



TODDINGTON ESTATE, NEAR WINCHCOMBE.

Development of One of the Large Gloucestershire Estates.

TOF all the English counties it is safe to say that none offer greater inducements than Gloucestershire to those who wish to apply their labour direct to the soil, or to engage in almost any branch of ordinary manufacturing. Geographically, the county occupies a favourable position between the great commercial centres, with which it is put into easy communication by both rail and water; topographically, it presents a most pleasing variety of open and wooded country, hill and vale, rising from the sea level to an altitude of 1,100 feet, and greatly protected from East winds by the shelter of the Cotswold Hills. With the exception of two towns of nearly 50,000 each, the population is almost wholly rural; and yet there is scarcely a single industrial pursuit that cannot be successfully conducted in Gloucestershire. It is, therefore, of special interest to know that systematic and far-reaching efforts are being made to attract to this county a population capable of fully utilising its resources.

Probably the most attractive effort made in this direction is on the famous Toddington Estate, the development of which forms one of the most pleasing and interesting chapters in Gloucestershire's industrial industry. This estate, which lies in the north-east portion of the county, comprises upwards of 8,000 acres of land in one tract, and is one of the most fertile and most picturesque estates in England. The larger portion of the tract is valley land, sheltered by the beautifully wooded Cotswolds, and really forming a continuation of the far-famed "Vale of Evesham." It is drained by the River Isborne, with numerous clear and spring-fed tributaries, flowing North and uniting with the Avon. Two main roads—the principal thoroughfares in that part of the county, one east and west between Tewkesbury and Stow, and the other north and south between Cheltenham and Evesham—extend directly through the estate, intersecting at its very centre. Picturesque and well-kept villages are also included.

As has been stated, the Toddington Estate is included in what is really a continuation of the Vale of Evesham, noted for its fruits and vegetables, and we are told there are many sites available on the estate which are peculiarly adapted for fruit culture. Full information concerning terms of letting can always be obtained by simply applying to the Estate Office, and the proprietor is, we understand, willing—and, indeed, anxious—to encourage any industrious persons desirous of acquiring land on the estate for the cultivation of fruit or for market gardens, and will assist them in every possible manner.

There are already upwards of 700 acres devoted to the cultivation of apples, plums, strawberries, and bush fruits of the choicest varieties, and every year this area is increasing. In addition to this cultivation, is that of early vegetables and the less hardy fruits under glass, about eighty glass-houses having already been erected, and last year two new houses (each 200 feet long) were added. As much as 2,000 tons of fruits have been grown in a single year and part of this is despatched by rail to fruit dealers and preserve manufacturers in all parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and an immense quantity is preserved on the estate by Messrs. T. W. Beach and Sons, the well-known and eminent firm of steam fruit preservers. This firm, by the way, established their large and splendidly appointed plant on the estate many years ago for the purpose of securing at their very door a practically unlimited supply of absolutely fresh, sound, ripe fruit, which may be preserved and bottled within a few hours

from the time it is gathered, and which is, therefore, in the best possible condition. These preserving works have been undoubtedly successful, employing several hundreds of hands in the season, and "Beachs' Jam" has a world-wide reputation.

As may readily be imagined, the cultivation and care of 700 acres of orchard forms an important industry in itself, and during the busy season, in addition to the employment of all local women and girls available in the immediate neighbourhood, three hundred women and girls are brought down annually from Shropshire to assist in the gathering of the fruit. These women are housed in large barracks especially erected for them, and every attention is given to their comfort and well-being. Connected with the growing and packing of the fruit are several allied industries, including a cider mill and a factory for making fruit baskets and crates.

The fruit industry on the Toddington Estate, however, is but on the eve of its full development. The Great Western Railway is at this time of writing constructing a double line from Honeybourne to Cheltenham—a distance of about twenty-five miles—the line running directly through the Toddington Estate. This connecting link will form a part of the Great Western main line, with a station at Toddington, thus affording quick communication with Birmingham and the North, London and the South, and Bristol and Cardiff; and the Toddington section has been opened for traffic to the North and to London for the fruit season of this year. Mr. Andrews has arranged to erect a large fruit packing shed and coal depot at Toddington Station, and for this and for the development of the estate generally the Great Western Railway are providing special and ample siding accommodation and every other needed facility for the quick handling and dispatch of fruit, vegetables, and farm produce, including cattle pens, large goods shed, weigh-bridge, and powerful lifting crane.

The importance of the facilities afforded by this new line of railway can scarcely be over-estimated. Its most marked effect will undoubtedly be the bringing into cultivation of a great number of small fruit and vegetable holdings. Hitherto the small grower, whose energy and intelligence have been sufficiently taxed by the actual work of cultivating and gathering the fruit, has been almost at the mercy of the dealer to whom his produce is sent. The cost of transition of a small quantity and the inability of the small grower to secure quickly the best market has been to him a serious handicap. It is proposed to afford small growers the means of effectively co-operating with each other, and with the estate itself, each one carting his fruit to the packing shed already referred to, where it will be dealt with and consigned to the market in bulk; and with this in view, and for the purpose of assisting Agriculturists and Market Gardeners generally throughout the District, the Toddington, Winchcombe and District Agricultural Co-operative Association has been established. This Association will carry on a general business, such as the purchase of Artificial Manures, Feeding Stuffs, and other goods required by the Members. It is intended to establish a connection for the sale of goods as well as for purchase, Fruit and Market Garden produce forming the special feature, as referred to above. A Co-operative Auction Mart is also being established adjoining Winchcombe Station, under the management of Mr. C. C. Castle, Auctioneer and Valuer, of Winchcombe and Cheltenham, the Landowners, their Tenants and others being the Shareholders.

This practical application of the beneficent principle of co-operation, together with the remarkable natural advantages of this estate, is destined, we trust, to attract to it a populous

and a prosperous community of fruit growers and market gardeners. There is no reason why it should not comfortably maintain a large population, who would find profitable employment similar to that around Evesham. It should be added that during the past two years twenty new cottages have been erected for labourers, and others will be erected for those who are capable of availing themselves of the special advantages and opportunities offered to them by the owner of the Toddington Estate.

To provide for the probable requirements of increasing population, a complete water supply system has recently been completed, under the supervision of Messrs. Willcox and Raikes, C.E., of Birmingham. The water is obtained from springs rising on the Cotswold Hills above the village of Hailes, on the estate, and is conducted through six miles of 4-inch iron pipes past the new Toddington Station, through Toddington Village and some of the orchards, to Toddington House, Mr. Andrews' residence. At convenient intervals fire hydrants are placed, and in case of an outbreak of fire provision has been made to obtain an increased flow by drawing from the lake at Hailes.

Negotiations are also in progress with a large quarrying company with the view of working an extensive deposit of building stone recently discovered on the estate. This stone is an Oolite, having a rich buff colour, the colour having no tendency to fade, but rather attaining a warmer shade with age. It is a free working stone, hardens on exposure, and is equally adapted to all kinds of buildings. In another place in this publication reference is made to the county's splendid deposits of building stone, of which the stone here mentioned is one of the best examples.

The estate also contains extensive deposits of clay suitable for the manufacture of plain and facing bricks, and for drains, tiles, and all kinds of shaped ware. The erection of a brick-making plant, equipped with modern machinery, would prove a very successful undertaking.

There is no reason, indeed, why almost any kind of industry should not flourish here. Gloucestershire presents many striking illustrations of the benefits derived by manufacturers who carry on their industries in rural districts. The "West of England" cloth, the hair-pins and hooks and eyes, and the umbrella fittings made in scattered mills and factories throughout the Stroud Valley; the paper mill near Winchcombe; the Handicraft Guild, located not far from Toddington Estate, who recently moved into the county from London; and many other industries of a varied character show that there is no better field for enterprise anywhere. To those manufacturers who desire cheap building sites, more room for expansion, or wholesome surroundings for the operatives, by which their efficiency will be increased, the Toddington Estate offers advantages which cannot be excelled, and we hope to see a speedy development. From the operatives' point of view these advantages are enhanced by the abundant work already provided in the orchards for women and girls, enabling the family to greatly augment their income.

