

The Trends Toward Serfdom in Mediaeval England

by

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Historians generally are not unacquainted with the notion of the mediaeval serf— a person in legal and economic subjection to a lord, with his social life closely circumscribed by the village, and with his main duty that of work upon the lord's fields or demesne in that village. This serf must not be confused with the slave, for in terms of human freedom there was the breadth of a civilization between the mediaeval serf, a legal person, and the Anglo-Saxon slave, a chattel, who in Anglo-Saxon law as late as the 10th century could be stoned or hanged like a thief for running away. But it is a curious anomaly that historians have been able to isolate movements from freedom to serfdom, or from a lesser to a more subjective serfdom — regressions towards servitude — in a western Europe whose general ethos was a gradual abolition of slavery. We shall be concerned here only with mediaeval England where, until recently at least, three such movements have usually been depicted by historians: these are, in chronological order, the subjection of peoples with the breakdown of Anglo-Saxon tribal structure, an intensification of this subjection due to the extension of seigniorial authority from the time of the Norman conquest, and thirdly, a renewal of serfdom due to intensified cultivation by large agrarian corporations from the 13th century.

It is the purpose of this paper to deal with that detailed research upon the social and economic status of lesser men which, over the past two decades especially, has been gradually sketching out a picture which does not readily conform with the above-mentioned trends to subjection or servitude. It could not be our purpose to present a reformulation of the problem, even if time permitted, for many questions have but begun to be investigated, not the least important being the fundamental point of terminology. Serfdom, along with feudalism, and other such handy categories created by the historian for the measurement of freedom and unfreedom, have accumulated political and psychological overtones during generations and centuries of use. They are, as it were, sticks of ideological dynamite — and therefore ought logically to be treated first by the historian's own clinical technique of soul searching — that is, historiography. Much work is indeed being done along these lines by legal and constitutional historians, and this properly, as they are in fact most responsible for existing theories. But it is not yet possible to bring their conclusions into the context of the matter

discussed in this study. We shall be chiefly concerned to summarize in this paper, therefore, the main directions indicated by the social and economic research.

We shall spend little time on the first theory since there is an increasing argument for the suspension rather than the solution of the theory of progressive subjection during Anglo-Saxon history. Nevertheless, this theory is still given strong credence in general text books. For instance, in his *Economic History of England*, Lipson's disproof of the existence of the manorial system before the conquest was no more than the precaution, "...At would be unsafe to regard the manor as the prevailing type of estate from the earliest times, on the ground that some were in existence before the Norman Conquest."¹ Yet he goes on to set out the historical investigation bluntly: "We have now to trace the process by which a nation of free cultivators became gradually transformed into one of dependent serfs." Then Lipson proceeds in the manner of a 19th century Whig historian to adduce every form of human burden, be it political, social, or economic: Danegeld tax, ecclesiastical tithes, Norse attacks, harvest failures, harshness of the criminal code, private court jurisdiction, political disorder, rise of a military class, as likely causes for an increasing subjection of men.

Even a great historian of the period like Sir Frank Stenton states the case for subjection as an accepted thesis: "The central course of Old English social development may be described as the process by which a peasantry, at first composed essentially of free men, acknowledging no lord below the king, gradually lost economic and personal independence."² But when he comes to grips with the evidence, he is forced to admit that a clearly defined evidence for loss of independence is unobtainable: "The origin of private justice is one of the unsolved problems of Anglo-Saxon history,"³ for landlords with clear juridical authority can be found at least 400 years before the Conquest.

In fact there is no evidence to support a theory of social evolution.⁴ Neither comparative histories of law and culture, nor the accumulation of archaeological data have fulfilled the promise or predictions of the 19th century Teutonic theory which is the foundation for this notion of increasing subjection over the Anglo-Saxon era. No editor of Anglo-Saxon records will to-day claim to give a representative, much less a comprehensive picture of Anglo-Saxon society. But furthermore, the interpretation of increasing social organization over the late

¹ Vol. I, *The Middle Ages*, A. & C. Black, 10th edition, p. 15.

² *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford, 2nd edition, p. 463.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

⁴ Stenton has himself stressed the paucity of Anglo-Saxon evidence in his recent study, *Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period*, Oxford, 1955, p. 12: "Beyond all this there rises the question whether the number of genuine charters now extant is large enough in relation to the number once issued to provide material for an exhaustive list of formulas in use at any given time."

Anglo-Saxon period as an oppression of peoples may have been due to a Rousseauian neglect of social realities. The most recent editor of Anglo-Saxon records, Dorothy Whitelock, actually argues to an *advance* of human relations as the tribal system is replaced by the seignorial: "But there are many signs that in the latter part of our period (500-1042) it (i.e. the tribal kindred group) was not found adequate either to protect the individual from oppression or to produce an accused person to answer a charge. It is the latter aspect that is clearest in the laws, and it leads to the insistence that every man must have a lord who will be responsible for his actions..."⁵

In short, the bald theory of progressive subjection during Anglo-Saxon times does not appear possible of definition; and even as a hypothesis, it would seem inadequate.

With Domesday Book, and manorial extents or surveys of the 12th century, a much more complete picture of social organization becomes possible; but at the same time the intervention of a military conquest makes the problem of measuring more peaceful impositions extremely complex. There can be no doubt that the Norman conquest was real in a wider meaning than the battle of Hastings, that those most immediately connected with opposition to William's invasion, the important military personnel represented by Anglo-Saxon lords and theyns, were wiped out as a class. And in the rewarding and settlement of Norman warriors on English lands there was brutality and injustice to Church and peasant alike. But after the punishment for resistance, and the establishment of order under Henry I, was there anything in the development of this Anglo-Norman society that imposed a subjection upon men?

The strongest supporters of the theory of increasing subjection due to feudalism have had to allow for certain irreconcilable factors. The first of these was the geographical incidence of the classical manorial type. Large numbers of freemen found in the Domesday of East Anglia, Kent, and the Danelaw, led to a restriction of the subjection theory to the midlands. To quote Stenton again, "In eastern England, and especially in the districts where the Danish settlement had introduced a new element of freedom in local society, many manors consisted of a central estate at which light rents were paid and occasional services rendered by a large number of virtually independent peasant dispersed in groups over a wide area."⁶ R. H. Hilton tells us what this limited manorialization meant throughout the county of Leicester: "We find that none of the lay estates (and he places ecclesiastical estates in the same category), in the county comprised many manors; and that on the great majority of these manors the lords' demesne lands were small in extent. We also find indications that a large proportion of the peasantry was, apart from the payment of money rents and the attendance at

⁵ *English Historical Documents*, general editor, D. C. Douglas, vol. 1, 1955, p. 58.

⁶ *Anglo-Saxon England*, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

seigniorial courts, comparatively independent of seigniorial agriculture; and that on many manors the labour services of those customary tenants that owed them were not very heavy.”⁷

The intensive investigation now being conducted into the 12th century extents for large midland manors is making it less and less possible to restrict this condition of things to the old Danelaw regions. The recognition of some social evolution by lesser men over England as a whole is not of course new; many years ago Paul Vinogradoff translated such evidence as that of the large scale emancipation of slaves in the late Anglo-Saxon times into a sign of social movement: “What I want to make clear is the trail of evidence which shows the gradual absorption of free settlers and warriors by aristocratic formations, a process which was met halfway by another wave of social evolution – the gradual rising of serfs and slaves to the position of dependent householders.”⁸ But this statement is an oversimplification in the light of our present knowledge of 12th century evolution. We now realize that there were many freemen in the most intensely manorialized districts after the conquest; and the ‘dynamics’ of the midland small holder was along the lines of the Danelaw small holder, not towards an increase of personal obligations. To begin with the freemen: we shall cite evidence from the estates of Ramsey abbey in Huntingdon, Bedford, and Herts, long considered to be a prime example of manorialization.⁹ While Domesday mentions only the few knights and “frankelanni” as the free tenants on these manors, the extents from the time of Henry I, show that it was common for 2 to 4 hides (say 20 to 30 per cent of the assessment) on these manors to be held by freemen, *liberi feudati*, for suit to the hundred or shire courts, with sometimes a small money rent or slight agricultural obligations. Since these

⁷ *The Economic Development of Some Leicestershire Estates in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Oxford, 1947, p. 15.

⁸ *English Society in the Eleventh Century*, Oxford, 1908, p. 429.

⁹ Rather than give here in detail the extensive sources for this Ramsey evidence, and parallel evidence of the time, I refer the reader to the bibliography in my forthcoming study on Ramsey Abbey estates. An emphasis on the revaluation of the ‘manorial and feudal’ notions in social history may also be seen in Sir Maurice Powicke’s study of the English freeman, *The English Parliament*, in *Modern Historians and the Study of History* (Odhams, 1955), p. 222: “The evidence of a great record, the Hundred Rolls, and of the vast body of private charters, shows that, in the heart of what is sometimes described as ‘manorial’ England, fifty per cent at least of the landholding population was free ... He disposed freely of his land, gathered and lost estates scattered in various places, had his own seal, engaged in litigation in the public courts, served on juries of all kinds, planned and built on his holdings, large or small, as he wished. Like everybody else, he was subject to manorial customs and feudal obligations, but customs and obligations were not a burden, they were incidents in his life, part of life’s routine.”

freeholds are larger than the usual holdings in the village, it would seem simply that, like their Anglo-Saxon forebears, the villagers had to assume obligations to higher courts once their holdings attained a certain size. Far from being a class distinction, this tenure by service to higher courts seems to have been looked upon only as a more stringent obligation in a writ of William II, ordering that only those men who had done service to the shire or hundred courts in the time of King Edward could be forced to that service now.

The *independence* of the smallholder in the midlands may be seen in two great agrarian movements of the 12th century, the opening of new lands (i.e. assarting), and the reduction in the size of manorial demesnes. From the lands of St. Cuthbert in Northumberland down through the west country to Devon, from the weald of Sussex through Essex and the eastern midlands to the Cistercian valleys of Yorkshire, the charters and extents of the 12th century abound in references to the clearing of new land. Unlike the great co-operative drainage ventures of the men of Holland in mediaeval times, or the organized clearing by the grand seigneurs of eastern Germany in the 15th and 16th centuries, the clearing of forest land or the drainage of land in 12th century England seems to have been left to the individual initiative of the small peasant. Right from the very beginning of the 12th century small parcels of land, paying a smaller than average money rent, were being added to the village rent rolls. The lord of the district evidently lowered the rents for new land in order to encourage clearing. Only after the land had been in cultivation for some time, did the holder have to pay a regular rent. But even then, there is no evidence of an effort by the lord to bring some of these lands into his manorial demesne, or to impose servile obligations upon the tenants. At the large Ramsey manor of Cranfield in Bedfordshire, for example, some 30 men cleared over 350 acres of arable during the second generation of the 12th century, but beyond their obligations to the manorial court, their rent dues were small money payments and hidage taxes like those of the freemen of the district. This clearing of forest, and drainage of marshy lands, which, as far as our evidence goes, must have been begun from at least the late 11th century, changed the whole tenurial structure of the village. Rather than the demesne and villeinage which alone could be seen in D.B., there was now the demesne, villeinage, and lands at money rents. Some statistics may be cited from the Ramsey manors with which I am most familiar in order to show the actual extent of this frontier clearing. On most of the manors for which we have evidence, the number of landholders had increased by one-third, or doubled, during the two generations after D.B.: at Hemmingford Abbots from 31 to 47; Brancaster, 59 to 80; Elton, 28 to 48; Knapwell, 24 to 34; Hilgay, 19 to 35; Ringstead, 48 to 70; Graveley, 20 to 37; Holywell, 29 to 52; Cranfield, 20 to 58; Welles, 16 to 46; Warboys, 47 to 112. And over the next two or three generations, that is, until well into the 13th century, the numbers of these holders again increased by one-third to one-half. Hence, the English countryside was opened up in the 12th century, not by an

army of serfs, but by the encouragement of individual initiative and independence.

The second significant agrarian movement of the 12th century, the reduction of the lord's demesne, seems to have been but another expression of the initiative of smaller men. In every group of estates for which we have detailed information in the second half of the 12th century, there are numerous references to renting of part of the demesne in smallholdings, and in some cases the whole demesne had been broken up in this fashion. Because portions of the demesne were thus not cultivated by the lord, he would have less need for labour services. This meant that the fragmentation of the demesne would be accompanied by the commutation of labour services. As Professor Postan has shown in his study, *The Chronology of Labour Services*,¹⁰ this commutation was going on at varying rates throughout the more than three hundred manors, representing every part of the countryside, for which we have extant evidence. As he has remarked, it is indeed extraordinary that the general theories of the development of feudalism and the absence of money economy, have blinded historians to this evidence which has been clearly available, in many cases in printed editions for generations.

These agrarian movements into new lands, and towards the destruction of the demesne in the 12th century, refute the traditional conception of the post-conquest lord remorselessly reducing the men of his neighbourhood to serfdom. But even more, this indiscriminate commutation of services throughout England in the 12th century, while commutation had traditionally been considered to be significant from the 14th century only, as the manor began to break up, calls for a fresh investigation of our notion of the serf, peasant, or villein, who worked upon the demesne of the lord. Did the manor harden into such immutable customs after all, when the large agrarian movements of the 12th century were freeing men from personal economic obligations? Was the villager simply a predial serf, when some or all of his personal obligations could be paid in money, and when the very possibility of this alternative means that he must have had surplus corn or stock to market in order to acquire the money for rent? We shall be able to gain a more concrete picture of the villagers mode of existence by looking at the positive realities of his life, i.e. we shall start from the least men of the village, in order to avoid the dangers of bias in the common procedure of subtracting and contrasting the benefits of higher social groups with the life of the peasantry.

The least important men in England at the time of the Conquest were the slaves, or servi, who numbered between 9 and 10 per cent of the population according to Domesday statistics. This slave category was greatly reduced by 1086, and disappeared in the 12th century. The enfranchised slave took up the

¹⁰ Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Fourth Series, XX, 1937, pp. 169-193.

humblest economic position on the manor, which was not that of the traditional villein working on the demesne of the lord; but they became the village labourers to be paid in money or food rents, or by the tenure of rent-free smallholds. These labourers were most in demand for permanent services like those of the shepherd, swineherd, oxherd, dairy maids, brewers, malters, etc., since the regular villein had to work his own lands and could only give intermittent services to the lord. Right from the 12th century these labourers became a most important part of the demesne economy. It is estimated that even at the peak of the manorial organization of the 13th and early 14th centuries, the work done by this wage labour was more important to the demesne than that of the villein proper. Throughout the ordinary small manorialized village of the midlands of about 10 hides there were usually some dozen permanent labourers during the year, and two or three dozen more would be taken on for special gang work like that of threshing. On larger manors, or in the less intensely manorialized districts like the lands of the cathedral priory of Canterbury in Kent, there would be more than 30 permanent hired men on the manor.

According to our sources the labourer was free to take on the contract for work or to leave it. In many cases after the 12th century when there was not new land available for cultivation, the unemployed would have to depend upon these local service opportunities. The wages of these men were in fact organized upon a welfare basis rather than a competitive labour market. The revenues from small holdings were supplemented by payments in corn and money, and during the working 'bees', by food at the lord's expense on a level sufficient to support a family. There were regulations whereby the less arduous work, like gleaning and threshing, were first made available to the needy, the aged and the weak. During the 13th century, when the price of corn was gradually rising throughout England, the large payments in corn to the labourers remained practically unchanged. Manorial labour in consequence probably enjoyed a rise in real income. Where the labourer was given some rent-free land there was usually some contractual arrangement whereby the lord aided in its exploitation: when it was arable, and the labourer would not have the plough equipment or the time to work his own lands, he had the free use of the lord's teams for a certain period every week – a grant often called the Saturday Plough. Shepherds, swineherds, etc. could keep some of their stock in the lord's pastures, and often had rights to certain profits from the stock of the lord.

Such manorial labour, rather than the villein, is now being considered as the descendant of the slave and the forerunner of modern wage labour. In turn, the wide incidence and the disabilities of this manorial wage labour serves to underline the comparative advantages of the traditional 'serf', i.e. the villein holding land for work on the lord's demesne. It throws into relief three features, above all else, about the villein: first, his was not ordinarily a mere subsistence livelihood; secondly, his labour on the lord's demesne did not bind him personally serf-like to the lord's demesne; and thirdly, there was a real

contractual relationship between the villein and the lord. The first point can be seen in many ways: for instance the attractiveness of the villein holdings – it was only with the great depopulation after the Black Death that it became difficult to obtain tenants for these lands – although at some other periods the entry fine was very high; or again we can obtain some idea of the villein's stock, and from the amounts he had to pay when his labour was commuted we can obtain at least a minimum idea of his profits from the sale of stock and corn. Since these methods are rather detailed for our present exposition, we can obtain the desired notion from a comparative glance at the villein's greatest source of wealth, his stock. Mr. Reginald Lennard¹¹ has recently computed from D.B. statistics, that in the old Danelaw districts where the villeins owed little services to the lord's demesne their stock was about equal to that of the freemen (i.e. the sokemen); in Yorkshire, Northants, Notts, Derby, and Leicester the plough beasts per sokemen were 3.1, that of the villeins for the same counties was 3; in Lines, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, the sokemen averaged 1.6, the villeins 1.5. In the western counties, however, the villein plough teams were twice as numerous as those for Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, where sokemen had most of the stock. In addition, the holdings in such midland counties as Bedford, were much larger than those of East Anglia. Even with the work that he owed on the lord's demesne then, and considering that much of the sokemen stock would be pasture stock rather than plough teams, these statistics favour the economic position of the villein in the heavily manorialized midlands. Throughout the ensuing generations and centuries, the freehold tenements of East Anglia were reduced further by the custom of partible inheritance; the villein units were maintained by impartible inheritance on the other hand in the midlands over the 12th and 13th centuries. His attachment to the demesne gave the villein a vested interest therefore, and a position clearly superior to the subsistent social groups of the time.

For our second point—that the villein was not bound serf-like, in the classical or oriental sense of the term, to the lord's demesne – two factors in the organization of the demesne economy are especially important. First, the lord and his manager, i.e. the reeve, were interested in units of labour, not in the villein himself, except for the week or two of the large harvest and ploughing bees when an effort was made to get everyone into the fields. There are many entries from the earliest extents of the 12th century, that show that the villein was expected to hire men to help carry out his labour obligation on the lord's demesne. The villeins holdings were too large to be worked by one man in addition to the numerous obligations required of him by the lord. A hired labour group must have existed on the villeinage as well as on the demesne, therefore, from earliest times. Further evidence of this is seen in the court rolls of the 13th century, where there is reference to the 'villeins and their men'. The best proof

¹¹ *Economic Journal*, 1946, pp. 244-264; 1947, pp. 179-195.

of the non-personal servile nature of this work lies in our second point, i.e. the fact of commutation. We have already mentioned the large amount of commutation from the 12th century and that it was considered to be a regular alternative to villein work on the demesne. It is generally conceded now that such commutation of the large number of services due from villein holdings was only possible if the villein was himself using hired labour. Hence, when the villein had not to supply labour to the lord, he had considerable funds to pay for the commutation of his services from the money he had himself ordinarily paid out in wages. The basic pattern of the villein-lord relationship was therefore, economic and commutable, rather than personal and servile. The long lists of villein duties given in the extents, that have so convinced historians of their servitude, are rather a measure of the considerable rent-value of the villein's holdings. As a corollary, the tenant on a small villein holding who owed fewer services to the lord, the border, or cotter, was not less servile, but less important a landholder. This does not presume too much on the part of the villein when we consider that even in the time of Domesday, groups of villeins had themselves taken over whole manors; that the large encroachments into the lord's demesnes by the villeins in the 12th century could have been made only by the latter group working together with many hired men; and from the latter half of the 13th century in many parts of the midlands there began to be a concentration of land in the hands of the villeins as they grouped together in various numbers in order to rent parcels or large fields from the demesne of the lord.

Our third point, that the relationship between the lord and villein was really contractual, becomes clear with the detailed enrollment of villein obligations in the 13th century. The villein was not at the beck and call of the lord, but had only to do certain jobs on specific days. In the court rolls of 13th century we find the reeve and villeins referring a dispute over works to the 'register', at the lord's hall, in order to determine the limits of their obligations. The same type of rolls show the villein refusing to do certain work for the lord, 'because they do not have to do it, and only did it before of their own will'. The contractual *quid pro quo* is best seen in the harvest bees, or boon works, where the lord had to supply the food to the workers: the nature and quantity of the food to be provided were as clearly specified as the labour to be done, and we have many instances of the workers 'striking' because the lord refused to live up to his commitments. This contractual structure of the villein-lord relationship will have to be reconstructed slowly from registers and lawsuits, since one villein succeeded to his father by the rule of primogeniture, and the fact of succession followed unwritten customary law. Fortunately, when a new man was taken in from outside the manor, the custom could not be presumed, and more recently writers on manorial history like Miss Elizabeth Levett and Mrs. Chibnall have been able to discover interesting written contracts issued for the villein in such circumstances.

To turn now to the third trend to serfdom, the theory of an increase of serfdom in 13th century England is based upon the evidence of revocation of

commuted works in the early 13th century, upon evidence for increase of works during the 13th century, and upon numerous lawsuits between lords and villeins in the late 13th century which turned about the villein obligations for his land. Despite the vast amount of manorial data for 13th century England, or perhaps because of the formidable task of investigating it, the structure of the manor in the 13th century has not yet received the comprehensive treatment that the account rolls and extents make possible. From what has already been said about the nature of villein obligations, however, we would seem justified in seeking a simple economic reason for the increase in villein works. We can find such a reason in the changes in prices of agrarian produce between the 12th and 13th centuries. From the late 12th to the mid-13th century, the price of stock and corn doubled on the midland manors. In the 13th century the price of land began to catch up with that of produce, and we have evidence for a doubling and even tripling of rents by the third quarter of the century. Since the lord was interested in taking advantage of the better corn market, it has been assumed that he would want more labour, and hence the revocation of commuted services. Such may have been the case to some extent, but now that we have become aware of the large numbers of hired labourers on the demesnes – and we know that the wages of such labour do not reflect a scarcity in the 13th century – this reason for the revocation of commuted labour becomes less cogent. The reason would seem to lie more surely in the necessity for the revaluation of commuted labour as a type of rent, that is to say, in the pushing up of total rents, whether partly paid by services or not, to accommodate the higher price level of the 13th century. And the account roll data fits this argument: from the third quarter of the 13th century, when opposition to villein services becomes apparent in lawsuits, the works due from the villein began to be tabulated in a very efficient manner. All the villein's obligations for the year may be commuted for a round sum – the censum – or they may be paid according to piecework during the year. The fact that rents rather than services were of primary interest here, may be clearly seen in the prosperous agrarian years of the early 14th century when large amounts of annual services were commuted, and piecework continued to be sold back to the villein.

This new system of detailed commutation meant that the villein would likely be called upon to commute his work during the poorer agricultural years, and from the third quarter of the 13th century there is much evidence that diminishing returns were settling in rapidly in many traditional cornproducing areas. In an expanding economy where the villein could put his own labour and that of his hired help, to profitable employment, commutation was a benefit rather than a burden; but in hard times, and with such an efficient system of commutation, it became a burden. This comes out clearly in a suit for libel at the manor of Elton (near Peterborough) in 1278; chatting after Mass around the church on a Sunday morning some of the villagers had charged the reeve with 'taking gifts' from the richer tenants as a consideration for not turning them into

tenants at money rents, and with obliging the poorer tenants to become payers of money rents. Working for the lord could not have been much of an act of servility in this neighbourhood!

I have only attempted to indicate in this section that accentuated villein obligations in the 13th century was primary a question of rents rather than one of servitude. In the light of the ability of the villeins to take over the lord's demesne in the 14th century, and in some cases in the 13th, it may be that the lawsuits between villeins and lord in the 13th century were actually signs of the villeins' virility rather than of their oppression. It is high time that the general mediaeval historian ceased to look upon the manorial courts as the forum for the unlimited authority of the lord. The legal historians who have done specialized work with these courts are far from such an opinion. We shall cite the words of Miss Elizabeth Levett – no sentimental mediaevalist – as a case in point: “With this caution in mind [she is referring to a remark that public discussion is not the sole means of government], we shall turn from the undeniably democratic structure of the Manorial Courts (which are not only judicial but also deliberative, administrative and legislative in function) to study for a space the external administration of great estates...”¹² Or again: “Many causes contributed to that disastrous decay of the English manorial courts which deprived the smaller land-holder of his main line of defence and his only method of corporate self-expression, leaving him inarticulate in the midst of a predatory world.”¹³

As we pursue this revision of the place of the villein in Mediaeval English life, other social problems promise to benefit from the investigation. For instance, when we consider that it was the small freeholders of East Anglia and Kent and the wage labourers generally, who were poorer than the villein, it is not surprising to find that the misleadingly named Peasant's Revolt was mainly a revolt of wage labourers and smallholders in Kent and East Anglia. Nor will the social historian be so surprised to find that the famous yeomen of England were villeins or descendants of this sturdy class.

In conclusion we should like to stress again that this growing evidence against the theories of a movement towards serfdom still awaits much treatment by the research specialist before general conclusions can be drawn. Perhaps we shall not have to wait too long for these conclusions since there is an increasing attention to the study of mediaeval social and economic data; an attention well reflected in the last two International Congresses of Historical Sciences. But equally encouraging is the fact that the student of agrarian society is today much less likely to take his ideology from the 18th century; he has at hand the long experience of town and parliamentary historians to remind him that great social developments could take place within the framework, and with the inspiration of feudal society.

¹² *Studies in Manorial History*, Oxford, 1938, p. 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.