realities. His ambition was at the time, to turn Russia into a modern industrial state by a process of



*Prince Peter Kropotkin*

gradual reform. A decade of frustration and failure was to persuade him of the impossibility of such a road. But this lay ahead.

In an unprecedented move on graduation the Corps top student, head and personal page of the Tsar refused to serve in St. Petersburg. He asked instead to be sent as a military officer to the Amur region of Eastern Siberia a recently annexed wasteland. For he imagined that by going from the feudal atmosphere of the St. Petersburg Court to the cold administration of such a virgin territory he would have an opportunity to implement his liberal ideas. Despite his father's frantic opposition he got his wish and spent five years stationed near Irkutsk. In this period he began to make a name for himself as an explorer and geographer organising a number of expeditions to Manchuria.

In 1867 his growing realisation that the Russian bureaucracy, even in the uncivilised remoteness of Siberia, was corrupt and impossible to reform, and precipitated by the brutal repression of a revolt of Polish exiles led him to leave the Army and return to St. Petersburg. In all this his personal history curiously parallels that of George Orwell sixty years later.

When Kropotkin settled back in St. Petersburg his explorations in Siberia stood him in good stead. The Russian Imperial Geographical Society encouraged him to prepare a number of scientific papers from the material he had collected in the East. These papers on publication made important and fundamental contributions to the geology, anthropology and Zoology of the Arctic regions. But 1879 saw two events accelerate the direction his life was taking. His father died and the Paris Commune, that first communist experiment, was born and bloodily perished in the full glare of international newspaper publicity. The first freed him from his filial duties and the second gave him something to believe in.

Consequently, in 1872 while on his first trip abroad in Zurich, he joined the International Workingmen's Association (I.W.A.), which had been established by Marx in 1864 to unite the European labour movement on a common socialist platform. Yet this conversion was less dramatic than it appears for ever since his return from Siberia he had been on the outer fringes of the revolutionary populist movement. In 1874 these activities led to his arrest. Two years later, still untried, he made a spectacular escape with the aid of people from the Circle and got away abroad. He initially settled in Switzerland where he began his strange dual role of scientist and revolutionary.

On March 1st, 1881 Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in Russia and his ex-personal page wrote in his Swiss Journal *La Revolte* justifying the deed that he had been 'the worst enemy of his own people'. This led to his expulsion from Switzerland and he removed to England where for a while he was pursued by the agents of the Russian Government supported **Holy Brotherhood** who were trying to

assassinate him.

England did not suit him and in 1882 he went to France where he felt more at home speaking fluent French and being familiar with the culture. Within two months he was under arrest, following some anarchist bombings in France, as an active member of a proscribed organisation — the I.W.A. He was sentenced to five years in jail, despite the fact that he was in no way implicated with the bombings, and was sent to Clairvaux prison. Because of the unsatisfactory way his trial was conducted and because of his fame the French Government was subjected to much international pressure for his release from both the socialist and scientific communities. And in 1886 he was released on the condition that he left France. This time he came to England for thirty years until his return to Russia in 1917, just four years before his death.

The situation in which he now found himself was far from satisfactory. The English labour movement was poorly developed and that which did exist he could not communicate with very well. So he turned towards writing mainly for the French anarchist press, but also some longer theoretical works.

#### THE CHANNEL ISLES

Two of the problems facing the anarchists — and for that matter the rest of the labour movement — were the intellectual heritage of Malthus and Darwin. The Rev. Thomas Malthus had published his *Essay in the Principle of Population* in 1798 which stated that while population increases in geometrical progression the means of subsistence only increase in arithmetical progression i.e., mankind was doomed to suffer from permanent want and scarcity. Darwin had used this notion in *The Origin of Species* (1859) as the driving force behind progressive evolution. For with a permanent struggle for the means of subsistence the survival of the fittest would automatically follow.

This seemed to pre-empt the possibilities of an anarchist society based on mutual respect and co-operation. For with limited resources how could the fight of all against all be avoided. Kropotkin took on himself the task of demolishing the ideas of both Darwin and Malthus. The first of these he attempted in his book *Mutual Aid* (1902) when he tried to rebut Darwin by demonstrating that alongside the law of mutual struggle there ran a law of mutual aid and that this co-operation is far more important in promoting progressive evolution than mutual conflict.

But more important from a Channel Isles perspective Kropotkin also set out to demonstrate the possibilities of industry and agriculture. He attempted to show that Malthus's pessimism was now outdated with the advances that science, technology and craft practice had created. He maintained that it was perfectly possible for a country like Britain to feed a population of twice its present size. To demonstrate this he made

detailed studies of advanced agricultural and horticultural techniques in both Europe and America.

He was not averse to experimenting himself, experimenting with growing grapes under glass in his London home. One of his key examples was that of the Channel Isles based on the information he had gleaned from his visits and from his studies of the Islands. It was to collect information that prompted him to come, although the possibility of being within sight of his beloved and forbidden France may have tempted him also.

But it is time to begin to allow him to speak for himself. He said of Jersey, 'The successes accomplished lately in Jersey are entirely due to the amount of labour which a dense population is putting in the land; to a system of land-tenure, land-transference and inheritance very different from those which prevail elsewhere; to freedom from state taxation; and to the fact that communal institutions have been maintained, down to quite a recent period, while a number of communal habits and customs of mutual support, derived therefrom, are alive to the present time. As to the fertility of the soil, it is made partly by seaweeds gathered free on the sea-coast, but chiefly by artificial manure fabricated at Blaydon-on-Tyne, out of all sorts of refuse — inclusive of bones shipped from Plevna and mummies of cats shipped from Egypt.' (1)

'The glory of Jersey is, of course, Mr. Bashford's establishment. When I visited it in 1890, it contained 490,000 square feet under glass — that is, nearly thirteen acres — but seven more acres have been added to it since. A long row of glasshouses, interspersed with high chimneys, covers the ground — the largest of the houses being 900 feet long and forty-six feet wide; this means that about one acre of land, in one piece, is under glass.' (2)

'And, yet, barring a few exceptions, Jersey hardly knows what intensive market gardening is. To see this, one must go to the sister island of Guernsey, which has to nourish 1,300 souls on each square mile, and has more unproductive soil. Guernsey, like the suburbs of Paris, is a land of market gardening, which has developed of late into greenhouse culture. All over the island, especially in the north, wherever you look, you see greenhouses. They rise amid the fields and from behind the trees; they are piled upon one another on the steep slopes of the hills facing the harbor.' (3)

He makes his point. 'Soil-making, hot-water pipes in the soil, and culture under glass at a certain period of the life of the plant, will be essential features of the gardening of the future. They will finally dissipate the childish fears as to the impossibility of satisfying the needs of a rapidly-increasing population, and they will permit man always to have fresh from the soil, the bush, or the tree, most of what is necessary for his life. That is not a dream of futurity; it is becoming a fact of

modern life. Indeed, nothing can be more instructive on this account than a visit to the islands of Jersey and Guernsey, (my emphasis — J.G.F.), such as I recently made. It gives one a concrete idea of what the world is coming to in the way of culture under glass.' (4)

In these few extracts one can see his views coming through quite clearly. **Anarchism and Science will together solve mankind's problems.** Many today would question both. Yet in the reprint of Appendix L. from his **Fields, Factories and Workshops**, reprinted in this monograph, we have both a demonstration of Kropotkin's simplicity and brevity of expression in his writing, and a contemporary view of the state and importance of Channel Islands food production around the turn of the century.

June, 1979.

James Glyn Ford  
Ashton-under-Lyne

#### REFERENCES

1. **Fields, Factories and Workshops**, Nelson, 1918 pp 167-168.
2. *ibid.* p. 203.
3. 'The Possibilities of Agriculture', **Forum**, 1890 p. 623.
4. *ibid.* pp 622-623.

## THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

### ISLANDS

The excellent state of agriculture in Jersey and Guernsey has often been mentioned in the agricultural and general literature of this country, so I need only refer to the works of Mr. W. E. Bear (*Journal of the Agricultural Society*, 1888; *Quarterly Review*, 1888; *British Farmer*, etc.) and to the exhaustive work of D. H. Ansted and R. G. Latham, *The Channel Islands*, third edition, revised by E. Toulmin Nicolle, London (Allen), 1893.

Many English writers—certainly not those just named—are inclined to explain the successes obtained in Jersey by the wonderful climate of the islands and the fertility of the soil. As to climate, it is certainly true that the yearly record of sunshine in Jersey is greater than in any English station. It reaches from 1,842 hours a year (1890) to 2,300 (1893), and thus

exceeds the highest aggregate sunshine recorded in any English station by from 168 to 336 hours (exclusively high maximum in 1894) a year; May and August seeming to be the best favoured months.\* But, to quote from the just mentioned work of Ansted and Latham:—

“There is, doubtless, in all the islands, and especially in Guernsey, an absence of sun heat and of the direct action of the sun’s rays in summer, which must have its effect, and a remarkable prevalence of cold, dry, east wind in late spring, retarding vegetation” (p. 407). Everyone who has spent, be it only two or three weeks in late spring in Jersey, must know by experience how true this remark is. Moreover, there are the well-known Guernsey fogs, and “owing also to rain and damp the trees suffer from mildew and blight, as well as from various aphides.” The same authors remark that the nectarine does not succeed in Jersey in the open air “owing to the absence of autumn heat”; that “the wet autumns and cold summers do not agree with the apricot;” and so on.

If Jersey potatoes are, on the average, three weeks in advance of those grown in Cornwall, the fact is fully explained by the continual improvements made in Jersey in view of obtaining, be it ever so small, quantities of potatoes a few days in advance, either by special care taken to plant them out as soon as possible, protecting them from the cold winds, or by choosing tiny pieces of land naturally protected or better exposed. The difference in price between the earliest and the later potatoes being immense, the greatest efforts are made to obtain an early crop.

The decline of prices per ton is best seen from the following prices in 1910:—

\* *Ten Years of Sunshine in the British Isles, 1881–1890.*

| Week ending            | Quantities<br>exported. | Prices.         |    |       |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|----|-------|
|                        |                         | Tons.           | £  | s. d. |
| April 2-30 . . . . .   | 210                     | 30              | 11 | 0     |
| May 7 . . . . .        | 600                     | 18              | 12 | 8     |
| " 14 . . . . .         | 1,250                   | 15              | 12 | 0     |
| " 21 . . . . .         | 2,000                   | 13              | 0  | 0     |
| " 28 . . . . .         | 5,500                   | 10              | 3  | 8     |
| June 4 . . . . .       | 7,825                   | 8               | 13 | 4     |
| " 11 . . . . .         | 9,200                   | 6               | 5  | 8     |
| " 18 . . . . .         | 13,000                  | 4               | 17 | 6     |
| " 25 . . . . .         | 9,650                   | 4               | 8  | 10    |
| July 2 . . . . .       | 6,600                   | 3               | 13 | 8     |
| " 9 . . . . .          | 1,900                   | 2               | 18 | 6     |
| " 16 . . . . .         | 145                     | 3               | 9  | 4     |
| " 23 . . . . .         | 10                      | 3               | 18 | 0     |
| <b>Total . . . . .</b> | <b>57,890</b>           | <b>£381,373</b> |    |       |

The quantities of early potatoes exported varied during the years 1901 to 1910 from 47,530 tons to 77,800 tons, and their value from £233,289 to £475,889.

As to the fertility of the soil, it is still worse advocacy, because there is no area in the United Kingdom of equal size which would be manured to such an extent as the area of Jersey and Guernsey is by means of artificial manure. In the seventeenth century, as may be seen from the first edition of Falle's *Jersey*, published in 1694, the island "did not produce that quantity as is necessary for the use of the inhabitants, who must be supplied from England in time of peace, or from Dantzic in Poland." In *The Groans of the Inhabitants of Jersey*, published in London in 1709, we find the same complaint. And Quayle, who wrote in 1812 and quoted the two works just mentioned, in his turn complained in these terms: "The quantity at this day raised is quite inadequate to their sustenance, apart from the garrison" (*General View of the Agriculture and the Present State of the Islands*

on the Coast of Normandy, London, 1815, p. 77.) And he added: "After making all allowance, the truth must be told; the grain crops are here foul, in some instances execrably so." And when we consult the modern writers, Ansted, Latham, and Nicolle, we learn that the soil is by no means rich. It is decomposed granite, and easily cultivable, but "it contains no organic matter besides what man has put into it."

This is certainly the opinion anyone will come to if he only visits thoroughly the island and looks attentively to its soil—to say nothing of the Quenvais where, in Quayle's time, there was "an Arabian desert" of sands and hillocks covering about seventy acres (p. 24), with a little better but still very poor soil in the north and west of it. The fertility of the soil has entirely been made, first, by the *vraic* (sea-weeds), upon which the inhabitants have maintained communal rights; later on, by considerable shipments of manure, in addition to the manure of the very considerable living stock which is kept in the island; and finally, by an admirably good cultivation of the soil.

Much more than sunshine and good soil, it was the conditions of land-tenure and the low taxation which contributed to the remarkable development of agriculture in Jersey. First of all, the people of the Isles know but little of the tax-collector. While the English pay, in taxes, an average of 50s. per head of population; while the French peasant is over-burdened with taxes of all imaginable descriptions; and the Milanese peasant has to give to the Treasury full 30 per cent. of his income—all taxes paid in the Channel Islands amount to but 10s. per head in the town parishes and to much less than that in the country parishes. Besides, of indirect taxes, none are known but the 2s. 6d. paid for each gallon of imported spirits and 9d. per gallon of imported wine.

As to the conditions of land-tenure, the inhabitants have happily escaped the action of Roman Law, and they continue to live under the *coutumier de Normandie* (the old Norman common law). Accordingly, more than one-half of the territory is owned by those who themselves till the soil; there is no landlord to watch the crops and to raise the rent before the farmer has ripened the fruit of his improvements; there is nobody to charge so much for each cart-load of sea-weeds or sand taken to the fields; everyone takes the amount he likes, provided he cuts the weeds at a certain season of the year, and digs out the sand at a distance of sixty yards from the high-water mark. Those who buy land for cultivation can do so without becoming enslaved to the money-lender. One-fourth part only of the permanent rent which the purchaser undertakes to pay is capitalised and has to be paid down on purchase (often less than that), the remainder being a perpetual rent in wheat which is valued in Jersey at fifty to fifty-four *sous de France* per cabot. To seize property for debt is accompanied with such difficulties that it is seldom resorted to (Quayle's *General View*, pp. 41-46). Conveyances of land are simply acknowledged by both parties on oath, and cost nearly nothing. And the laws of inheritance are such as to preserve the homestead, notwithstanding the debts that the father may have run into (*ibid.*, pp. 35-41).

After having shown how small are the farms in the islands (from twenty to five acres, and very many less than that)—there being “less than 100 farms in either island that exceed twenty-five acres; and of these only about half a dozen in Jersey exceed fifty acres”—Messrs. Ansted, Latham, and Nicolle remark:—

“In no place do we find so happy and so contented a country as in the Channel Islands. . . .” “The

system of land-tenure has also contributed in no small degree to their prosperity. . . .” “The purchaser becomes the absolute owner of the property, and his position cannot be touched so long as the interest of these [wheat] rents be paid. He cannot be compelled, as in the case of mortgage, to refund the principal. *The advantages of such a system are too patent to need any further allusion.*” (*The Channel Islands*, third edition, revised by E. Toulmin Nicolle, p. 401; see also p. 443.)

The following will better show how the cultivable area is utilised in Jersey (*The Evening Post Royal Almanack*):—

|   | 1894.                                 | 1911.  |        |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------|--------|
|   | Acres.                                | Acres. |        |
| Corn crops . . . . .  | Wheat . . . . .                       | 1,709  | 656    |
|   | Barley and bere . . . . .             | 113    | 125    |
|   | Oats and rye . . . . .                | 499    | 1,213  |
|   | Beans and peas . . . . .              | 16     | 34     |
| Green crops . . . . .   | Potatoes . . . . .                    | 7,007  | 8,911  |
|   | Turnips and swedes . . . . .          | 111    | 61     |
|   | Mangolds . . . . .                    | 232    | 137    |
|   | Other green crops . . . . .           | 447    | 176    |
| Clover, sainfoin and<br>grasses under rota-<br>tion . . . . . | For hay . . . . .                     | 2,842  | 2,720  |
|   | Not for hay . . . . .                 | 2,208  | 1,731  |
| Permanent pasture<br>or grass . . . . .                       | For hay . . . . .                     | 1,117  | 944    |
|   | Not for hay . . . . .                 | 3,057  | 2,522  |
|   | Bare fallow . . . . .                 | —      | 53     |
| Fruit . . . . .   | Small fruit . . . . .                 | —      | 99     |
|   | Orchards and small<br>fruit . . . . . | —      | 1,151  |
|   | Other crops . . . . .                 | —      | 240    |
|   |                                       | 21,252 | 20,733 |
| <i>Living Stock.</i>  |                                       |        |        |
|   | 1894.                                 | 1911.  |        |
| Horses used solely for agriculture . . . . .                  | 2,252                                 | 2,188  |        |
| Unbroken horses . . . . .                                     | 83                                    | 69     |        |
| Mares solely for breeding . . . . .                           | 16                                    | —      |        |
| Horses . . . . .  | 2,351                                 | 2,257  |        |



| <i>Living Stock.</i>                |           | 1894.  | 1911.   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|
| Cows and heifers in milk or in calf | .         | 6,709  | 6,710   |
| Other cattle:—                      |           |        |         |
| Two years or more                   | . . . . . | 864    | } 5,321 |
| One year to two years               | . . . . . | 2,232  |         |
| Less than one year                  | . . . . . | 2,549  |         |
| Total cattle                        | . . . . . | 12,374 | 12,031  |
| Sheep, all ages                     | . . . . . | 332    | 186     |
| Pigs, including sows for breeding   | . . . . . | 6,021  | 4,639   |

| <i>Exports.</i>  |           | 1887. | 1888. | 1889. |
|------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
| Bulls            | . . . . . | 102   | 100   | 92    |
| Cows and heifers | . . . . . | 1,395 | 1,639 | 1,629 |

Potatoes exported:—

| Average.  | Tons.  | £       |
|-----------|--------|---------|
| 1887-1890 | 54,502 | 308,713 |
| 1891-1894 | 62,885 | 413,609 |
| 1901-1905 | 66,731 | 455,773 |
| 1906      | 51,932 | 308,229 |
| 1907      | 77,800 | 377,259 |
| 1908      | 53,100 | 356,305 |
| 1909      | 62,690 | 332,404 |
| 1910      | 57,890 | 381,373 |

The export value *per acre* varied in different years from £27, 6s. in 1893 to £66, 1s. in 1894, and even £95, 18s. in 1904.

As regards greenhouse culture, a friend of mine, who has worked as a gardener in Jersey, has collected for me various information relative to the productivity of culture under glass. Out of it the following may be taken as a perfectly reliable illustration, in addition to those given in the text:—

Mr. B.'s greenhouse has a length of 300 feet and a width of 18 feet, which makes 5,400 square feet, out of which 900 square feet are under the passage in the

middle. The cultivable area is thus 4,500 square feet. There are no brick walls, but brick pillars and boards are used for front walls. Hot-water heating is provided, but is only used occasionally, to keep out the frosts in winter—the crops being early potatoes (which require no heating), followed by tomatoes. The latter are Mr. B.'s speciality. Catch crops of radishes, etc., are taken. The cost of the greenhouse, without the heating apparatus, is 10s. per running foot of greenhouse, which makes £150 for one-eighth of an acre under glass, or a little less than 7d. per glass-roofed square foot.

The crops are: potatoes, four cabots per perch—that is, three-quarters of a ton of early potatoes from the greenhouse; and tomatoes, in the culture of which Mr. B. attains extraordinary results. He puts in only 1,000 plants, thus giving to his plants more room than is usually given; and he cultivates a corrugated variety which gives very heavy crops but does not fetch the same prices as the smooth varieties. In 1896 his crop was four tons of tomatoes, and so it would have been in 1897—each plant giving an average of twenty pounds of fruit, while the usual crop is from eight to twelve pounds per plant.

The total crop was thus four and three-quarter tons of vegetables, to which the catch crops must be added—thus corresponding to 85,000 lb. per acre (over 90,000 lb. with the catch crops). I again omit the money returns, and only mention that the expenditure for fuel and manure was about £10 a year, and that the Jersey average is three men, each working fifty-five hours a week (ten hours a day), for every acre under glass.

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