

HANDBOOK OF FARM LABOUR

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Handbook of Farm Labour by John Chalmers Morton

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JOHN CHALMERS MORTON

**HANDBOOK OF
FARM LABOUR**

HAND-BOOK
OF
FARM LABOUR.

BY
JOHN CHALMERS MORTON,
EDITOR OF "THE AGRICULTURAL GAZETTE," "THE AGRICULTURAL CYCLOPEDIA,"
"THE NEW FARMER'S ALMANAC," ETC.

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HAND-BOOK

OF

FARM LABOUR.

THE following pages contain, re-arranged and in completer detail, the materials gathered for two papers, one of which, "On the Cost of Horse-Power," appeared in the nineteenth volume of the Royal Agricultural Society's Journal;* and the other, "On the Forces used in Agriculture," was read before the Society of Arts on the 7th of December, 1859, and immediately appeared in the weekly journal of that society. In addition to such a discussion of the management, the quantity, and cost of hand, horse, and steam power employed on English farms as may thus be possible, details are given of the expense of the different agricultural operations which are performed by means of them; and, founded upon these, the labour-cost is calculated of our different agricultural crops and products. The book was written originally seven years ago, and a new edition of it is supposed to be called for by the general interest which the condition of the agricultural labourer has of late excited. Such additions have accordingly been made to its pages as recent agricultural history and progress have made necessary.

I. STATISTICS OF FARM LABOUR.

It is proposed in this chapter, in the first place, to specify the quantity of hand, horse, and steam power actually employed on a number of known farms, selected so as to be characteristic, as far as possible, of our different soils and our different styles of management; then to compare and contrast these instances, so as to determine how much horse and hand labour is employed per acre in good and average agriculture; and, lastly, to give such tables from the latest returns of the population and their

* Murray.

occupations as throw light upon the whole amount of farm labour in the country.

1. **Labour on Light Soils.**—I give three instances:—

(1.) My first is that of an extremely light-soil farm reclaimed from Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. It varies from a mere sand to a gravelly sand, in many places containing boulders. Its character is indicated by the fact that a day's ploughing is equal to one acre in the case of the deepest work, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ or even two acres in that of light fallow ploughing—the average ploughing of all sorts being about $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres daily, done in eight or nine hours—two horses to a team. The extent of the land under cultivation is 930 acres, all arable: 350 acres are in grain crops; 350 are in one and two years' clover; twenty acres are in pulse crops; and 210 acres are in fallow crops, as turnip, mangold-wurzel, &c. Twenty horses suffice for the cultivation of the land, being one pair to every ninety acres; or, deducting the acreage in clover, one pair for every fifty-six acres of land actually under the plough. Steam power has latterly been employed, not only for threshing out the corn, but for cultivation. The following figures, however, refer to the labour of the farm under horse cultivation.

The average number of persons constantly employed is twenty-four men and eighteen boys. This, however, includes a foreman and a wheelwright. In harvest additional hands are hired for various periods. In July and August some thirty boys are engaged in singling turnips and in weeding. The wages paid during a selected year, deducting the wheelwright, were £1,245 12s. 2d.; in the following year, the wages paid were £1,147 8s. 11d. The extra harvest wages paid amounted, in the two years, to £156 17s. 7d., and £216 13s. 3d. respectively. The average sum annually paid for hand labour amounted thus to £1,383 5s. 11d., or as nearly as possible, 30s. per acre.

(2.) My next two instances are of comparatively light fen land, in the counties of Cambridge and of Lincoln. The following are the particulars given me of a farm near Chatteris. The soil is very light and non-adhesive; a character, however, which it is gradually losing by lapse of time, for many fen farmers break up a good deal of their clean fallow lands with four or six horses to a large plough, bringing up the subsoil, which is clay, and mixing it up with the top soil. They then plough from ten to fourteen inches deep; but the usual depth of ploughing is for wheat five or six inches; and on the higher lands they cultivate from six to eight or nine inches deep. Two horses easily plough

five roods a day on the fen ; on the high lands early in the season two horses will plough from three to four roods per day ; but in winter and spring, when the land gets wet and sticks a good deal, they usually plough with three horses at length, to avoid treading, and they plough just three roods daily.

The farm consists of 900 acres of plough land and 120 acres of pasture : 450 acres are in grain crops ; 150 in clover ; 65 in pulse (beans, peas, &c.) ; and 235 in fallow crops (turnip, mangolds, rape). The horses needed number twenty-nine—one pair for every sixty-two acres of arable land, or, taking clovers out, one pair for every fifty-two acres of actually ploughed land. The hands regularly employed are about thirty men throughout the year, and twenty to thirty women, girls, and boys, from April to November. Of this number, six men during winter, not so many in summer, are employed at piecework. Extra hands are employed for reaping and during harvest time, but at no other period. The wages paid amount to £1,560 a year ; and it is to be taken into account, as affecting the amount of labour, that forty acres of potatoes are grown as one of the fallow crops, and that weeding on fen lands is an expensive item. This amount, deducting 5s. an acre for the pastures, is 34s. per acre on the arable land.

(3.) The following are particulars of another farm, also of fen land, but in which the process of ploughing up the clay subsoil has been carried further, so that the soil is peat upon clay over not more now than one-half of the farm—over the remainder the clay is ploughed up—and it needs a great deal of rolling to give it sufficient solidity for the wheat crop. The ploughing may be reported at 1½ acres daily on the average for each pair of horses. The general depth of cultivation is five inches ; for, though they plough deeper for fallow, yet the peat decomposes, and they lose the depth in the course of a year, and find it prejudicial to any other crop to plough deeper than it was fallowed.

The land is 790 acres in extent, or, deducting roads, and drains, and waste, 760 acres, of which about 100 acres are pasture, 130 are clover, 330 acres grain crops, 90 acres flax and pulse, &c., and 110 acres are fallow crops. Twenty horses are employed—one pair for every sixty acres of arable land, or, deducting clovers, one pair for every fifty-three acres of land actually under the plough. The wages paid for hand labour during the three years, were £1,414, £1,305, and £1,061, averaging £1,260 ; which, deducting 5s. an acre for the pasture land, is 37s. an acre. The number of men during three months from Lady-day averaged