

**THE COTTAGE, THE BOTHY AND  
THE KITCHEN, AN INQUIRY  
INTO THE CONDITION OF  
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN  
SCOTLEND**

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The Cottage, the Bothy and the Kitchen, an Inquiry Into the Condition of Agricultural Labourers in Scotlend by James Robb

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**JAMES ROBB**

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AGRICULTURAL  
LABOURERS IN SCOTLEND**



# THE COTTAGE, THE BOTHY

AND

# THE KITCHEN

BEING AN INQUIRY INTO  
THE CONDITION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS  
IN SCOTLAND

BY

JAMES ROBB

GENERAL EDITOR OF THE "SCOTTISH FARMER"

WITH A PREFACE

BY THE RIGHT HON. LORD KINNAIRD

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
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## P R E F A C E.

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THE republication in a compact form of the Reports which have appeared in the *Scottish Farmer* on the Condition of the Agricultural Labourers in Scotland, will prove very valuable not only to the proprietors and farmers resident in those counties to which the Reports more especially refer, but also to Scotland generally, the subject of these Reports being one to which much attention has been directed of late years, and the importance of which cannot be over-estimated.

The high position held by Scottish agriculture, both at home and abroad, is owing, in a great measure, to the superior intelligence of the farm-servants—a fact so fully appreciated by those Scotch farmers who have taken farms in England and Ireland, that they frequently send to Scotland to engage ploughmen, and one also which gives them a claim to greater attention to the comfort of their dwellings than has hitherto been bestowed upon them.

Mr Stuart of Oathlaw was one of the first to point out the wretched state of the abodes of our agricultural labourers, and the result was the establish-



ment of the Cottage Association, which supplies, at a cheap rate, plans, specifications, and every necessary information applicable to all localities, and many of which, if adopted, would add materially to the comfort and health of the people. Much good has been effected, but not to the extent anticipated, the Association not having met with the support from the proprietors which it was entitled to expect. The erection of new cottages on the old principle of the "but and the ben," without provision for the separation of the sexes or regard to sanitary improvements, which the Reports show is still continued, is much to be regretted; but it must be admitted that the untidy habits of the Scotch people, and other circumstances, present great difficulties in the way of proprietors, and the abuse which has been lavished upon them by writers and speakers may, in many cases, be undeserved. The reporter truly states that there is great difficulty in arriving at the truth. "The beastliness of some particular bothy or the excellence of another; the irregularity of one farm-kitchen and the tolerable comfort of some solitary cottage, are often all the foundation certain persons have for the most extravagant denunciation or praise." These Reports, as far as they have gone, represent very fairly the state of the cottages and bothies, and the habits and feelings of the farm-labourers, and may be taken as a fair criterion of the state of the whole of Scotland in this respect; and though not completed, the present publication will form a valuable handbook for the use of all connected with the agricultural districts of Scot-

land; and it is to be hoped that the impartiality with which the subject is treated, the particulars elicited respecting the condition of the various districts, and the expression of the sentiments of the men themselves on the different systems adopted for lodging single men, will induce proprietors and farmers to pay more attention to the dwellings of those engaged in agricultural employments.

In other respects the condition of the farm-servants throughout Scotland has been much improved during the last quarter of a century. These Reports show that, while the wages have risen considerably, the necessaries of life are greatly cheapened, and improved in quality.

The Reports allude to an erroneous assertion often made, that high or improved farming leads to the depopulation of the country districts.

It is undoubtedly true that a great want of hands exists in many parts of the country, but many causes tend to this result. The temptation of work afforded by large towns, the disuse in a great measure of spinning and handloom weaving, the facilities of transit which attract the buyer to the cheapest market, thus destroying the business of the small tradesman, who is forced, in self-defence, to remove from country localities,—all lead to a decrease in the rural population; but high farming has rather an opposite tendency, as, though some hands may be saved by machinery, many more are employed in other work on the farm, and the economy thereby effected induces the cultivation of waste land and the growth of crops which require a

great amount of hand-labour. A cry has been raised, by those who do not understand the question, for the erection of a greater number of cottages, regardless of the fact that field-labour, which cannot from its nature be constant, will not support a family. It appears, however, from the Report on Aberdeenshire, that in that county a great deficiency of cottages exists for yearly married servants, and this want, which is attended with serious evils, should no doubt be attended to; but it is a great mistake to encourage the location of families who have no other means of support than the chance of occasional outdoor work.

The old plan of crofters has also been brought forward, but however plausible it may appear in poor districts, where the land is being brought for the first time into cultivation, the description given by the Reports of the actual state of these crofters in different districts, corresponding with their state at the beginning of this century, proves how very undesirable a return to such a system would be. It is even a question whether the privilege granted to the foreman on a farm of keeping a cow instead of receiving his regular and constant supply of milk, is on the whole advantageous to him: replacing a cow in case of any casualty is a most serious affair, and the value, had it been laid by in a savings bank, would have been much more beneficial to him. The crofter has the additional chance of the loss of a horse, which is sufficient to ruin him.

One other subject treated of in these Reports deserves especial notice, and that is the Bothy system. It is, doubtless, one full of difficulties, but to which the