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SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN RURAL SOCIOLOGY

This paper describes some of the more general sociological hypotheses of the writer after two years of research in a number of village communities in south-west England. These villages were mostly in areas which had been markedly depopulated. It is not, therefore, claimed that these conclusions necessarily apply to all areas, for there are considerable regional, and even local, variations in economic and social structure. Nevertheless, it is felt that certain factors described here are fairly general characteristics of small agricultural communities, though whether they need necessarily lead to the emergence of particular problems will depend upon many additional circumstances.

Many of the specific problems of village life in certain areas — dwindling populations, inefficiency of local government, poverty of services, poor schools, lack of pastoral care, bad housing, apathy, decline of secondary industries, etc., are all inter-related both as cause and effect in what is known as the "decay of village life". This decay continues in some places despite the general economic and technological improvement of the central industry, agriculture. What in fact is happening, is that a particular type of society or culture is breaking up. Opinions as to the significance of this vary. It is deplored by the sentimental as the loss of a precious component of national life. By others it is considered as proof that change is long overdue, and that the clinging to traditional values jeopardises development in accordance with sound — or modern — economic and social trends.

But the purpose of this paper is not so much to examine the resultant problems, nor to weigh the relative merits of older and newer standards, but to examine the sociological and psychological nature of the change which is taking place.

Economically, both as regards the disposal of its produce and its purchase of goods, the village is less independent than ever before. Modern life has largely reduced its isolation, both physical and ideological, from the rest of the country. Its members are more apt to leave and seek employment in the towns, and town-folk are more liable to take up temporary residence as 'week-enders' or to live there when they retire.

All these things endanger a type of integration involved in a setting of relative isolation and self-sufficiency. Many different patterns of integration existed even in a small area, but they had this much in common, that they provided a focus of balance by which the village retained some measure of cohesion. As in the case of primitive society, this balance was often what we might term archaic, but it must be considered with some respect since it functioned well as a means of adaptation in circumstances as they were.

Nowadays, although most of the pressure from the outside world militates against the persistence of the old culture, there are, nevertheless, enough internal