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# Social and economic conditions in England during the fourteenth century

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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN ENGLAND

DURING THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

SUBMITTED BY

ELBRIDGE GERRY DAVIS

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V. Charlton  
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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN ENGLAND

DURING THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN ENGLAND DURING THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

In the fourteenth century there was little manufacturing in England, and hence the majority of the people were engaged in agricultural pursuits. Therefore, if we would understand the social and economic conditions of the people of that century, it is necessary for us to consider the condition of those engaged in tilling the soil.

In order for us to get a clear idea of the condition of the agricultural population of this period, it is necessary for us to understand the system under which the land was held and worked. At the present time we find in our country districts that the farms are adjoining; but in the England of the fourteenth century a great estate consisted of several separate manors, which might be scattered all over England. In the Domesday we find that there were eleven manors in Essex which were the property of the Canons of the Cathedral, no two of which lay closer together than four miles, and the average distance between them being over fifteen miles. Another example is found in the court records, where eleven manors belonged to the Norman Abbey of Bec, ten of which were in different counties, stretching from Dorsetshire to Northamptonshire and Norfolk. Some estates were even more scattered, as in the case of that of Merton College, Oxford, which stretched from Northumberland to Kent.

Under such conditions it was impossible for one man to have charge in person of a single estate, and it was necessary that each manor should have an agent or bailiff; hence the system came

DIVISIONS OF  
THE LAND

DUTIES OF THE  
BAILIFF and  
STEWARD

to be known as bailiff farming. The bailiff was an important person in this system, as it was his duty to have general oversight of the manor, to keep the accounts, and to look after his master's interests. He was his own master for the greater part of the year, accordingly a great deal depended upon his honesty, skill and energy. In addition to the bailiff there was a steward, who was a sort of general superintendent, although his duties were more legal than economic, and most of his time was devoted to holding parts on the various manors of his lord's estate. His visits to the manors were usually very brief, as is shown by the fact that the steward of the Abbey of Bec visited six manors in the six counties of Wiltshire, Berkshire, Northamptonshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Surrey between September 17th and October 19th of the same year.

The typical manor which the bailiff had charge of consisted of a single village in which all the land legally belonged to the lord and all the inhabitants had to submit to his rule. The lord did not keep all the land which was used for tilling in his own hands, but only about a third, known as his demesne. The remainder of the arable land was divided among the villagers with whom the lord also shared the grass upon the meadows and the nuts in the woodland. The villagers were not required to pay money rent to the lord, but paid their rent in services rendered to him. These services, in case of a freeman were not very burdensome; but there were few freemen, and most of the villagers belonged to the villan class, who were required to render to their lord considerable service for the privileges granted to them. They were compelled to cultivate the lord's demesne, and to see that this work was

THE MANOR

done properly was one of the principal duties of the bailiff, who frequently found it a very difficult task, as only a certain amount of work could be demanded of the villans. If the number of villans on the manor became too small to carry on the necessary work there was no way to increase them. The only thing to do was to allow the land to go out of cultivation.

There were two kinds of services which might be demanded of the villans, namely: "week-work" and "boon-work". The week-work was regular services rendered to the lord for two or three days each week throughout the year, with most likely a little extra time during the harvest season. The boon-work, on the other hand, was irregular, and consisted in performing services for the lord whenever he might require it. In many instances the villans were also required to deliver to their lord certain tributes, such as eggs on feast days and wheat or barley in seed time. Sometimes the villans were provided with food when they were employed on the demesne. This system would seem to us a very awkward method of getting our farming done; and so it was, but under agricultural conditions at that time it worked fairly well, with the assistance of the bailiff and his subordinates, who assisted him in seeing that the villans rendered the services required of them. These subordinates were villans themselves and were chosen by their fellows as their representatives, to be responsible for them if they failed to perform their duties. The most important of the minor officials were the reeves, or provost, and the hayward, both of whom must

CHARACTER OF  
SERVICES RENDERED  
BY THE VILLANS

have found their office anything but remunerative, for we find instances where villans paid as high as twenty shillings to be released from serving as reeve after having been elected. As a last resort the villans, as a whole body, were made responsible for the required service, and the lord could fine a whole township if the services were not rendered.

Each of the villans usually held about thirty acres of land, but some held more than this, and others much less. There was a large class of cotters, or cottagers, who had little more than a garden. These holdings were not cultivated separately as individual farms are now, but they were all worked together as one large farm. This was made necessary because of the fact that there were no fences in those days, and the different holdings were separated only by narrow strips of unplowed land. In rare cases the lord's demesne may have been kept separate, but in any case it was cultivated in the same manner as was the land held by the villans.

There were two methods of tillage in common use at this period in England, and nearly all the cultivated land was worked under one or the other of these methods. They were known as the three field and two field systems. The three field system seems to have been in more common use. Under this the whole of the cultivated land was divided into three sections, and every year one of these produced wheat, another oats, while the third lay fallow. The order of planting would thus be changed yearly, so that each year one third of the land would lie fallow. The crude methods of tillage at this time made it necessary to pro-

AMOUNT OF LAND  
HELD BY VILLANS

SYSTEM OF TILLAGE

vide a natural means of giving the land a rest so as not to take from it all its substance and thus impoverish the soil. Under this system the course would be to sow a field with barley in January of the first year, and in the following August to reap the barley; then from September in the first year to June in the second year to allow the land to remain fallow, and then plow it ready for wheat, and in the fall sow the wheat; then in August of the third year reap the wheat and plow the land in preparation for sowing barley in January of the fourth year. This system was usually followed, but sometimes rye was substituted for wheat and peas, beans, hemp, corn and linseed were raised in small quantities. When preparing the land for a crop it was usually plowed twice, but even then, because of the crude plows in use, the soil was not well cultivated. Oxen were used in preference to horses, as they did not have to be shod, and the expense of feeding them was less. After sowing, little care was given the crop, although some times the corn was hoed. The method of reaping was to cut the grain high, so as to leave long stubbles. This prevented the reaper from being compelled to carry a bundle of useless stalks, and it left these stalks on the ground to be used for thatching, or to be plowed in for fertilizer. The amount of grain harvested per acre was very small, because of poor cultivation, varying from four bushels on the poorest land, to sixteen bushels on the best. This was a very small yield compared with the amount usually raised now on the same area. After the grain was

reaped it had to be thrashed and winnowed. The winnowing was usually done by the women. The grain was not generally sold, but was stored in barns for future use. In the good years the people would raise little more than enough to supply their needs, so it was necessary to keep some grain in storage in order to prevent suffering from famine in the years when the crops failed.

Cattle and sheep were the usual live stock kept by the villan, and each family would also have a pig. In the summer all the stock was sent out to feed under the care of cowherds, shepherds and swinherds, in the pastures, and there was usually plenty of food for them in the summer season. But in winter the greater part had to be killed, as there was little hay or grain with which to feed them. The draught oxen had to be kept, and enough of the other animals for breeding purposes. Those that were kept were nearly starved, and in the spring the lambs and calves got little or no protection from the weather, and many of them died as a result of the exposure. Notwithstanding such unfavorable conditions, sheep raising was doubtless the most profitable business in the agricultural districts, for even at this time England controlled the wool trade, and there was an increasing demand from Flanders for fleeces to supply the looms. The fleeces were very light, but still the small amount of labor required to raise the sheep rendered the business profitable. There was, of course, some dairying and poultry raising, but each one did enough of this for his own needs, and consequently there was

LIVE STOCK KEPT  
BY VILLANS

little or no demand for such product.

CHANGE IN LARGE  
CONDITIONS

The manner which we have described is such as existed in England during the thirteenth and a part of the fourteenth centuries. During this period, however, a great change was taking place in the condition of service on the manors. This was the gradual disappearance of the villan with his obligation of rendering service and helping to cultivate his lord's demesne, <sup>in</sup> and <sup>his</sup> place the appearance of a class of free laborers who worked for wages. There was no great movement among the villans for freedom at this time, but gradually the bailiffs seemed to have come to regard them as free, and to allow them the rights of free men. There was no clear admission to full rights of freedom to the villans from the lords, but the villans ceased to be tied to the soil and the revolt which came in 1381 was brought about by an attempt on the part of the lords to exact service which had become obsolete. This change in the status of the villan came about, not through kindness or pity, but simply because it was for the best interests of the lord. It had never been easy to secure proper cultivation of the demesne under the system of villan labor even when the lord was able to get trustworthy bailiffs, and at its worst the system had been very unsatisfactory. The villans were constantly claiming that they had performed all the work required of them by the many customs and usages in existence; hence there was always the annoyance of frequent complaints, which necessitated so much superintendence that

the margin of profit derived from the work of the villans was very small. This was also a period of increasing expenses in the cost of living. The age was one of progress and additional luxuries created a demand for ready money, which demand was imperative with the lords, and they could not raise the money which they needed so long as their rents were paid in labor. Under such conditions it can readily be understood why the lords were not unfavorable to a new system which would give them rent money instead of labor. The change was gradual, and at first the lord was at liberty to exact either money or labor in payment of rent. If he collected his rents in money, he must hire the villans to work for him on his demesne; but in this he gained, for he had not only servants who worked better, but servants who could be engaged exactly when wanted. The villans were better satisfied under this sytem, because they felt that they were free, and that the labor which they rendered was voluntary. As soon as the lords could be sure that this rent money would be paid regularly, the system of requiring rent in labor was bound to disappear. The amount of rent paid varied according to the size of the villan's holdings, and to a certain extent to the kind of service which he had formerly rendered; but at most this rent did not exceed ten shillings a year, and was often much less.

After this new system of paying rent with money instead of labor had become firmly established, the lords did not care to have more laborers on their demesnes than were sufficient to cultivate the land; so if the remainder preferred to seek

DIVISIONS OF  
LABOR AND  
PAYMENT FOR  
SERVICES

employment elsewhere rather than cultivate their holdings, the lords would usually allow them to do so upon the payment of small fines, and consequently a large number of villans took up trades and became detached from the land and practically free. Others of the villans accumulated in their own hands the holdings thus vacated, and grew into a class of yeomen who were often sufficiently well-to-do to be under no necessity of working for hire,

Those villans who were employed on their lord's demesne may be divided into two classes, namely, the regular servants employed throughout the year, and those employed occasionally. The regular servants included plowmen, carters and drivers, herdsmen and dairymaids, all of whom worked about 210 days in the year. In addition to a small money wage, each received a regular allowance of grain, varying from a quarter every nine weeks to one every fourteen, according to their employment. Sometimes laborers were paid entirely in money, and when this was done payment was usually by the piece. It has been calculated that, at the rates paid for labor, the cultivation of the land cost the lord about one pound per acre, at which cost he would derive a fair profit from his demesne. The whole system depended upon there being a sufficient number of laborers who would accept the ordinary wages. This condition ceased to exist when the Black Death killed nearly half the laborers in England. The survivors refused to work for the old wage, with the result that nearly all the landlords were ruined.

CONDITION OF  
COMMERCE

The latter part of the 13th century in England was not a period of great industrial progress. There was little commerce and trade relations between different parts of the country and the foreign countries were not well developed. The reason for this condition was that the control of commerce was in the hands of the crown, and a very wealthy class of landlords, who united to exact as much as possible from the traders and the working people. The whole system was opposed to the development of general trade and commerce for the benefit of all.

GROWTH OF TRADE  
UNDER  
EDWARD I.

Under Edward I. there arose a new factor which was to cause a revolution in industrial conditions, namely, commercial legislation. After this time trade was not regulated in the sole interests of the rich landlords, but rather in the interests of the whole people. Hitherto trade had been severely restricted by vexatious local usages and customs, but now, under legislative enactments conditions were greatly changed for the better. This change was largely due to the far-sighted foreign policy of Edward I. and his immediate successors. During the reign of Edward I. a great number of new towns were established, and the free cities of Europe reached the zenith of their political and commercial prosperity. As a result of this growth trade among the cities flourished. The crown assumed a nominal control over foreign trade, which was at that time largely in the hands of the Hanse. The Jews and Flemings controlled internal trade; but the crown compelled all to be licensed, so that the government could control trade relations. The great commercial houses of Lombardy grew up

under Edward , and by him the Jews were expelled and the Lombards patronized in their place. France was hemmed in between a dependent English ally in the North, and a flourishing English province in the South. The king regarded the products of his country, the wealth of the church and of the town, as available to supply him with funds either by direct taxation, or by assignment of income to foreign financiers. Edward insisted that he was "free to buy and sell like any other" when the Commons remonstrated at his illegal seizure of goods for his own purposes. The king also farmed out the customs to societies of foreign merchants. Foreign trade had become so important that it could not be left in the hands of the guilds of the free cities, so the king took control of foreign trade and used it as a means of raising revenue to supply his own needs. In later years the questions in which trade relations were involved came under control of the Commons.

The purpose of the system adopted by Edward I. and carried on by his successors was to secure commercial advantages for the English people. The most important of these advantages was that of securing a profitable market for English exports, and the next in importance was the securing of an abundant supply of imports which should be unrestricted. Aliens were encouraged to import goods, but restrictions were always imposed so as to favor the English. Various measures were taken to safeguard the seas and to establish a continental market for English goods. Prior to the 14th Century the crown had licensed persons to carry on foreign trades, and such a license afforded the king's protection to the person holding it. This system afforded protection to the

REPORTS AND  
IMPORTS

merchants so long as the peace of an absolute monarch was the only law recognized; but with the re-organization of the system of justice, other arrangements became necessary. The Magna Carta had asserted the common law right of merchants to freedom of traffic, provided the usual regulations were complied with; but notwithstanding this, it was usually found convenient to obtain protection of the crown by payment of fines for charters of liberties or safe conducts, under which to do business. There was also local taxation levied on merchants, which consisted of tolls and fines levied at fairs and markets, or at the city gates and quays.

The chief result of the commercial policy adopted by Edward was the consolidation of these various taxes into a definite system revenue. In bringing about this result the crown secured possession of those systems of private revenue, or at least restricted the authority of the lords, to collect tithes. The first Parliament at Westminster made a "great contract" with the crown by terms of which the crown abandoned the indefinite taxes on native exports of an earlier period, in exchange for a fixed duty on wool products and leather. This tax became known as the Great or Ancient custom. The taxes on wines imported by natives was ratified as the Prisaige. Before the end of Edward's reign a similar contract was made with foreign merchants, whereby they obtained equal advantages by paying an increased duty of fifty percent on wool products and leather, with a fixed tariff on cloths and wax, a tonnage of two shillings on a cask of wine, and a poundage tax on all imports and exports. This new custom caused considerable discontent at first among the merchants,

CHANGE IN  
REVENUE SYSTEM

but its success as a financial and commercial measure was undoubted, and the merchants came to look upon it with more favor as they realized <sup>its</sup> efficiency.

In order to collect this revenue to which the crown was entitled under the Statute of Westminster, and the Carta Mercatoria, it was necessary to maintain an organized staff of custom house officers. The ports actually became "the king's gates"; a strong coast guard was maintained, and the local authorities were looked after, with the result that the condition of the harbors, quays and streets was greatly improved. We also find that the Statute of Winchester caused the roads to be cleared of the robbers who had infested them, and that the Statutes of London maintained good order in the city. By the Statute of Merchants trade debts were secured, so far as possible, and a system of registration established.

Edward III., grandson of Edward I., carried this trade policy even further. He was determined to extend foreign trade as much as possible, and to bring this about he granted charters to the merchants of Gascony, who imported wine, and also to merchants in other branches of trade. The aliens were expressly protected by the Statute of Staple, and a statutory fare for their passage between Dover and Calais was fixed. Notwithstanding the encouragement received from the crown, the foreign merchants labored under considerable local disadvantages, as we find, for example, that their sojourn for more than forty days in England was resented by the English Commons. The increased import trade, together with the success of the French war, tended to demoralize the middle classes of English society, and before the end of the reign of Edward III. it became necessary that

SOME OF THE  
RESULTS OF THE  
REVENUE LAWS

THE REIGN OF  
EDWARD III.

CHANGE IN REVENUE  
LAWS AND THE  
STAPLE

rigorous laws should be passed for the purpose of protecting native industries. Edward III. also tried the plan of bringing Flemish weavers to England under the special protection and patronage of the crown, and this policy was favorably received by his subjects; but most important of the commercial projects of Edward III. was the scheme which was consummated in 1353, whereby English exports were brought under direct control of the crown. This system was known as the Staple.

The importance of the export trade as a means of revenue had now been recognized by the sovereigns, but the customs heretofore imposed did not seem a sufficient revenue to supply the crown with necessary funds in time of war, as the king had given up various claims through scutage and feudal practices; hence he must readjust the revenue taxes so as to yield a greater income. A tax known as the *Maltolte*, of forty shillings, had been levied on the sack of wool, and the result of this tax was a constitutional crisis. This ended in the confirmation of the charters which provided that if the king wished, in case of necessity to levy an unusual tax, he must first obtain consent of Parliament. During the war with France this necessity arose, and after that the grant of the subsidy of wool became the most important factor in raising funds for the annual budget. This source of revenue placed the financial dealings which England had with Flemish and Lombard capitalists upon a firm basis, and it was with the view of developing this means of revenue to the utmost that caused the crown to devote so much attention to the Staple.

In the thirteenth century the Staple was a body of traders with definite objects and interests; and during the earlier

days of its existence, the members exported wool and other staple products to the Flemish cities without discrimination. During the reign of Edward II., however, it was deemed advisable to establish a fixed staple for the sale of English exports. This action created a monopoly in favor of a few cities, which finally became so oppressive that in 1353 the Staple was transferred to England in the expectation that free competition among foreign merchants who visited English markets would tend to increase the price of wool and thus diminish the burden of indirect taxation in the form of customs and subsidies, which tax fell upon the producer. It was also expected that the English towns, at which the Staple would be held, would receive great benefits, and that the volume of foreign imports would lower prices and leave a balance in favor of England.

The Ordinance of the Staple named ten English towns which were to have exclusive sale of wool. These towns were located within easy reach of the coast, and scattered from Newcastle in the north to Bristol in the west, with separate Staples for Wales and Ireland. Each town was not far from a port, and in each a court merchant was established with a mayor, officers and assessors. The wool was weighed and certified, and all disputes settled in these courts, after which it was conveyed to the nearest port, where it was inspected by the king's officers who collected the customs and subsidies. It was made a criminal offence for an English subject to export wool, while at the same time the strongest inducements were offered aliens to patronize English markets. The immediate effect of this measure was a great increase in the Staple trade, and the export trade was

THE TEN STAPLE  
TOWNS

greater than ever before. It must be borne in mind that this export trade was by statute in the hands of aliens, and this restriction was exceedingly inconvenient for natives and caused the old jealousy of foreign traders to increase. The oppressive restrictions on trade naturally caused a great deal of smuggling. This offence became so serious that finally a compromise was made whereby for ten years the Staple was fixed chiefly at the new English colony of Calais.

#### THE REGULATION OF TRADE

In the earlier periods of English trade and commerce internal regulation was in the hands of local authorities. The early manorial and municipal records contain accounts of prosecutions of those who had committed offences against the assizes. The assize of bread and ale was everywhere recognized, and local inspectors were elected to see that the rules and regulations were obeyed. This careful supervision of goods and wares offered for sale was carried on in interests of the whole community and was very similar to our own inspection and pure food laws today. The crown appointed officers whose duty it was to gauge the wine and measure cloth, and severe penalties were inflicted upon those who did not obey the regulations. At one time there was an attempt to regulate prices, but this resulted in distress and disaster, and was finally abandoned.

#### THE CURRENCY

One of the most important questions with which the crown had to deal was that of the currency. As the royal revenues became payable in money instead of in kind, it was necessary for the treasurer to take extreme precautions in order to maintain a high standard of purity in the royal coinage.

The money of England was famous throughout Europe for its purity, and the coin which had the largest circulation was the silver penny, which passed from hand to hand freely. Nearly all the coins in circulation were subjected to the assay at the audit of the sheriff's accounts in the Exchequer. A strict watch was kept on those who had charge of the royal coinage, and the handling of money, and those who were found dishonest, or in any way guilty of defrauding the crown were severely punished as examples to all others who might be tempted to commit similar crimes. Occasionally the debased currency was called in, and a new coinage issued. In the first half of the fourteenth century various treatises on coinage were issued which gave evidence of considerable scientific knowledge. A great number of ordinances were passed by the king and council for the better regulation of the currency, and these resulted in the establishment of the Mint and Exchange. Under Edward III. a double standard of currency was established, that is, both gold and silver coins came into use. The circulation of base foreign coins tended to drive out of circulation good money. These coins were brought into England by foreign traders. A statute was passed, the purpose of which was to remedy this evil by prohibiting the use of foreign coins, and compelling alien merchants to pay for goods with actual bullion, and at the same time the exportation of English bullion was checked so far as possible. In the year 1351 an entirely new coinage of gold and silver was issued.

## INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS

During the fourteenth century the crown and Parliament united in passing ordinances and statutes for the better protection of the working classes, and under the protection of these laws great progress was made by the artisans. Many new industries were established by Edward III., in pursuance of a policy which had been successful for some time prior to his reign. Both the Flemish weavers and English cloth workers were given protection by the crown, and while there was some jealousy among those people, there was a tacit understanding between them which was fairly satisfactory. Besides the Flemish weavers who were settled in the western and eastern counties, there were also many other trades people settled in England and the elaborate laws of the period were evidently designed for the encouragement and protection of native manufacturing industries.

## TRADE GUILDS

In the case of some of the trades, there was an entire reorganization during the reign of Edward I. As an example, we may take the goldsmith's trade, which had a well-known trade mark and which was, by direction of the crown, affixed to all silver plate. The majority of other trades were still regulated by their own governing bodies, although each was benefited indirectly by the activity of the trade organizations which were better developed, and which were under the protection of the crown. In the fourteenth century the form of government for the English towns became that of guilds, for the purpose of trade. Gradually all the towns had acquired the privileges that were essential to freedom of trade, namely the exemption from local tolls, the sheriff's assessments, and the necessity of pleading outside the city.

In the 14th Century the typical craft guild contained three classes of artisans, namely, masters, journeymen and apprentices; but all these had a common interest, although there were inequalities in the rights and privileges among the classes. The organization of the guild had not varied much since the earlier stages of its development. The great increase in the number of laborers in the towns made it necessary for the guilds to provide such regulations as would enable each member to find employment. The line of work in which the members of a particular guild might engage was strictly limited, and the members of one guild were not allowed to engage in work which belonged to the members of another. It required workmen of four separate guilds to make a finished saddle and bridle. A joiner made the wockwork, which a painter decorated, a saddler supplied the leather, while a lorimer furnished the metal trappings and appointments. Each craft usually had its own guild court, and here all cases which arose from disputes among the members were settled. In certain cases a craftsman could claim a trial by his own guild court rather than by the municipal courts.

The guild officers did not confine their activities to the hearing of cases which were brought before them, but were also engaged in regulating the workmanship and dealings of the craftsmen, chiefly for the purpose of preventing the use of improper weights

and measures. Poor workmanship, or false weights and measures, were sure to be detected by these inspectors. By such an arrangement the purchasers were well protected and the cause of the honest workman advanced. The government also afforded protection to the purchaser by insisting upon fair dealings on the part of workmen.

#### GROWTH OF CRAFT GUILDS

In the 12th century there were very few craft guilds, but before the close of the 14th Century the number had increased to 50 in London alone. Manufactured articles which had hitherto been imported could now be supplied by native workmen, who were able to hold their own with foreign craftsmen. It is true that a number of the finer crafts were not successfully practised in England until the immigration of the Protestant refugees in the 16th Century. This remarkable growth is the more astonishing when we consider the fact that the trades were supported almost entirely by the court, the nobility, and the wealthy burgesses. The inhabitants of the rural districts enjoyed very few of the luxuries which were possessed by those who lived in the towns.

#### CONDITIONS OF ALIENS IN ENGLAND

At the same time that King, Parliament and the people were working out the trade regulations heretofore mentioned, other regulations were made for the control of aliens who wished to import or export goods. Aliens were not allowed to meddle with the native trade either by retailing or by occupying any position of trust or profit. They were not allowed to be innkeepers, and the feeling against alien farmers was very strong. Forty days was supposed to be the extent of the alien's

stay in England, and during this time he must transact all his business, must pay an increased duty, and was expected to spend freely during his stay. Strict precautions were taken to prevent aliens from conducting their business by the use of native agents. Not all these oppressive regulations were enforced by the Crown, notwithstanding the jealousy of its interested subjects. The people of England gradually came to have broader views in regard to trade relations with their neighbors, and these regulations were modified so as to allow greater privileges to foreigners.

#### ECONOMIC POLICY

While the English were determined to keep out foreign competition and thus keep trade in the hands of natives, at the same time there was a strong feeling against usury. The Jewish money lenders and the Flemish and Lombard farmers of the customs were alike despised by the English. There was no place for the capitalist in the economic theory of this period. The people were narrow in their views, and many times by the restrictions which they placed upon others their own interests were injured; but out of this system came better and more humane conditions in commercial England.

In the reign of Edward I. there was much legislation passed for the purpose of governing the Jews. Parliament in 1275 passed statutes limiting the rate of interest which might be charged by the Jews, and also requesting that they should wear a badge in the shape of the two tables of the law of Moses. It appears that there was considerable ground for this intense feeling against the Jews. They were the money lenders of the time and were very exacting, when once they got the borrower in their power. They were also guilty of debasing the currency, and frequently inflicted physical punishment upon Christians. In the year 1286 there was a recognized raid throughout England upon the Jews, and they were fined by the King, who at that time wanted money for an expedition into France. The Commons granted the king one-fifth part of their movables to have the Jews banished, but the Jews gave the King large sums of money and thus induced him to let them remain in England. Their stay, however, was not for long, because the popular prejudice against them was so great that even the protection of the King was not sufficient to enable them to remain in England. Parliament, in the year 1290 passed an act of banishment upon the Jews. This act confiscated their immovable goods together with their obligations, but they were allowed to carry away their movable goods. It is said that this act caused the banishment of over 15,000 Jews from England. The people were exceedingly bitter against the Jews, but yet they actually needed them to secure money for the purpose of carrying on business.

AGRICULTURAL CONDITIONS

and

COST OF LIVING

During the period which we are considering the conditions under which the land was tilled were not such as to bring about a large production of food stuffs. Hence, in case of failure of crops one season there would be great want and suffering among the poorer classes. At such times the cost of food would be high, and the poor people without means with which to buy. Many died of famine. In fact at times, historians of this period tell us, the living could scarcely bury the dead. The greatest famine was during the years 1315-1316. At this time Edward II. issued writs throughout the kingdom commanding that no wheat should be used for making ale. This relieved the distress, as it lessened the consumption of grain for other purposes than food. Diseases broke out among the live stock at the same time, so that this source of food supply was greatly lessened. There were, however, times when food stuffs could be obtained for a reasonable price, and later the price of poultry and farm products was fixed by law. This attempt to regulate prices was not very successful, as prices were bound to depend to a great extent upon the law of supply and demand, and finally the matter was dropped and economic laws allowed to govern the situation. In London the authorities looked after the food supplied to the people, in order that, as far as possible, protection might be afforded from dishonest dealers.

BLACK DEATH

Probably the most important event of this period, from an economic standpoint, was that of the Black Death, which invaded England in 1348. This social calamity changed the whole economic condition of England, transformed her agricultural system, and had an important influence upon industry. It also left a lasting impression on her laws, arts and manners, and in fact permanently influenced the whole political, social and economic life of England. The Black Death was the same disease that was afterwards known in England as the great plague. This disease was very fatal and quick in its action. About half of those attacked died. It attacked all classes of society, but naturally the poorer classes suffered most, as they were not able to escape infection, or provide proper care after the disease would attack them. After the Black Death entered England it spread very rapidly. It first appeared in Dorsetshire and within a fortnight it was in Bristol, and soon after that in Gloucester. The first of January 1349 the diocese of Bath and Wells did not contain a sufficient number of priests to perform funeral rites for the plague victims. The city of London itself was reached about the first of November 1348, and to the south the disease had reached as far as Bodmin by Christmas. During the year of 1349 the Black Death extended into all parts of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

The period of greatest mortality in Scotland was not reached until the year 1350. In London the disease was at its worst in the month of April 1349 and from that time declined until it was apparently stamped out about Whitsuntide 1349. Hence we see that the Black Death lasted about fourteen months from its first appearance in Dorset to the last record we have of its existence in England.

#### THE MORTALITY

So far as the records show the mortality appears to have been from one-half to two-thirds of the population. In Norfolk two-thirds of the parish clergy died, and at least one-half of the clergy in Nottingham, West Riding and No. Riding of Yorkshire, and this appears to be about the average death rate in all parts of England. In the monasteries the mortality was even greater than among the parish clergy. In the city of London the highest mortality was about two hundred a day which would mean a total number of some 20,000, or nearly one-half of the population. It required many years for England to recover from the loss of such a large percentage of its inhabitants and the country was not so populous again until the reign of Elizabeth.

#### THE RISE OF WAGE EARNERS

For many years previous to the Black Death a new class had been growing up in England, namely a class of wage earners. These people were not legally free, but practically they controlled

their own time and were able to sell their services wherever and to whomsoever they wished. This change came about so smoothly that in the beginning of 1348 there seemed no reason why the spirit of liberty should not have obtained a complete triumph within a few decades, and the oppressive obligations of serfdom be done away with. There was hardly anything to discourage laborers in their efforts to obtain freedom. All this was changed in the year 1349 and the advantages which had hitherto been obtained were largely lost.

#### THE PEASANT REVOLTS

#### THEIR CAUSES

The Black Death by decreasing the number of laborers in the country made it exceedingly difficult for the land owners to secure a sufficient amount of labor to cultivate their estates. Hence there was a general reaction from the progressive system to that of the discarded labor services. There was not actually a return to labor services but for a time it seemed that such would be the result of the unsettled conditions of service between laborers and land owners. The supply of hired labor who invariably carried on the farming was not only greatly diminished, but the demand for it was relatively increased. The majority of the land owners had large tracts of land thrown upon their hands on account of the death of their tenants without leaving successors, and this land they must work for themselves in ad-

dition to their old domaine, or else allow this additional land to go out of cultivation. Hence we see that even though the land owners might obtain a sufficient number of laborers to work the lands which they previously held, it now became necessary for them to obtain many more in order to cultivate this extra land and thus avoid loss from allowing the land to remain idle. In many cases the manors were so depopulated by the plague that there was not a tenantry on them sufficient to carry on the cultivation of the domain, and farming could not be kept up unless additional labor could be brought in. This additional labor could be secured only by paying for it, and the amount of services exacted from those in the manor could not be increased beyond that which had been customary. Hence it was exceedingly difficult for the land owners to cultivate their estates at a profit. At this critical time the laborers, realizing the needs of the land owners, thought they were masters of the situation and demanded an enormous increase in wages. In many cases they demanded double the amount of wages previously received and were not satisfied with that. Under such conditions the landlords found themselves in the predicament of choosing between the loss of either letting their fields lie uncultivated, or of losing by hiring laborers at a high wage to cultivate their estates. Naturally

under these conditions the landlords began to take counsel together to see what could be done to afford them relief from the oppressive demands of the laborers. This consultation among the landlords resulted in what is known as the Statute of Laborers.

STATUTE OF LABORENS

The Statute of Laborers was passed by the first Parliament which assembled after the Black Death, and its purpose was to provide a remedy for the landlords. This was well set out in the preamble which was:

"Because a great part of the people, and especially workmen and servants, late died of the pestilence, many seeing the necessity of masters and great scarcity of servants will not serve unless they may receive excessive wages, and some are rather willing to beg in idleness than by labor to get their living."

Among the various provisions which we find in the Statute of Laborers there appears the following:

That every man or woman, whether bond or free, who was physically able and within the age of three score years, not having sufficient property of his own to live upon, or land of his own which he might cultivate, and not serving any other, should be bound to serve the employer who might require him to do so, provided that the lords of any bond man or land servant should be preferred before others if they desired his services. That servants should demand only the wages to which they had been accustomed in the

year 1347, and that anyone who neglected to serve should be committed to jail. That any reaper, mower or other workman who should leave his employer's service should be imprisoned, and that no one should receive or retain him. That any workman demanding or receiving more than the accustomed wages should be prosecuted in the Court of the manor where he was serving and should be compelled to pay a fine equal to double the wage received by him. That contracts for increased wages should not be enforced at law and that no one should be allowed to give alms to beggars upon pain of imprisonment.

Not only did the Statute of Laborers aim to regulate wages but it also was the intention of the farmers to have it regulate prices, for we find paragraphs regulating the price which could be charged by butchers, hostlers, brewers, bakers, etc. The framers of the Statute did not seem to realize the impossibility of its enforcement. Naturally such an oppressive statute caused great discontent among the laborers, and attempts to enforce it resulted in a bitter contest between land owners and laborers.

The attempts of the land owners to keep the laborers in subjection were not destined to be permanently successful. An increase in the cost of living was taking place, and it was impossible for the laborers to live on the same wages

which they had previously received. Hence although there was a desperate attempt to enforce the various statutes aimed to control the laborers, we can see why those attempts were unsuccessful. The laborers were destined to secure freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their own labor and to improve their social and economic condition. Within the limits of this article it is impossible to go into the many details connected with the development of England in this period, but a few points have been covered and from those we can readily see that it was a period of considerable progress in social and economic life; that by the close of the fourteenth century, the condition of the laboring classes had been greatly improved, that the laws had become less oppressive, that life to the working people was worth much more than it was at the beginning of the century.

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