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PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN ENGLAND BEFORE 1381

By R. H. HILTON

‘Aux yeux de l’historien... la révolte agraire apparaît aussi inséparable du régime seigneurial que, par exemple, de la grande entreprise capitaliste, la grève.’

MARC BLOCH, *Caractères Originaux de l’Histoire Rurale Française*, p. 175.

I

THE dramatic character of the Great Revolt of 1381, the collapse of the government, the concerted action of peasants from parts of the country remote from each other, have made us regard that event as unique in English history. It is certainly true that at no other time was the English peasantry able to make itself felt politically as in May and June of that fateful year. But because of the uniqueness of the movement we are inclined to regard the Revolt as a bolt from the blue. We recognize and analyse the social, economic and political causes of mass discontent, but we mistakenly conceive of them as operating on a hitherto passive population which only shows its exasperation in this one explosive outburst, the first and last of its kind. There are very good reasons for rejecting the idea that the Revolt of 1381 was the last of the great peasant revolts. From the years immediately after the suppression of the Revolt¹ to the Midland Revolt of 1607, agrarian discontent is at the bottom of many movements usually considered to have primarily political or religious causes, and this fact is being more widely recognized by historians.

I am not concerned here to examine the course of peasant discontent after 1381, but to re-examine the period preparatory to the Revolt, a period whose beginnings I see, not at the time of the Black Death but at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In order to place this peasant discontent in its proper perspective, before indicating the evidence for it in the period to which I refer, it will be necessary to make some general remarks about the economic and social position of the English peasantry in the Middle Ages. This will seem to many a well-trodden field, and I am

¹ A. Steel, *Richard II* (Cambridge, 1941), p. 187, n. 3.

conscious of the risks in attempting to reassess the work of such eminent workers as Seebohm and Vinogradoff, or, to come to contemporary scholars, Professor Postan and Mr Homans.

What was it in the agrarian relations of feudal society that made peasant revolts, as Marc Bloch implied in the quotation I have set at the head of this article, inevitable? In order to answer this question, we must simplify the broad outlines of that society by (for the moment) ignoring such important intermediate social strata as the burgesses and certain of the free tenants. Is not feudal society after all fundamentally determined by the relations between a landowning military aristocracy on the one hand, and a vast class of peasant-producers, working individual family holdings but also organized in village or hamlet communities, on the other? I am aware that there have been many important modifications made to this simple picture,¹ but I maintain that the picture remains fundamentally true for even economies of widely differing character, in so far as it describes the basic social relations between the two main classes of feudal Europe. I must, however, further define these social relations as they affected the majority of the peasants and the feudal lords.

The fact that the peasants were organized in an organic community and that they were in effective possession of their own means of subsistence is of the greatest importance. This fact contradicts, as it were, the legal claim of the landowners to the monopoly and free disposal of the arable, the meadow, the pasture, the woods, the rivers and the waste. The landowners were not, however, powerless. They were militarily an extremely powerful class, and whether the state power which they controlled was decentralized into private jurisdictions, or centralized under the direction of the most eminent of the feudal landowners, the king, they had all the means of coercion in society in their own hands. Their sustenance as a non-producing class depended on the transfer to themselves of the surplus produced by the peasant, above what the peasant needed to keep himself and his family alive, and to ensure the reproduction of the agricultural routine year in and year out. There was no economic reason why the members of the peasant communities (many of which existed before feudal lordship developed) should transfer their surplus to their lords. The lord-serf relationship was in fact primarily a political relationship. It may originally have contained within it an element of *quid pro quo* by which the lord protected some of the peasants during the chaos of the ninth and tenth centuries, but that the element of protection was of minor importance by the eleventh and twelfth centuries is shown by the legal status of the majority of the peasants. Their surplus has now to be transferred under coercive sanction, and therefore they are unfree.²

¹ Well summarized in E. E. Power's article in the *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. vii (1932), entitled 'Peasant Life and Rural Conditions'.

² The description I give here of the lord-serf relationship as being one of exploitation must not be taken to imply a pejorative judgement of the historical role of the medieval landowning aristocracy, whose contributions in the cultural, economic and political fields, at any rate up to the thirteenth century, were immense.

The transferred surplus is rent, and the rent can be in many different forms without losing its essential character. In the period of transition from tribal to feudal society, in England in the eighth and ninth centuries for instance, rent as defined above is hardly distinguishable from the food tribute once rendered freely to the king and the warrior leaders of the tribe,¹ and rents in kind remain throughout the Middle Ages as an important component of total rent. Most lords, especially the ecclesiastics, could rely on at least eggs at Easter and hens at Christmas from their tenants as late as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Another form of rent is labour, often regarded as the most typical rent of feudal society. Here the peasant's surplus is transferred to the lord in the form of labour on the lord's own domanial reserve. It should be noted that labour rents do not only involve a transfer simply of labour, but often the application of the peasant's own equipment and seed to the lord's demesne. When the lords are not concerned to cultivate their demesnes directly—and this decision is not, as was once thought, the necessary reaction to the growth of the market²—they might, according to local circumstances, appropriate the peasant surplus either as produce or as money rent. The produce rent of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries must be distinguished from the ancient customary renders of pre-feudal origin. It is sometimes a proportion of the total harvest (the French *champart*), but this is uncommon in England, where more often a fixed amount was demanded. The money rent was regarded for the most part, and should be regarded by us, as a commutation of other forms of peasant surplus. Whilst it is true that by the fourteenth century some demesne and assarted land was being leased at what are sometimes called 'economic' rents, the level of most money rents was determined primarily, as in the case of food and labour rents, by the political relationship of lord and peasant, and not by free bargaining on a land market. Even the level of the 'economic' rent must be assumed to have been considerably affected by this political factor.

Naturally these different forms of rent existed side by side. Examples abound. Let us take the rents paid by the half-yardlanders of Childehampton, a manor of the nunnery of Wilton in Wiltshire, in 1315. The money value of labour rent performed during the year was about 6s., the money rent paid was 5s., and customary (probably pre-feudal) produce rents consisted of a cock, three hens, and a grain payment for churchscot.³ We must also remember that if we regard rent as being the transfer of the peasant's surplus to the landowner, other payments not normally described as rent should be included. Of these payments the most important was probably tithe, which I do not propose to discuss here. Another payment more to the forefront of peasant grievances was tallage, sometimes euphe-

¹ Cf. Tacitus, *Germania*, c. 15: 'mos est civitatibus ultro ac viritim conferre principibus vel armentorum vel frugum...'; also F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943), p. 284.

² M. M. Postan, 'The Chronology of Labour Services', in *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.* 4th ser., vol. xx (1937); M. E. Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946), p. 40 et seq.

³ Roxburgh Club, *Pembroke Surveys II*, App. A.

mistically described as aid. This was an annual tax on the unfree peasantry of a manor for the benefit of the manorial lord. It was sometimes a fixed amount, but more often was determined by the will of the lord. In the second half of the thirteenth century the Abbot of Bec was getting from his manors tallage varying between 13s. 4d. and £4 per manor.¹ Individuals paid varying amounts. The unfree tenants of the Master of the Temple on his manor of Cubbington in Warwickshire were stated in 1279 to owe 2s. per head a year, while a serf of the Prior of Kenilworth at Baginton in the same county paid an 'aid' of 5s. 4d. a year.² Arbitrary tallage was the most typical, and to be tallaged 'high and low' was considered to be a mark of servitude. It might also be justifiable to include in the total of rent (as defined here) some of the fines in the manor courts. Entry fines should certainly be considered as rent. Fines for permission to do certain acts which might be prevented by the lord by virtue of his political power may well come in this category, although they are principally a by-product of regulations aimed at restricting the movement of peasants and their property.

The main concern of the lord in his relations with the peasants was to get his rent. In view of the ability of the peasant communities to stand on their own economically, it was necessary for the lords to exercise their coercive power in order to guarantee the payment of the rent. A group of regulations operated in the manor courts and ultimately guaranteed by the threat of force was designed to secure the lords' claims. These were restrictions on the movement of the unfree population; restrictions on the movement of their chattels; and restrictions on the transfer of land between unfree peasants. Intended to guarantee the conditions under which the peasant surplus or rent could be transferred, these restrictions came to be the very marks of legal servility; a clear indication of the close relation between the status and the economic obligations of the peasantry.³

The restriction on the movement of the medieval serf was not identical with the binding to the soil of the peasant population of the late Empire, in spite of the fact that the author of the *Dialogus de Scaccario* refers to the villein as 'ascriptitius'.⁴ The serf, as Marc Bloch has pointed out,⁵ was bound, not to the land but to his lord, and it is noteworthy that whilst referring to the unfree peasantry as 'ascriptitii' Richard Fitznigel stresses that they can be moved from place to place, sold and otherwise alienated at the will of the lord. However the fact was that there was such a shortage of labour in the Middle Ages that in practice the effort was always made

¹ Selden Society, vol. 1, *Select Pleas in Manorial Courts*, passim.

² P.R.O. Exchequer, K.R. Misc. Bks, 15, ff. lv^r, xii^v.

³ What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the incidents of villeinage, but a reference to those restrictive of the movement of personnel and property.

⁴ Stubbs, *Select Charters*, 9th ed. (Oxford, 1913), pp. 219, 221.

⁵ In *Cambridge Economic History* (1941), I, 248. See his general discussion of serfdom, 'Comment finit l'esclavage antique?', in *Annales*, Jan.-March and April-June, 1947. The point is also illustrated in Selden Society, vol. 62, *Introduction to the Curia Regis Rolls* (1943), by C. T. Flower, pp. 228 and 234.

to fix the peasant to his holding so as to guarantee the payment of rent and the performance of services. Hence the unfree peasant could not quit the manor without permission, and even when given permission had to pay an annual chevage from wherever he might be, to remind him that the lord might recall him at will. The offspring of serfs had to obtain a licence to enter holy orders, or to receive schooling, which amounted to the same thing. The marriage of serfs' daughters, and sometimes of their sons, was additionally controlled, and the obligation to pay *merchet* or, as it was sometimes called, *redemptio sanguinis et carnis*, was regarded as a hall-mark of servility. As a corollary *leyrwite*, the fine for unchastity out of wedlock, was imposed not so much perhaps to compensate for loss of marriageability, and therefore of *merchet*, but because bastards were considered to be born to free status.¹

The restrictions on the villein's right freely to dispose of his movable goods was generally covered by the doctrine that such goods were in fact, like the villein himself, the property of the lord. Hence manumissions were always paid for by a third person.² More particularly, the villein was forbidden to dispose of beasts without licence, a restriction often linked with the obligation to pay *merchet*. The object of this restriction was probably to maintain the number of plough and draught animals needed to perform services on the demesne. Restrictions on the right to dispose of grain by sale are not found, for the peasant had to sell on the market in order to get the cash with which to pay his money rent. Abnormal sales were, however, prohibited. A villein on the Abbot of Ramsey's manor of Houghton in 1307 sold his movable goods and the crops on half a virgate of land to a merchant from Erith. The abbot's bailiff was instructed to seize all the goods.³

Restrictions on the free disposal of produce are capped by restrictions on the free disposal of land. Particularly when labour services were assessed on the yardland or half-yardland tenement it was necessary for the lord to maintain the integrity of the holding. Control of villein land alienations was achieved by making all land transfers illegal except by surrender and release in the manor court under the supervision of the lord's steward, recorded on the court roll. Villeins were strictly forbidden to exercise the right enjoyed by free tenants to transfer land by charter. Land 'in fee' could not be acquired by villeins, for its descent could not be controlled by the lord and it escaped from the rules governing land in villeinage—and the villein might escape with it.

It has often been said, sometimes in an attempt to provide something of a moral basis for the existence of this form of social relationship, that the villein was in practice protected against the extremes of extortion by a tenacious manorial custom which the lord could not override. There is

¹ See P. Vinogradoff, *Villeinage in England* (1892), p. 60. Although one view was that bastards took their mothers' status, bastardy in the fourteenth century meant freedom. See *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1345-8*, pp. 7-8.

² Glanvill in Stubbs, op. cit. p. 192. Also *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, passim.

³ W. O. Ault, *Court Rolls of the Abbey of Ramsey* (New Haven, 1928), p. 242.

some truth in this statement, but it must be realized also that manorial custom was not fixed. It was in fact a shifting compromise between peasant resistance based on the mutual solidarity produced by common interests and a common routine of agriculture on the one hand, and the lord's claims on the other, more or less urgent as they might be, and backed up by more or less political and military power. But although custom—and in particular the rent demanded—was not fixed, neither did it fluctuate rapidly or arbitrarily. If the rent that was taken had represented the whole of the peasant family's surplus above subsistence needs it would necessarily have varied from year to year, and from holding to holding. This was by no means the case. It was usually constant over a long period of time. And though a fixed level of rent might, and probably did often mean that the poorer peasants in bad years were driven even below subsistence standards, it meant also that the richer and more fortunate could accumulate a surplus of goods, or money, and when the opportunity occurred, could convert that surplus into land and extend their farming operations.

Even when manorial discipline on the English estates was most strict it was not possible for the rigid framework of obligations to suppress this constant movement of differentiation among the basic producers of society participating as they did, like their lords, in production for the market. Because the peasantry was thus separating into elements with differing economic interests, the reactions of different groups to seigneurial exploitation were quite differently motivated. The poor and middling peasants, whose agriculture was only above subsistence level in so far as they had to sell their produce in order to pay their rent, resisted increased demands because they pressed on their already low standard of living. The richer peasants, accumulating both movable and landed property, struck against all aspects of seigneurial control because at every point they found their road to economic expansion blocked by the innumerable devices whose object it was to transfer as much as possible of the surplus from the holding to the lord in the form of rent, by hindering any movement and any progress which might take the peasant or his property out of the ken of the lord. But though the reasons why these groups resisted seigneurial pressure differed, the direction of their resistance was the same, and this accounts for the extraordinary force revealed by a class otherwise so much divided.

II

Peasant resistance to seigneurial pressure seems first to become significant in England in the thirteenth century. This is partly due to the fact that the documents from which we derive our information became very abundant at this time; and partly due to the fact that there was a considerable, and possibly sudden, intensification of the exploitation of peasants by their lords. This intensification was probably much greater than that which is said (on much slenderer authority) to have resulted from the Norman Conquest. It may be remarked that the intensification of exploitation and

the increased documentation are not unconnected, for the magnificent series of court rolls, manorial accounts, rentals and surveys, for which this country is the envy of continental medievalists, were a by-product of the administrative activity involved in the organization of the thirteenth-century baronial estate.¹

Apart from these records of private administration, the official records of the activities of the royal courts and of the chancery become available and abundant from the beginning of the thirteenth century. There are many cases concerning villeinage in the *Curia Regis Rolls*, and in the records of the itinerant justices. Some of these are printed in full, but these are unfortunately only a fraction of the total.² The old compilation called the *Placitorum Abbreviatio*³ contains reports of a number of villeinage cases. The notebook of the great thirteenth-century lawyer Bracton also contains many records of villeinage cases, together with valuable comments by Bracton himself.⁴ For the later period, the Year-books and records of the courts of equitable jurisdiction⁵ provide some information. The Calendars of Letters Patent and Close are especially valuable because such letters issued from the chancery, ordering sheriffs or other royal officials to take action on behalf of landlords against rebellious serfs, often recite full details of the cases with which sheriffs or commissioners were to deal.

It is now well known that in the thirteenth century most of the great estate-owners, lay and ecclesiastical, expanded their demesne production in order to sell agricultural produce on the market.⁶ Prices were rising and for many reasons the landowners were striving to increase their cash revenues, both by increasing their money rents and as stated, by producing for the market. Much of the labour needed for the expanding demesnes had to be provided by peasant cultivators, for although there was a considerable increase in the population which swelled the ranks of the smallholders,⁷ wage labour was apparently insufficient to supply the extra needs. So labour services were increased, even doubled. This increase in services appears to have been almost universal (in England), and it was

¹ See N. Denholm-Young, *Seignorial Administration in England* (1937).

² H.M. Stationery Office, *Curia Regis Rolls, 1199-1220*; Selden Society, vols. 53, 56, 59, ed. D. M. Stenton: *Rolls of the Justices in Eyre for Lincolns (1218-19)*, and *Worcs (1221)* (1934); do. for *Yorks (1218-19)* (1937); do. for *Gloucs, Warwicks, and Staffs (1221-2)* (1940); vol. 30, ed. W. C. Bolland (1914), *Select Bills in Eyre (1292-1333)*; vol. 60, ed. Richardson and Sayles (1941), *Select Cases of Procedure without Writ*; vol. 57, ed. Sayles (1938), *Select Cases in the Court of King's Bench, II*.

³ Record Commission, 1811.

⁴ *Bracton's Notebook*, ed. F. W. Maitland (1887).

⁵ Selden Society, vol. 10, ed. Baildon (1896), *Select Cases in Chancery (1364-1471)*; vol. 35, ed. Leadam and Baldwin (1919), *Cases before the King's Council*; Record Commission, *Calendar of Proceedings in Chancery*.

⁶ Postan, loc. cit.

⁷ The very full surveys of the manors of the Bishop of Worcester dated 1299, in the *Red Book of Worcester* (Worcester Historical Society) illustrate these points very clearly. Between 1182 (the date of the previous extant survey) and 1299 there may have been as much as a doubling of the population on some manors, especially of the smallholding population.

inevitable that there should be resistance by those of whom more was being demanded.

The earliest signs of this resistance are to be seen in the records of the royal courts, a resistance at first put up by individuals rather than by groups, though the individuals who faced their lords in the courts may well have represented test cases for their fellow peasants. In theory villeins had no case against their lords in the royal courts. They held their land at the will of the lord, and so far as the king's justices were concerned (most of whom, like their master, were also serf-owners) disputes about services should be dealt with in the manorial courts, if the tenants were unfree. But although this theory does not appear to have been challenged, the question as to who was and who was not a villein could always be argued about, and the additional complication of free men holding by villein tenure brought another element of doubt into the situation.¹ Consequently the trial of pleas *de villenagio* or *de nativitate* was often in practice the concluding stage of a dispute about increased services. The cases as argued in court are full of interest for those concerned with the definition of legal status, and Miss Cam, Sir Cyril Flower and Mr Lane Poole have recently discussed the evidence at some length.² It is with the local struggles revealed by these cases that I am concerned, and I will quote one example typical of many in the records—and no doubt typical of even more that never reached the royal courts.

Bracton tells us³ that in 1224 a case came up in court at Oxford between the Abbot of Battle and William the son of Andrew, a tenant in the village of Crowmarsh. The abbot claimed that William should do services as of villeinage, while William, though admitting his liability to services, claimed to be a free man, so that his services should be fixed and that the abbot had no right to increase them arbitrarily. The abbot was in fact claiming double services from this tenant, as well as the right to tallage him. The case went against the tenant because the abbot showed that he had a second cousin who was a villein, and because, although William claimed to be free himself, he recognized that all the other tenants (except one) were villeins. He admitted that he did labour services with them, and that he contributed to a tallage levied on them—though he claimed that his contribution was an aid given of his own free will. Once William's villeinage was proved, his case passed beyond the ken of the royal justices. I do not doubt, although no evidence appears, that although William tried to disassociate himself from the villeins of Crowmarsh, the doubling of labour services against which he was protesting had been imposed also on the other tenants.

¹ Cf. the well-known case in *Bracton's Notebook*, II, 70, discussed by Vinogradoff, op. cit. p. 78.

² 'Pedigrees of Villeins and Freemen in the Thirteenth Century', in *Liberties and Communities in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1944); op. cit.; and *Obligations of Society in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1946). There is of course the older and masterly discussion in Vinogradoff, op. cit.

³ *Notebook*, III, 1005.

Individual clashes such as these were but the heralds of the storm. It was collective action which was to be most disturbing to the social order and which was the training ground for revolt on a large scale. Some of the earliest instances of collective action have been recorded as a result of circumstances similar to those which produced the record quoted above. Groups of tenants were only able to find a legal basis for resistance to claims by the lord for increased services by denying that they were of ordinary villein status and so subject to the lord's arbitrary will. So in some cases they claimed to be protected as tenants of the ancient demesne of the Crown, in other cases to be of long-established free condition.

Certain villein tenants on manors that were demesne of the Crown at the time of Edward the Confessor, even though subsequently alienated to other lords, could claim royal protection against an increase in services beyond those rendered before the alienation. The appeal against the increase of services was pleaded before the king's justices by the writ or plaint *monstraverunt* and the decision as to whether a manor was of ancient demesne or not lay in the higher courts. Although not all villeins on ancient demesne were entitled to the writ *monstraverunt*, the distinction between 'pure' villeins and the privileged villein sokemen was often ignored.¹ So the privilege of ancient demesne was often claimed by peasants who saw old fixed services transformed in the interests of manorial profit. This peasant habit of litigation *par colour de certains exemplificaciouns hors de livre de Domesday* was, as is well known, a matter for complaint in a statute of 1377.² It was a habit that was then at least a century old, and a number of cases are known to us from the latter part of the thirteenth century, an example of which I quote from the Patent Rolls. In 1278 the villein tenants of the alien Priory of Harmondsworth impleaded their lord the Prior that he should not demand from them customs and services in excess of those they owed when the manor was in the king's hands. Domesday Book was searched and it was shown that the manor did not count as ancient demesne. The tenants were therefore declared tallageable at the will of the lord and liable to *merchet*. The sheriff of Middlesex was ordered to assist the abbot to distrain and to tallage his rebellious tenants.³

Appeals of this sort to a not necessarily mythical or remote past are to be found in other cases in which proof of past conditions was necessary, not involving a plea of ancient demesne. What Vinogradoff calls 'a very

¹ For a full discussion of the still obscure subject of ancient demesne, see Vinogradoff, *op. cit.* ch. III. The late Professor N. Neilson further discusses the problem in the forthcoming Dugdale Society edition of the Stoneleigh Ledger Book.

² Stats. II, 2-3.

³ *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1272-81*, p. 290. Other cases may be found in F. M. Stenton, *Documents Illustrative of the Social and Economic History of the Danelaw* (1920), p. 87, n.; M. Morgan, *English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (Oxford, 1946), p. 106; *Plac. Abb.* p. 303 (see also index); Bolland, *op. cit.* pp. 25-6; Richardson and Sayles, *op. cit.* nos. 74, 76 (both 1258); G. C. Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Harvard, 1941), pp. 276-83.

definite case of oppression¹ is summarized in the *Placitorum Abbreviatio*, recording an inquisition at Northampton in 1261. The tenants of Mears Ashby made no claim of ancient demesne, but simply to be free men, to have the right to buy and sell land freely, to be amerced only by the judgement of their peers and to pay a fixed tallage. They complained that though their lord, on first acquiring the manor, had for seven years observed the old customs, he had then reversed these conditions of freedom and tallaged the whole village arbitrarily. They eventually obliged him to restore their rights, by extra-legal pressure it must be assumed, shortly before his death. The inquisition appears to have been taken because his widow once more attempted to impose servility upon them.

I have described elsewhere² an attempt by some Leicestershire villeins in 1278 to prove the illegality of a demand by their lord, the Abbot of Leicester, for increased services. In this case too, we find no appeal to Domesday Book, but conscious perhaps of the Danish-influenced social structure of the area in which they lived, they claimed not to be villeins but sokemen. They claimed therefore that their services should not be arbitrarily increased, as had been done, by Paul, one of the abbot's predecessors (1186-1205), but the abbot was able to produce a jury with a legal memory going back to the first half of the twelfth century, and so to defeat them. This jury may very well have been intimidated by the abbot's officials into remembering so much from so remote a period. Local intimidation of this sort must have stifled many a movement of protest. What, for instance, could have been the local circumstances in a Northamptonshire case in 1273, when the men of Weekley got as far as the King's Court to claim the rights of tenants of ancient demesne against an increase in services, but let the case go by default? An examination of Domesday Book was ordered by the court, but the tenants did not come to hear the answer.³

A diligent search of the still unprinted records of the royal courts would, I believe, reveal many more cases of such litigation,⁴ provoked by increased services, but taking the form of disputes about status. Even all this evidence could not, however, reveal more than a tiny proportion of the existing social discontent. Behind this litigation we become conscious of a continuous day-to-day struggle between lord and villein, almost the only evidence of which is to be found in the records of the manorial courts. Although a number of manorial court rolls have been printed, this is a source of evidence which has not been used as extensively as, for instance, the accounts of manorial bailiffs, and manorial rentals and surveys.⁵ Even

¹ Op. cit. p. 205, n. Vinogradoff does not describe or discuss the case, which is in *Plac. Abb.* p. 150.

² *English Historical Review*, 1941.

³ *Plac. Abb.* p. 303.

⁴ Additional, that is, to cases in the printed records listed (p. 123, n. 2), of which the above are but samples.

⁵ Mr Homans, op. cit. chooses mainly court-roll evidence, and Professor Levett is obliged, for lack of other types of evidence, to use Court Books to write the history of St Albans Abbey. Mr Homans' chapter xxii should be read as an example of a conception of social peace in the medieval village, clearly opposed to the ideas expressed in this article.

a cursory examination of some of the best known of the printed rolls, with the problem of peasant revolt in mind, provides some very striking results.

Professor Levett has already drawn attention to the evidence for mass withdrawals of service contained in the Court Books of the Abbey of St Albans. She has shown that these movements were occurring as early as 1245 on the manor of Park.¹ We can see the same forces at work on the manors of the Abbey of Ramsey somewhat later, and can illustrate them with some figures. Between 1279 and 1311 there were twenty-one sessions of courts held in various of the abbey's manors, in which cases concerning manorial labour discipline were dealt with. There resulted one hundred and forty-six separate convictions for the deliberate non-performance of labour services, apart from cases of what may have been equally deliberate cases of bad work.² The individual offences are not exceptional, and might occur even where ordinarily the most harmonious relations prevailed between lord and serf. Typical of these offences are refusal to obey a summons to the ploughing service; absence from the autumn boon-work; refusal to thresh the lord's wheat; non-performance of carrying services. It is the number of these offences that makes them significant, and even more so, the clear indication of deliberate, concerted refusal to do the labour services. At the Cranfield view of frankpledge of 1294 twenty-six tenants were amerced for not coming to the lord's ploughing. At the manor court of Houghton in 1307 eighteen tenants, including the reeve, were amerced for not coming to turn the lord's hay when summoned. In the following year, at the same place, fifteen tenants were amerced for going and ploughing their own land after dinner instead of doing a boon-ploughing for the lord.³

Such small-scale collective actions are of great importance. The predominance of collective activities in the ordinary routine of the medieval rural communities must have made the organization of joint action for the representation of grievances to manorial lords⁴ or before royal courts easy and natural in the first stages. But without the fighting spirit generated in these obscure local clashes, would the members of an oppressed class, constantly reminded of its inferiority, have been able to force themselves on to the attention of tribunals where they had no legal standing and where the scales of justice were necessarily heavily balanced against them?

The peasant struggle for liberty and for a reduction in rents and services was conducted illegally as well as under the colour of ancient rights. This was necessarily so. Royal courts would protect the rights of men who were uncontrovertibly free, for free men, like knights, were precious assets to

¹ *Studies in Manorial History* (Oxford, 1938), p. 203.

² E.g. Wystowe, 1279. Robert the son of Richard at the church is amerced 6d. *quia male messuit in autumpno*. Thirteen others were amerced for the same offence. Ault, op. cit. pp. 183-4.

³ Ault, op. cit. pp. 233, n., 243, 247.

⁴ For a petition from bondmen at Harewood, see Denholm-Young, op. cit. p. 154; J. S. Nichols, 'Early Fourteenth-Century Petition of the Tenants of Bocking to their Manorial Lord', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* II.

the machinery of local government.¹ But it would be foolish to imagine that projects for the general emancipation of the unfree could be entertained by government officials or royal judges, whose social and political outlook was that of their class. So if no general legal redress was possible for the peasants, their action against their lords must either cease, or become violent and illegal. The consequences of the Harmondsworth ancient demesne case mentioned above² are an instructive illustration of this point. The Letter Patent which describes this case was in fact a commission of oyer and terminer to certain individuals instructing them to deal with events that happened after the failure of the villeins in their appeal to Domesday Book. Some of them, including one John le Clerk, had then broken into the manor house and carried away charters, other writings and goods, of which they were still in possession at the time of the issue of the commission. In addition they had threatened the prior and his household as to their bodies and the burning of their houses. It was in this year, too, that a dispute between the Abbot of Halesowen and his tenants, as to whether they were protected from increased services by the privileges of ancient demesne, appears to have culminated in violence. The tenants had failed to prove their case in the King's Court on appeal to Domesday Book. 'Worsted at law', says Mr Homans,³ 'they resorted to direct action', and were excommunicated for laying violent hands on the abbot and his brethren.

A similar case is recorded in the Patent Rolls of the year 1299.⁴ The Prior of St Stephen's, Hempton, had acquired a writ instructing the sheriff of Norfolk to help him to distrain his villeins of Worsted to do their due and accustomed services. The king's common minister for the execution of writs was dispatched to the scene of the disturbance and was manhandled on arrival by no less than sixty-six persons, all of whose names are given in the Letter Patent which, in ordering proceedings against them, tells the story which led up to the assault.

Such violent defiance of both private and public authority continues in the fourteenth century. Miss Morgan has described the development of a revolt over a period of many years, from litigation to open defiance, on manors in England of the Norman Abbey of Bec.⁵ The appeal of the Ogbourne tenants to the privileges of ancient demesne was made before 1309, and the movement did not culminate in the wholesale refusal of services until the year of upheavals, 1327. A year after this, we find bitter struggles taking place at Darnhall, a manor of the Cistercian Abbey of Vale Royal in Cheshire, between the abbot and the villein tenants. The villeins appear to have been fighting against a real social degradation

¹ The discussions of Mr Denholm-Young ('Feudal Society in the Thirteenth Century: the Knights', in *Collected Papers in Medieval Subjects*) and Professor Treharne (in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxi) have shown what scarcity value knights had in thirteenth-century administration. Was there the same shortage of freemen for juries?

² P. 125.

³ Op. cit. p. 281.

⁴ *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1292-1301*, p. 461.

⁵ Loc. cit.

following the recent gift of Darnhall to the Cistercians by the King.¹ The tenants' refusal to grind at the lord's mill, their objection to restrictions on the leasing of land, their denial of bondage, in 1328 led to imprisonment, submission and fines. But the movement started again in 1336, and with an incredible persistence the men of Darnhall combined both legal and illegal forms of struggle against their lord. They beset the Justiciar of Cheshire, the King himself, and even Queen Philippa in their search for redress at law, but at the same time some of them went as far afield as Rutlandshire, in arms, to seek out and attack the abbot and his entourage. In spite of some initial encouragement of the peasants by royal and official personages, the abbot was always able to intervene in high places against them with success, and gradually all were brought to submission.

The conspiratorial aspect of peasant revolt which the government and the nobility found so alarming before, during, and after 1381 is stressed in all accounts, official and unofficial, written by those hostile to peasant aspirations. The malicious plotters of Darnhall assembled together *at night* to plan the overthrow of the rights of their lord; in 1336 they *conspired* to obtain their liberty. The tenants of Great and Little Ogbourne not only formed a *conspiracy* in 1327, but supported it by a common purse—as must the Darnhall men, for they would not only have needed money to present their petition at Westminster, but also to pay the 'persons skilled in the law' who represented them at Chester. A commission of inquiry was appointed in 1338² to investigate the refusal of the villeins of Hayling to pay to the alien priory of the same place the due ransoms (that is, *merchet*), fines and other services and customs. The outline of the case in the Letter Patent speaks of this refusal as the consequence of a *confederacy* entered into by the villeins. Even the agitator from outside makes his appearance in a case in the year 1352.³ A commission of oyer and terminer was appointed to deal with three named persons and their supporters, who had not only stolen goods of the Bishop of Worcester and assaulted his servant, but had *conspired* with his bondmen at Hanbury, that they should refuse to do the services owed to him. The conspiracy must, to a point, have been successful, for the bishop had to spend money in order to compel his men to do their services.

Mutual support among the peasantry does not only show itself in conspiracies to acquire benefits for all bondmen in a community. It also prompts action to protect individuals from the consequences of seigneurial justice. In 1338 a bondman of the Prior of Tynemouth's manor of Elswick was arrested for trespassing with his beasts on the lord's land. He was being taken by the Prior's officer to judgement, when men from Newcastle and elsewhere rescued him. Not content with this, they invaded Elswick, took possession of the manor, and prevented the Prior's servants from

¹ Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, 1914, *Ledger Book of Vale Royal Abbey*, pp. 31–2, 37–42. The Darnhall custumal (pp. 117–20) reveals a harshness of exploitation unparalleled even on the old-established Benedictine houses of the south.

² *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1338–40*, p. 65.

³ *Ibid. 1350–4*, p. 275.

entering to collect rents and levy distrainments.¹ In 1349 two bondmen of the Countess of Pembroke were arrested at Foxley (Norfolk) for 'disobedience and rebellion'. On their way to Denny (Cambs), where they were to be 'chastised in the usual manner', they were rescued by their friends who also assaulted the Countess's officials.² In the same year, the Prior of Ely complained of the fate of his steward whom he had sent to Melbourn (Cambs) to bring a recalcitrant bondman to judgement. The steward put the bondman in the stocks. Nine named persons with others then lay in wait for the steward, captured him, and forced him to seal a letter ordering the deliverance of the bondman from the stocks.³ After 1349 such cases multiply, for one of the punishments for breach of the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers was to be put in the stocks.

III

The reasons why peasants, who were living on, or just above the level of subsistence, should resist demands for extra rents and services with bitterness and violence are obvious. The difference between a fixed and an arbitrary tallage taken by the lord at Michaelmas might be as much as the poor peasant's reserve for the winter. The loss of a plough-ox as heriot would tax the dead man's family at the hardest moment of its existence. The lord's demand for extra boon-work at haymaking or harvest might take labour away from the peasant holding at a moment crucial for the crop. But it was not only the poor and middling peasants who took part in movements of revolt. They were joined by the wealthy husbandmen, favoured by fortune and inheritance with more and better land than their fellow villagers. The participation of these men brought a different element, one perhaps of calculation and strategy, an ability to formulate programmes as in 1381.

The growth of a rich upper stratum among the peasants has been well enough documented in recent agrarian studies.⁴ Whether we look at peasant life in the south-east, in the Thames Valley, in East Anglia or in the Midlands, we find standing out from the ordinary run of tenants with their fifteen- or twenty-acre holdings, a small group of families, sometimes free, more often serf, holding a hundred acres or more. These holdings are composite in character—perhaps a couple of yardlands on customary terms; some land assarted from wood or marsh; portions of the holdings of extinct or bankrupt families; and in the fourteenth century after the final decline of demesne farming has begun, portions of the lord's demesne. But in most cases the economic prosperity of the holders of these extensive

¹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1338-40*, p. 67.

² *Ibid. 1348-50*, p. 313.

³ *Ibid. 1348-50*, p. 453.

⁴ Recent works include R. A. L. Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory* (Cambridge, 1943); M. Morgan, *op. cit.*; R. H. Hilton, *Economic Development of some Leicestershire Estates* (Oxford, 1947). Older works illustrating the same theme include G. Poulett Scrope, *Manor and Barony of Castle Combe* (1852); F. G. Davenport, 'Decay of Villeinage in East Anglia', in *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, n.s. xiv (1900); R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912).

farms is in sharp contrast to their legal status. In one of the earliest villeinage cases discussed by Bracton, the villein holding consisted of a hundred acres of arable land and fifty sheep.¹ Among the convictions for the non-performance of labour services on the manors of Ramsey Abbey mentioned above, we find that six men at Houghton in 1294 were amerced for withdrawing *their men* from the autumn boon-work.² Now these men must have regarded the restrictions of serfdom in a very different light from the poorer peasants whose legal status they shared. Most irritating to them must have been the hindrances to accumulation, rather than the fear of starvation. Consequently, and especially during the period of seigneurial withdrawal from active participation in productive activity, the issue of the right to buy and sell land freely comes to the fore. For this involved the right to convert surpluses made in buying and selling into landed property, acquired for the purpose of buying and selling on an even larger scale.

It will be remembered that the Northamptonshire case of 1261 quoted above³ contained a plea by the tenants for the free disposal of land, whether as gift, sale, pledge or exchange. These men who claimed to be free recognized that as villeins they would not have that right—*sicut nec villani possunt*. Ramsey Abbey tenants were frequently being fined for unlicensed leases and exchanges of land among themselves,⁴ most frequently of small quantities rarely exceeding an acre, and for short terms, such as for two crops. From 1312 onwards land alienations by charter made by villeins without the abbot's permission on the St Albans manor of Barnet were being attacked by the estate officials, and in 1345 the charters had to be surrendered in court.⁵ The 1320 Visitation Articles of the Cathedral Chapter of St Paul, London, order an inquiry to be made as to whether villeins and customary tenants had been leasing, selling or giving customary land, with or without charter to fellow-villeins, without the consent of the farmer of the manor, and not in full court or hallmote.⁶ When the tenants of the Canterbury Cathedral manor of Monk's Risborough claimed privileges of ancient demesne in 1336, amongst those mentioned were the right 'to sell their tenements by charter as they wished without the lord's permission'.⁷

The lord's action when these transfers took place was to enter on the illegally acquired land.⁸ Even if the land was acquired in fee, and could

¹ Above, p. 124, n. 1. The free man who in this case took land in villeinage had to perform all villein obligations or lose the land.

² Ault, op. cit. p. 226.

³ P. 125.

⁴ Ault, op. cit. Examples will be found on pp. 189, 198–9, 216, 221, 240, 243 (this is an example of a licensed exchange), 254, 259, 278.

⁵ Levett, op. cit. p. 149, n. 5.

⁶ Camden Society, *The Domesday of St Paul's* (1857), p. 157*. The farmer here must be understood as a Chapter official rather than as a mere lessee.

⁷ Nichols, loc. cit. p. 300, n.

⁸ Alienation by charter, or without charter when unlicensed, involved perpetual forfeiture at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. Vinogradoff, op. cit. p. 198, n. 1, quoting the Stoneleigh Register.

not be claimed by the lord as his villeinage, confiscation was his right. References in the Patent Rolls show this. In 1339 the Priory of Spalding got a licence for acquiring in mortmain a messuage which its bondman had acquired in fee, and which the Priory had consequently appropriated. Similarly, pardon for unlicensed acquisition in mortmain was given in 1366 to the Abbey of Waltham Holy Cross because it had entered into thirty acres of land acquired in fee simple by its bondman 'as was lawful for them to do'. In an exemplification of various suits in 1348, there is mentioned a lay lord's appropriation of sixteen selions of land 'as tenements acquired by his villein'. A manumitted bondman in 1359 had to obtain a royal pardon for the unlicensed acquisition in tail, presumably while he was still unfree, of an estate of some dimensions—two messuages, two cottages, sixty-three acres of arable land, another plot of land and the liberty of a fold.¹

It was clearly, then, deliberate seignorial policy over a wide area to stamp out illegal land transfers, for this would rob the lord of entry fines, and to confiscate the land so acquired. It cannot be assumed that the desire to thwart the economic expansion of the thriving peasants was a conscious motive of policy of all lords, but it may have been for some. An instruction to the Steward of the St Albans estate lays down that 'several [*plures*] lands are not to be granted to one man, and if one man now holds several lands, they are to be divided up, if it can be conveniently and decently done'.² The tenants of St Albans, as Miss Levett has shown, fought this policy during the whole of the period before the Great Revolt. In 1381 when the abbot was obliged to grant charters of liberties to the tenants on his estate, freedom of alienation was one of the clauses. The tenants of Barnet, having reverted to the practice of alienation by charter during the confusion of the Black Death (only four years after their previous surrender), sought to destroy the Court Book which contained the evidence for transfer by surrender in the manorial court.³

The Black Death and the labour legislation following intensified the social conflicts described above. The enforcement of labour discipline directly by the organs of the State had the effect of unifying the discontent, because the target of resentment was no longer the individual lord alone but also the local officials of the government. The different peasant groups were affected in different ways by the labour legislation, just as they had been affected in different ways by the increased stringency of manorial exactions. And here again, for different reasons, rich and poor united against the same enemies.

Naturally those without land, and the smallholders who had to work for wages to supplement their income, did not like the restriction on wages and on the mobility of labour. The middling peasant who did not employ

¹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1338-40, p. 326; 1364-7, p. 309; 1348-50, p. 234; 1358-61, p. 179.

² Vinogradoff, *op. cit.* p. 172, n. 1, quoting a St Albans Formulary.

³ St Albans 1381 charters, of which that of Rickmansworth is a good example, will be found in *Gesta Abbatum III*, pp. 324-32.

labour but whose energies were entirely occupied with his own holding, would probably be affected by the discontent of wage-earning members of his family. His exasperation would be increased if he lived on a manor where the surviving tenants were expected to perform the services owed from abandoned holdings.¹ There was another contemporary phenomenon, not generally noticed, which must have embittered all grades of peasants against the manorial lords. This was the abduction of villeins by one lord from another's manor. It is well known that one of the consequences of the shortage of labour was for some manorial lords or officials to offer wage-rates above the legal maximum. But this must have been an offence to the principles as well as to the purses of many of the nobility and gentry. Brigandage, however, was not. The looting of persons for ransoms during the French wars was more remunerative than the looting of goods, and the habit was not lost in England. It was often the less warlike ecclesiastical lords who suffered, and there are many echoes of their complaints in the Patent Rolls.²

An important and, on the surface, paradoxical consequence of the enforcement of the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers, was the hurt done to the interests of the rich peasants, as was pointed out by Professor Levett.³ The rich peasants were all necessarily employers of labour, for the farming of some of the larger peasant holdings would have been impossible without hired help, and even the richest peasant did not have the villein services of other peasants under his control.⁴ Now a large farm is useless without the hands to till it, so the tenant was prepared to pay high prices for the labour he could not get otherwise. In so doing he would also tend to put up the price of labour for the manorial lords. But there was no need for the lords to suffer from the working of economic laws because they had at their disposal the political power which enabled them to circumvent them. They still had reserves of serf labour, and they controlled the distribution of such available wage labour as there was, in their capacity as Justices of Labourers, or of the Peace.

Rich peasants had little or no political influence, and for this reason we find them taking part in the Great Revolt. But there were some persons who were in exactly the same position as the rich peasants as far as the labour problem was concerned, but who did have political influence. Their complaints were made known to the government and are consequently recorded. We can, though with caution, take these grievances as being similar to those which must have been voiced by the peasants—but not heard. The Carthusian Priory of Wytham was a cultivator without any serfs. Its inmates lived in a close in the forest of Selwood, and (so the licence issued by letter patent tells us) had no lordship within or without the close.

¹ Cf. Levett, *The Black Death on the Estates of the See of Winchester* (1916), p. 85.

² *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1348–50, pp. 520, 521; 1350–54, pp. 447, 460; 1354–8, pp. 64, 335, 452; 1358–61, pp. 160, 284, 324; 1355–61, p. 581; 1361–4, pp. 283–4; 1364–7, pp. 361, 429; 1370–74, p. 98; 1374–7, p. 142.

³ 'A Note on the Statute of Labourers', in *Econ. Hist. Rev.* iv.

⁴ Unless he took the manor on lease together with the tenants' services. Complete manorial leases are rare at this period, piecemeal leasing being the rule, and in any case only rarely was the farmer given control over the tenants.

They could get no workers to replace those who had died of the plague. So the king gave them permission to attract labour by offering 'reasonable rates', notwithstanding the Ordinance. In addition, they were to recover any fines which might be levied on their servants under the Statute. This meant that they would be reimbursed for any extra expenditure on wages necessary to attract labour. They were also allowed to ignore the price regulations of the Statute when selling their hides in the local markets.¹ The wealthier peasants were obliged to offer high wages, as were these Carthusians, for they, too, were without lordship. But of course they received no licence, and were liable not only to suffer from the monopoly established in the labour market by the gentry in their capacity as Justices, but additionally from the punishments imposed on those who offered illegal rates.

Another religious house had to seek government aid to enable it to solve its labour problems. The Northamptonshire Abbey of Pipewell was suffering from the local monopoly of labour by the gentry, not in Northamptonshire but in East Warwickshire. The abbot complained in 1351 that the Warwickshire Justices of Labourers were forcing his tenants in his granges and in the neighbouring villages to work, not for the abbey, but for its competitors, so that the abbey lands were left uncultivated. Since the Ordinance and Statutes reserved to lords the first claim to the wage labour of their tenants, the king supported the Abbot of Pipewell, and instructed the Warwickshire justices to allow him an adequate supply of labour.² The abbot was fortunate in being able to enlist royal support in his fight to get enough workers, but we have no knowledge of how the wealthier peasants would fare in a similar situation, other than a suggestion from a well-known story from the chronicles of the Yorkshire Cistercian Abbey of Meaux. This story primarily concerns the attempt by a family of prosperous villeins to prove themselves tenants of the Crown rather than tenants of the abbey. They were not anxious, it would seem, to claim free status, but to exchange for the immediate pressure of the local, undying, corporation, the remoter control of the king and his officers. The attempt was in the end unsuccessful, in spite of the admirable and undaunted persistence of the villeins. What is relevant to the argument here is that one of the early incidents in the case was a complaint by this villein family to the king that the abbot had taken away by force their ploughmen, contrary to the Statute and Ordinance.³

¹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1354-8*, pp. 16-17, and 1358-61, p. 35. See also B. Putnam, *Enforcement of the Statute of Labourers* (New York, 1908), p. 93. The Carthusian Priory of Henton had similar problems and obtained a similar remedy. Their problem was additionally complicated by the fact that many of their tenants were clothworkers, whose services they lost because outsiders accused the Priory of paying them improperly high wages. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1354-8*, p. 282.

² Putnam, *op. cit.* p. 218*.

³ *Rolls Series, Chronica Monasterii de Melsa III*, pp. 131-2: *Ipse abbas... quosdam servos suos ad officium carucarum conductos a servitio ipsorum Johannis et Willelmi vi cepisset et detinisset, ad damnum uniuscujusque eorum centum solidorum, in contemptum regis et hominum suorum, ac contra formam statuti et ordinationis de operariis, artificibus et servitoribus, editorum, in comitatu Eboracensi observandorum.*

This complaint was possibly but a minor incident in the battle over the main issue. Nevertheless, it illustrates the difficulties of the villein employer of labour at this period, and shows the incompatibility of his interests with those of the greater feudal landlords, fortunate in their 'lordship'.

Miss Putnam has quoted sources showing that hatred of the Statute of Labourers and of those who enforced its operation led, in the years after its enactment, to organized attacks on the sessions of the Justices of Labourers—in Middlesex in 1351, in Lincolnshire in 1352, in Northamptonshire in 1359.¹ What manner of persons these were, who, as at Tottenham for instance, in 1351, released the prisoners and drove the Justices from their session, we do not know. They no doubt included agricultural labourers and town artisans. But they might also have included wealthy yeomen. For one of the most striking features of the revolt of 1381 was the unification in it of all the varying discontents of town and country, so that in many cases the leaders of the revolt were not the poor men made desperate by poverty, but prosperous men anxious to expand their thriving farms. Such men are typified by the Suffolk rebel, Thomas Sampson, whose land and chattels were estimated by the king's escheator after the revolt to include 160 acres under crop and nearly 500 head of livestock.² Such men were revolting against the restrictions as well as against the oppression of a financially and politically bankrupt ruling class.

Much stress has been laid here on the economic grievances of the peasants, for these were at the root of all others. It must not be forgotten, however, that just as the landowning classes were obliged to serve their economic purposes by contriving a depression of the social and legal status of the peasantry whom they controlled, so the peasants in fighting against economic oppression were also fighting for wider human rights. They strove not merely for a reduction of rent but for human dignity. They fought quite consciously against a system of society which by the thirteenth century had evolved a clear caste interpretation of peasant status, so that blood became the determinant of social and legal rights. What more poignant and bitter comment on this could there be than the action of a Worcestershire tenant of the Earl of Gloucester in 1293? This man was distrained by the earl's bailiffs to receive land to be held in the earl's manor of Hanley Castle in a servile manner. He had often sworn (so a jury said) that rather than take land on servile conditions he would drown or hang himself. And so he did—for to escape this disgrace he drowned himself in the River Severn at Clevelode.³

The abolition of bondage and serfdom was the first of the articles of the peasant programme at Mile End, and was repeated at Smithfield. Everything that was written about these peasants was written by their enemies, but the words attributed by Froissart to John Ball were in essence probably authentic: 'For what reason do they hold us in bondage? Are we not all

¹ Putnam, *op. cit.* pp. 93-4; cf. *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1350-54, p. 158; 1358-61, p. 151.

² E. Powell, *Rising in East Anglia* (Cambridge, 1896), Appendix II, pp. 143-5.

³ *Worcestershire Inquisitions Post Mortem*, I, p. 48 (Worcester Hist. Soc.).

descended from the same parents Adam and Eve? And what can they show or what reason can they give why they should be more masters than ourselves?'¹ These ideas have their history, so that when we read the statement of a Colonel Rainborough in 1647, 'The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he', we know that here is an expression of an English tradition as ancient as the more publicized traditions of reverence for old-established institutions.

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¹ For the fourteenth-century sermon background to these opinions, see G. W. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1926) and *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1933).