

# CONTENTS

List of Maps	ix
Foreword	xi

## I TRIBES AND LEGIONS

1 The Iberians	1
2 The Celtic Tribes	4
3 Roman Britain	9
4 The Roman Twilight	13

## II THE GROWTH OF FEUDALISM

1 The English Conquest	17
2 The Township	23
3 Christianity	25
4 The Northmen	30
5 The End of Saxon England	36

## III FEUDAL ENGLAND

1 The Conquest	43
2 The Social Structure of Domesday England	47
3 State: Baron: Church	52
4 Foreign Relations	57
5 The Great Charter	63

## IV THE DECLINE OF FEUDALISM

1 Trade and Towns	68
2 Parliamentary Origins	75
3 Wales: Ireland: Scotland	81

4	The Hundred Years' War and the Revolution in Military Technique	87
5	The Black Death	92
6	The Peasants' Rising	98
7	The Political Significance of the Lollard Heresy	103

## V THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

1	A Century of Paradox	108
2	Parliament and the House of Lancaster	113
3	The Hundred Years' War – II	117
4	The Wars of the Roses	121

## VI THE NEW MONARCHY AND THE BOURGEOISIE

1	The Clothing Industry	126
2	The Discoveries	131
3	The Agrarian Revolution	137
4	The Tudor Monarchy	145
5	The Reformation in England	151
6	The Counter-Reformation and the Elizabethan Settlement	157

## VII ORIGIN OF THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

1	The Struggle with Spain	164
2	The Chartered Companies	171
3	Crown and Parliament	178
4	The Puritans	185
5	Fundamental Issues in the English Revolution	190

## VIII THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

1	The Long Parliament: Classes and Parties	195
2	The Civil War	202
3	Regicide	208
4	The Levellers	214

## IX COMMONWEALTH AND COMPROMISE

1	Ireland: Scotland	220
2	The Commonwealth	226
3	The Compromise of 1660	231
4	The Compromise of 1688	238

## X WHIG ENGLAND

1	War Finance	246
2	Party Politics	253
3	Colonial War	259
4	The American Revolution	266
5	War and Industry	273

## XI THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

1	Agriculture	277
2	Fuel, Iron and Transport	282
3	Textiles: the Speenhamland Experiment	287
4	The French Revolution	295
5	The Napoleonic Wars	302

## XII THE TRIUMPH OF INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM

1	England after Waterloo	311
2	The War in the Villages	316
3	Factory Legislation	322
4	The Roots of Liberalism	327
5	The Reform Bill	332

## XIII LIBERAL ASCENDANCY

1	The New Poor Law and the Railway Age	339
2	The Corn Laws	345
3	Foreign Politics: Palmerston to Disraeli	350
4	The Second Reform Bill	357

## XIV THE ORGANISATION OF THE WORKING CLASS

1	Revolutionary Trade Unionism	363
2	The Chartists	369
3	The New Model	378
4	Socialism and the Organisation of the Unskilled	383
5	The War for the Land and the National Struggle in Ireland	389

## XV COLONIAL EXPANSION

1	India	397
2	Canada and Australia	403
3	Egypt	409
4	Tropical and South Africa	414

## XVI ORIGINS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

1	Imperialism	422
2	Triple Alliance, Triple Entente	429
3	Internal Crisis, 1906–1914	435
4	The Road to Sarajevo	445

## XVII WORLD WAR: WORLD CRISIS

1	The First World War	451
2	The Home Front	456
	A Note about Books	464
	Bibliography	465
	Index	471



## LIST OF MAPS

1	Prehistoric Britain	<i>page</i> 3
2	Roman Britain	11
3	The Anglo-Saxon Invasions	21
4	The Northmen in Britain	33
5	Trade in the Middle Ages	71
6	England, France and Ireland in the Twelfth Century	84
7	The Discoveries	134
8	The Reformations	154
9	Europe in the Seventeenth Century	167
10	The Conquest of Ireland	224
11	The Conquest of India	260
12	The Conquest of North America	264
13	The Industrial Revolution	289
14	The Napoleonic Empire	303
15	The British Empire in the Nineteenth Century	424

Maps 6, 8, 9, 10 and 14 are reproduced from J.F. Horrabin's *An Atlas of European History*.



## Foreword

One of the problems of writing history is to know where to stop, since history goes on continuously while a book has got to end somewhere. When I was writing this book twenty-seven years ago I solved the problem by stopping at the point we had actually then reached – with civil war still raging in Spain and the world under the menace of fascism and of a new war even more terrible than that of 1914.

This does not seem a suitable or even a possible stopping point in 1964. And in any case the events between 1918 and 1937 were necessarily only summarised in a brief Epilogue which has now become quite inadequate as an account of those momentous years. Two possible courses seemed open to me.

One was to bring my story up to date, or at least to find a new and more satisfactory stopping point somewhere between 1937 and the present time. The advantages of this are obvious. The disadvantages are that to deal with this period at all adequately it would have to be treated in considerable detail, which would destroy the present balance of the book and add very considerably to its already formidable length. In any case I do not feel myself competent to deal with the very difficult problems of a period quite outside my own field of study and for which a really gigantic bulk of material would have to be mastered. A good popular history of Britain in the twentieth century is certainly needed, but I am not the person to write it.

The other course, which I have adopted, was to cut out the Epilogue, thus ending with the close of the First World War and the establishment of the first socialist state in the Soviet Union. With these events, history takes a new direction and the world enters a new historic epoch.

Apart from this, I have taken the opportunity offered by this new edition to make a number of minor changes and some

additions to the bibliography. I hope that in its present form my book will continue to be useful to the student as well as to the general reader.

A.L.M

December 1964

# I TRIBES AND LEGIONS

## 1 The Iberians

Early maps show a world in which Britain is a remote outpost, a shapeless cluster of islands thrust out into the encircling ocean. But in some of these maps a significant tilt brings their South-western coast close to the North of Spain, reminding us that earlier still, centuries before the making of any maps that have survived, Britain lay not outside the world but on a regular and frequented trade route which linked Mediterranean civilisation with the amber-bearing North. It was by this long sea route and not across the Dover Straits or the Channel that civilisation first reached these shores.

In Cornwall, in Ireland and along the coast of Wales and Scotland cluster the monuments left by Iberian or Megalithic men who reached and peopled Britain between 3000 and 2000 BC. A final group of such monuments in Sutherland, the last point at which their ships touched land before pushing across the North Sea to Scandinavia, makes the route and its objective abundantly clear. At this time the land subsidence which had begun a thousand or so years earlier was still going on, and the apparently shorter and safer route up Channel and along the European coast was closed, if not by a land bridge joining Britain to the continent, then by straits that were narrow, shifting, shoaling and swept by rapid tides. This is perhaps the first reason for the settlement of Iberian man in Britain.

Though little is certainly known about these Iberians of the New Stone Age, a good deal may be inferred with reasonable safety, since they have left their mark clearly upon the face of the land. Further, their stock is one of the main contributors to the present population of the British Isles, especially in Ireland, Wales and the West of England. A small, dark, long-headed race, they settled especially on the chalk downs that radiate

from Salisbury Plain. Below the ridges of these hills run their trackways, like the Icknield Way and the Pilgrim's Way, which are our oldest and most historic roads. On the downs and along the trackways lie the long barrows, the great earthworks such as crown Cissbury and Dolebury,<sup>1</sup> and the stone circles of which Avebury is the grandest and Stonehenge the best known. It is from these monuments and from the downland terraces formed by their agriculture that we can guess what manner of people these were.

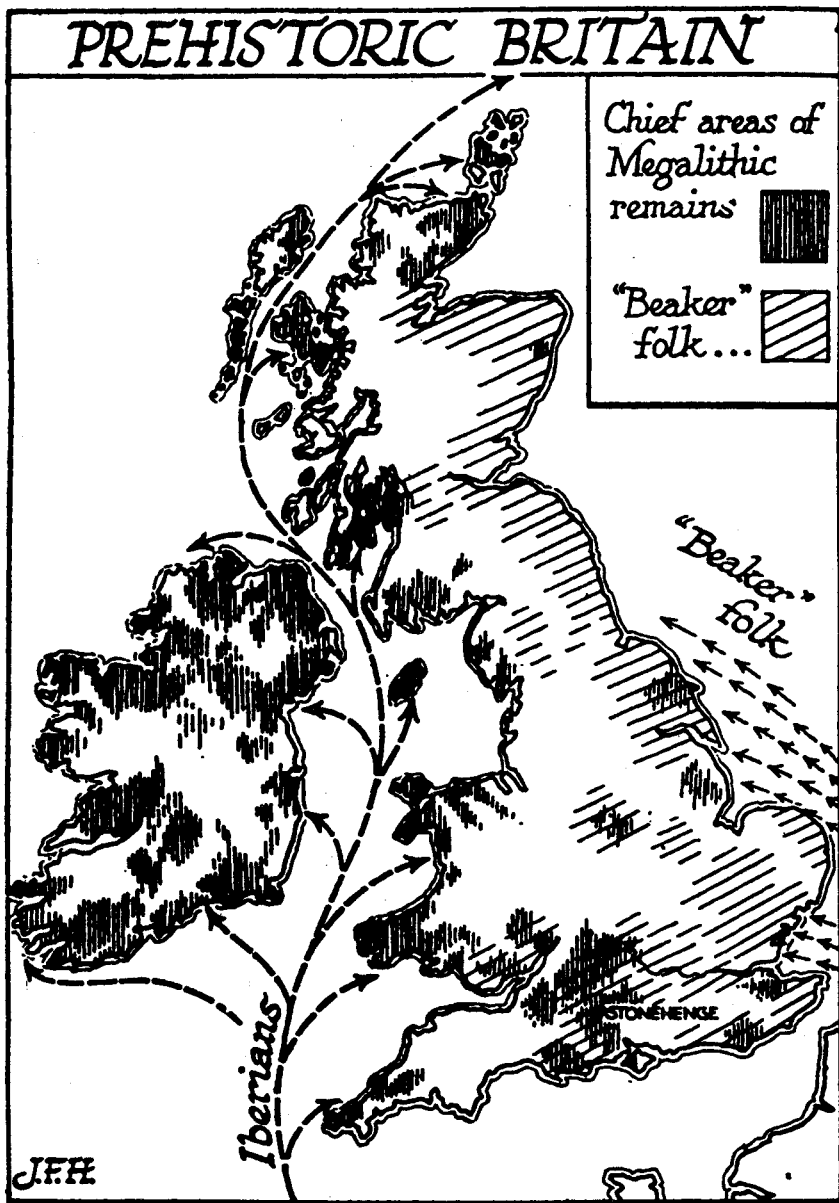
The size and splendour of their monuments speak of a numerous and well-organised people. Thousands must have worked together to raise the great earthworks, and the trackways link settlement to settlement in an orderly fashion. So, the Icknield Way joins the industrial centre of Grimes Graves, site of a large scale flint knapping on the Brecklands of Norfolk, with the religious centre at Avebury. The downland terraces indicate an intensive agriculture carried on with hoe and spade. The whole lay-out of Iberian civilisation points to a certain specialisation and division of labour which enabled the Norfolk people, for example, to mine and work flints that were traded all over the country.

More direct evidence of the social structure of the Iberians is the long barrow. Often over 200 feet in length, these barrows were burial places and prove the existence of sharply marked class divisions. On the one hand there must have been chiefs or nobles, people important enough to demand such elaborate funeral arrangements, and on the other, an abundance of the men whose cheap, possibly servile labour, was available for such works. If it could be definitely established that the huge pyramidal mounds at Silbury and Marlborough were also barrows it would be reasonable to infer also the existence of something in the nature of kingship.

Finally, there is some evidence that Iberian culture was mainly unwarlike. Few finds that can be classed as weapons have been unearthed of an earlier date than the first Celtic invasions in the Late Bronze Age, and there is little reason to think that the Downland earthworks were built as fortresses.

The diffusion of certain types of implements and utensils

<sup>1</sup> The earthworks in their present form are of considerably later, mainly Iron Age, origin, but often have a Neolithic substratum.



shows that a considerable trade went on along the trackways and by sea between Britain and Spain and even to the Mediterranean. Whether metals, other than gold which was mined in Ireland, were known is uncertain, since it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw any clear line between New Stone and Early Bronze Ages. Soon after 2000 BC a new race of Alpine stock entered the country, this time from the South-east and East. From their characteristic pottery they are known as the Beaker Folk. This race was certainly familiar with the use and working of bronze. The two peoples were closely related in culture, and the new-comers spread along the East coast, through East Anglia and up the Thames Valley. Iberian and Alpine met and fused in the Wiltshire area which is the focus of all pre-Celtic civilisation in Britain, and it is probably this fusion that produced Stonehenge sometime before 1000 BC. Tin, copper, and lead were mined in Cornwall and Wales and probably exported in considerable bulk during this period.

Although a respectable level of civilisation was reached in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages it was spread over only a small part of Britain. The mountain areas of the West and North were, as now, thinly peopled. More remarkably, much of the lowland area which today affords the richest agricultural land was also untouched. These areas were then covered by forests of oak and ash, with a thick, impenetrable underscrub. Such forests, on heavy, wet, clay soil were an absolute barrier to men equipped only with stone or even bronze implements, and, in fact, they were not seriously attacked till the Roman occupation and not finally cleared till the Saxon period. Prehistoric man kept to the dry chalk uplands, not because they were the richest but because they were the best he could occupy with the tools at his disposal, and it is not until the advent of the great iron axe that the richer but more heavily timbered lowlands were conquered.

## **2 The Celtic Tribes**

Soon after 700 BC, the first wave of Celtic invaders entered Britain, coming probably from the Upper Rhineland. These invasions were part of a widespread westward movement of tall, fair-haired, warlike tribes which overran the Mediter-



anean civilisation much as the later Teutons were to overrun the Roman Empire. The movement began in the second millennium BC, when barbarian tribes had learnt the use of bronze from the Mediterranean peoples and turned their knowledge to the production of weapons far superior to those of their teachers. In Britain the most striking sign of this is the appearance of the leaf-shaped sword, replacing the less effective knives and daggers of the Early and Middle Bronze Ages.

An early part of this movement was the penetration of the Aegean area by the Greek tribes, but the Celts proper spread as far abroad as Spain and Asia Minor. About 390 BC Celtic tribes sacked Rome and set up a kingdom in the fertile plain of Lombardy. The character of these invasions can be learnt from Caesar's account of his war with the Helvetii, who attempted to march across Gaul to escape attacks from the German tribes across the Rhine. They were movements of large tribes, composed of free warriors under tribal chiefs, accompanied by considerable numbers of women and children. They were, that is to say, national migrations rather than the raids of military bands, and their object was not so much plunder as conquest and settlement.

In Britain the first Celtic invaders were the Goidels or Gaels. These were followed about two centuries later by the Brythons, a branch of the Celts who had learned the use of iron, and who drove their bronze-using kinsmen out of the South and East and into Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the hilly Pennine and Devon areas. A third wave of invaders, Belgae from Northern Gaul, containing probably a considerable Teutonic element, arrived about 100 BC and occupied the greater part of what are now known as the Home Counties.

The Celtic conquerors blended with their Iberian predecessors to varying extents in different parts of the country. While in the West the dominant strain is Iberian, the Celts were able to impose their tribal organisation, modified to some extent by the fact of conquest, throughout the whole of the British Isles.

It is necessary at this point to describe the main characteristics of this organisation, since the whole history of the next thousand years may best be understood in terms of the gradual weakening and break up of tribal society and its eventual replacement by feudalism. From this point of view the

Roman occupation must be regarded as an interruption except in so far as it weakened Celtic tribal structure. This was especially the case in those parts of the country that were first reached by each subsequent invader.

The structure of tribal society has its roots in an even earlier age than the one we are discussing. During the greater part of the Stone Age – a vast period beginning with the emergence of Man himself – the productive system of society was a primitive communism. The food that was gathered for the social group, the animals that were hunted, the fish that was caught, were jointly produced and jointly consumed. The social group that carried on these common pursuits was a family group of a special kind. At the time of the Iberians the basic group of the kindred was probably a family group uniting the descendants of common great-grandparents. The size of the excavated settlements found in South and South-west England and dated to this period, confirms this estimate.

This early society was not, however, composed of small kinship groups with no economic and social relationships between each other. There were in fact very important relationships which united them to make up the larger groupings we call clans and tribes. The first way in which these groups co-operated was by the exchange of goods, primarily of food. On an analogy with Australian societies of modern times, it may be suggested that this exchange was based on a primitive division of labour by which certain groups specialised in certain products of the hunt. Another extremely important form of inter-kindred co-operation was in the exchange of mates. It was normal for a kinship group to find its husbands or wives outside the group, most likely in such other groups as were associated with it by the exchange of food as described above.

The kin was, in fact, a group of tremendous social cohesion. A man without kin was like a fish without water, helpless, doomed. Not only did a man's kin form the only possible framework of his economic life, but it protected him from the hazards of violent primitive existence. Should he kill or injure a man of another kin, his own kin either paid compensation (English *wergild*, Welsh *galanas*), or supported him in the blood-feud if the injured kin would not accept compensation. Should he slay a man of his own kin he was outlawed. This vital role of the kin is also of very long duration. For instance, in

England, the kindred were still an organisation with a considerable amount of vitality on the eve of the Norman Conquest. In Wales, Scotland and Ireland it was important until comparatively modern times.

Many other institutions of tribal society were, like the kin, of lasting vitality, and persisted long after primitive communism had been replaced as the basic form of economic organisation and class relationship by slavery or feudalism. The village communities which were only finally swept away by capitalism's industrial revolution, represent, in their many communal activities, the primitive communism of many centuries before. The limitations of the free disposal of landed property in the shape of various laws of inheritance, represent the lingering rights of the kin. Many of the rights of the medieval English kings were derived, not from their actual position, as leader of the feudal baronage, but from their previous position as leader of the tribe in war. Heraldry is a relic of the totemism of tribal society. And the most vital elements of European literature in the Middle Ages were inherited from the tribal epics and sagas of the Greek, Germanic and Celtic worlds.

The basic unit, then, of the Celtic tribe was the kinship group and these groups were in turn combined to form larger groups also based upon real or supposed kinship, rising to the tribe and the nation. But it was upon the kinship group that the economic life of the Celts centred. They practised a mixed agriculture and were the first to introduce the plough into this country. The Celtic plough was a small, light affair, and it was necessary to plough their fields twice so that the furrows crossed. Hence the square pattern of Celtic field systems, as compared with the strip pattern of later systems based on the heavy plough. The holding of the Celtic kinship group, the *gwely*,<sup>1</sup> was the joint property of the group and was divided among its adult males, each of whom assisted in the communal ploughing and in the harvest. The important point is that though the *gwely* might be almost infinitely subdivided it remained the property of the whole family and was carefully preserved as an economic unit. At the same time, when the pressure of population became acute, a

<sup>1</sup> Terms such as *gwely* and *galanas* (p.6) or the English *wergild* (p.6) are derived from written laws, Welsh and Anglo-Saxon, and therefore from a period far later than the prehistoric tribal society about which our knowledge depends upon inference from language and archaeology.

part of the family would split off and form a new *gwely* elsewhere. This was easy, because there was no lack of land, though there might be a shortage of *cleared* land.

The agriculture of the Celts was in some ways crude, and their ploughing was often no more than a scratching of the surface. Still, their better use of metals and the technical advance of the plough enabled them to occupy new areas. At the very close of the Celtic period the Belgae introduced a revolutionary innovation, the heavy plough drawn by four or eight oxen. Though the wet oak forests still remained uncleared, it was this period which saw the beginning of that valleyward movement of settlements that has now left Salisbury Plain, the Downs and the Norfolk Brecklands as almost unpeopled sheepwalks.

While Celtic tribal society cannot be described as classless, its class divisions were not sharply marked or of decisive importance. The difference between chief and free tribesman was one of degree rather than of kind, and such class divisions as existed seem to have been mainly the result of the subjection of a native population. It is unlikely that this took the form of slavery except under special circumstances. The technique of production was still too crude for slavery to be economically possible. Welsh law gives us the impression that the two peoples lived side by side in free and unfree hamlets and *gwelys*. The native population of the unfree *gwelys* was not apparently exploited by the mass of the free cultivators, but directly by the chiefs and the landlords who grew up after the settlements had taken place. It was undoubtedly their ability to exploit the labour of this large semi-servile class that formed the basis of the growing power of the chiefs, and which marked them off ever more sharply from the generality of the free tribesmen.

The coming of the Belgae opens a new and important stage in the development of Celtic Britain. As compared with the Goidels and Brythons they practised a more extensive agriculture, and the South-east of Britain soon became, what Caesar noted it as being, a corn growing country. At the same time towns began to spring up, as at St Albans and Colchester. These towns, if nothing better than large stockaded villages, were a marked contrast to the open hamlets and isolated homesteads of the earlier invaders. The Belgae kept up a close relation with Gaul, and a regular, if not extensive trade

developed. With this came the earliest native coined money. The Brythons had employed iron bars, rather like half-finished swords in appearance, but now gold coins were struck in imitation of the Macedonian staters brought by merchants from the continent. It is curious to observe these coins becoming progressively more crude with each new minting, but it is also worth noting that few gold coins were struck in England between the end of the Roman occupation and the reign of Edward III. With the growth of agriculture, trade and towns, powerful chiefs began to claim kingship over wide areas, and at the time of Caesar's invasion in 55 BC all South-east Britain was in theory subject to a certain Cassivellaunus whose capital was probably Colchester.

### **3 Roman Britain**

It was the close relation of Britain to Gaul which first attracted the notice of the Romans. Having conquered Gaul, Caesar soon heard tales of the pearls and corn in which the island was reputed to be rich. At the same time the export of tin from Cornwall, which had begun possibly as early as 2000 BC, still continued. Caesar's invasions were, however, dictated by strategical rather than by economic motives. Britain was a centre from which Gallic resistance to Roman power was maintained, British warriors crossed the Channel to help their Gaulish kinsmen, and rebels from Gaul found a refuge and encouragement among the British tribes. It is unlikely that the conquest of Britain was contemplated at this time, but some sort of punitive expedition was necessary before the Roman occupation of Gaul could be regarded as assured.

Roman imperialism, based upon the predatory exploitation of the provinces, needed a constant forward movement to prevent a decline at the centre, now becoming increasingly parasitic. But in 55 BC Gaul was newly conquered and assimilation and plunder by Rome's merchant and usurer capitalists had hardly begun. It was not till nearly a century later that Rome was ready to digest the new province of Britain. We shall see later that the inability to continue this process of absorption in the face of increasing resistance led directly to the decline of the Roman empire.

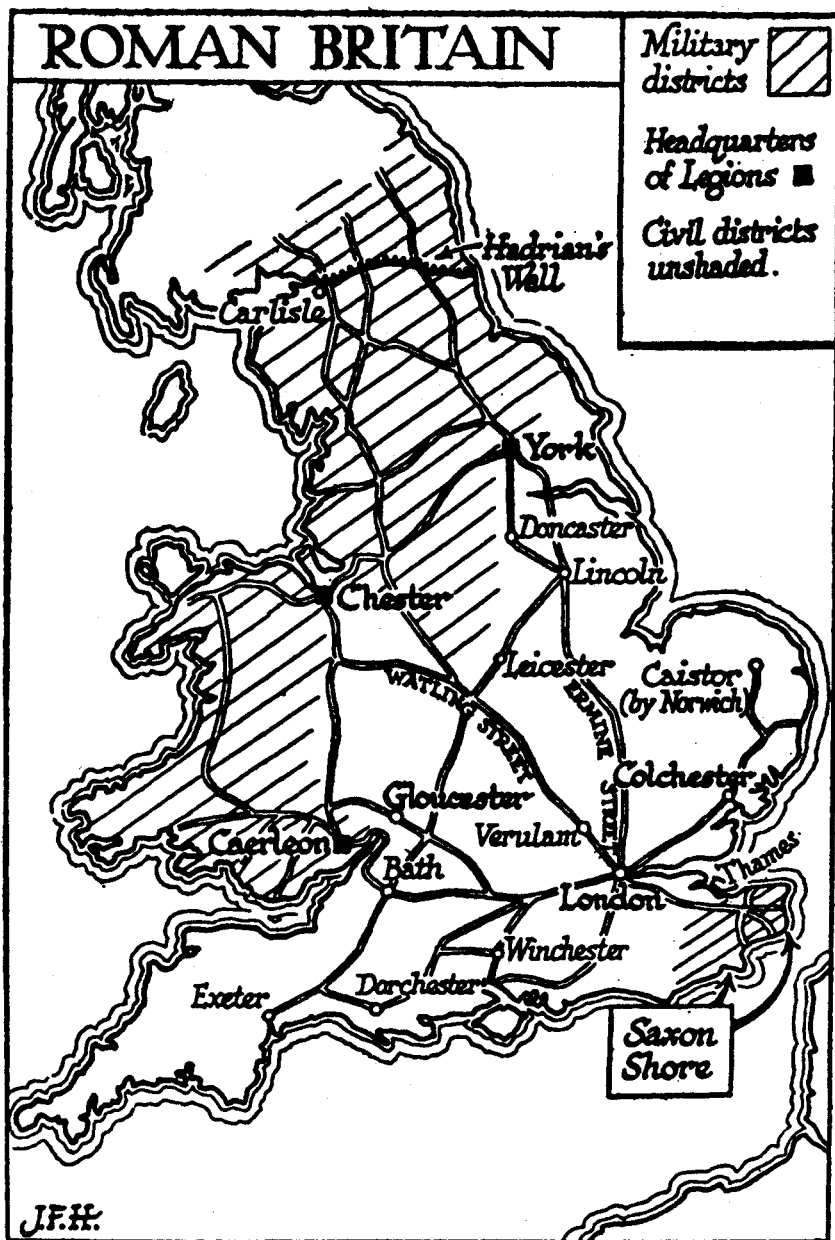
In any case, Caesar's two invasions were little more than reconnaissances in force. The first was made in the summer of 55 BC with two legions and a body of cavalry, making a total of perhaps 10,000 men. Some successes were gained but the opposition was strong and in the following year an army of about 25,000 was landed. The Thames was crossed and the capital of Cassivellaunus stormed. Caesar then departed, taking hostages and securing a promise to pay tribute. There is no evidence that this promise was ever fulfilled.

In the ninety years between these raids and the invasion of AD 43, in which the actual conquest of Britain began, many changes took place. Excavations prove that during this period a thorough economic penetration of South-east Britain went on. Trade became considerable, corn and hides being exchanged for pottery and a variety of luxury articles. Traders and colonists settled in large numbers and the growth of towns was so considerable that in AD 50, only seven years after the invasion of Claudius, St Albans or Verulamium was granted the full status of a Roman municipium with civic self-government and the rights of Roman citizenship for its inhabitants. The British upper classes began to imitate Roman ways and even to build crude imitations of the Roman stone villa.

When Boadicea led the Iceni in revolt in AD 60 and sacked Verulamium, Colchester and London, the loss of life in these three cities was estimated by a Roman historian, possibly with some exaggeration, at 70,000. This revolt was the most serious opposition that the Romans encountered in Southern Britain, and there is no doubt that the ease with which the country was conquered was mainly due to the economic penetration of the preceding century and the consequent disintegration of the Celtic tribal organisation.

The Roman occupation of Britain lasted nearly 400 years, and sets the historian two important and closely related problems: how thorough was the process of Romanisation? And how enduring were its results?

Roman Britain divided itself into two parts: the civil or lowland district and the upland or military. Wales and the whole area North and West of the Peak District up to the Roman wall which ran from the mouth of the Tyne to Carlisle composed the latter. North of the wall the occupation was never more than occasional and haphazard. About the



character of the occupation of these military districts there can be no doubt. A network of roads, strung with military blockhouses, covered the whole area. North of York and West of Chester and Caerleon there are no civil towns of any importance. Three legions were stationed here: one at York, one at Chester and one at Caerleon. The wall was heavily garrisoned by auxiliary troops. In all a permanent garrison of some 40,000 men was maintained in the province.

The native population of the military districts were little affected by the occupation except perhaps along the Wall and around the main stations. They revolted frequently till about AD 200, and there is no reason to suppose that their economic or tribal organisation was seriously interfered with, since it reappears intact centuries later in the earliest Welsh laws. The whole area was poor, bleak and hilly, and, except for some minerals that were worked in Wales, it had little to attract the greed of the conquerors.

In the civil districts the situation was different. Britain was valued largely as a producer of grain, and annual shipments were made to Gaul until about AD 360, when their sudden ceasing is one of the most ominous signs of the decay of Roman power.

Scores of towns grew up along the Roman roads. Five of these ranked as municipia: Verulamium, Colchester, York, Lincoln and Gloucester. London, which for some obscure reason never acquired municipal rank was larger than any of these and became the most important trading centre in Northern Europe. Between the towns were the villas, country houses of the Roman or British magnates. These villas were not mere pleasure resorts, but the centres of agricultural estates. The British upper classes became completely Romanised and were transformed from Celtic tribal chiefs into Roman landowners and officials.

So much is clear: what is and must be uncertain is how far Roman customs and the Latin language and the Roman mode of production affected the mass of the people outside the towns. Roman agriculture was based on the large estate, and this was cultivated largely by semi-servile *coloni* who were allowed to cultivate patches of land in return for fixed rents or services. This system became common at the end of the Roman period when depopulation and the inability to open up any new



sources for the supply of slaves produced acute labour problems. Almost certainly it was common in Britain and was found alongside of Celtic tribal agriculture even in the most settled regions.

During the Roman occupation large forest areas were opened up. Along the rivers and roads, and on the edges of the forest belts, clearings were made, and the demand for fuel to supply the elaborate central heating apparatus of the villas must have been a powerful factor in this process. We must conclude that the energy and method of the Romans radically transformed the whole of the civil districts and that the lives of all the people were moulded towards the Roman pattern. There is not the slightest evidence that any national feeling existed or that the inhabitants thought of themselves as Britons as opposed to Roman provincials.

Yet the permanent effects of Roman rule were astonishingly meagre. The roads remained. The towns remained but were laid waste and there is no certain evidence that any Roman town was continuously inhabited after the Anglo-Saxon inroads. It is possible that the economic structure of the villa contributed something to the makeup of the English township and the feudal manor. And, finally, Christianity, introduced by the legions, remained the religion of those parts of Britain which escaped the English conquest, penetrated thence to Ireland<sup>1</sup> where it acquired a curiously tribal character and ultimately played a big part in moulding the cultural development of the Anglian kingdom of Northumbria.

#### **4 The Roman Twilight**

The destruction of the Roman empire was due to a unique combination of internal and external causes, some of the former especially being very deep and rooted and slow in taking effect. Even at the height of its power, the Empire was suffering from profound maladies and it was when the

<sup>1</sup> But an independent, and possibly earlier, group of missionaries came into Ireland from Spain.

measures which served to alleviate these could no longer be applied that a steady process of disintegration set in.

Italy was originally a land of small peasant cultivators, and her towns no more than trading centres supplying their needs. From the time of the wars between Rome and Carthage (264-200 BC) these peasant holdings were destroyed and replaced by huge farms worked by slave gangs. The Italian peasant was driven from the land, just as the English peasant was in the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. But while in England the destruction of peasant agriculture was accompanied by the growth of capitalist industry in the towns this was not the case in Italy. Industry remained at a low level of development and was carried on almost entirely by slave labour. The result was the rapid development of merchant and usurer's capital without a corresponding industrial basis. Consequently, and especially in Rome itself, there came into being a huge parasitical proletariat, with citizen rights but no settled means of livelihood. The wholesale corruption of this mob by the merchants and tax farmers who replaced the old aristocracy at the close of the republic, involved a continuous forward movement so as to provide the series of provinces from whose plunder alone both proletariat and capitalists could exist.

These provinces were also needed to provide reinforcements for the slave army on which the whole Roman economy depended. Slave production is always wasteful and the Roman slave army always failed to reproduce itself, this failure producing a recurrent depopulation both in the provinces and at the centre. When the conquests reached the point at which it was a military impossibility to hold and assimilate fresh territories, decline was inevitable, though it was in part and for a time masked by improved methods of exploitation such as the substitution of a type of serfdom for the earlier chattel slavery. The political organisation of the Roman empire in the form of a military dictatorship added to these weaknesses by the constant strife between rival provincial generals attempting to use their legions to secure the Imperial crown. Britain, as an outlying and isolated province, suffered especially from this, being periodically drained of man power to support the claims of such adventurers as Maximus (383) and Constantine (407).

For long the Empire persisted rather because of the absence

of any outside force powerful enough to attack it than from its own strength. In the fourth century AD a series of westward migratory movements across the steppes of Asia and Europe forced the German tribes nearest to the Roman frontiers into motion. The whole sequence is obscure but at its heart we can trace the westward migration of the Huns, a Mongol tribe from Central Asia, probably the result of climatic changes turning their grazing lands into desert. At first these German tribes were allowed and even encouraged to enter the Empire, where they were absorbed and partially Romanised. Gradually, as the pressure increased, the hold of the central government on outlying provinces was relinquished and one by one they were overrun by barbarian tribes who set up independent kingdoms of varying character – some largely Roman in culture and language, others almost wholly barbarian.

Britain, as the most remote and among the most exposed of the provinces, was among the earliest to fall away and lost most completely its Roman character.

The first attacks came not from German tribes across the North Sea but from the unconquered Goidelic Celts of Scotland and Ireland. This is in itself a sign of Roman decline, since in earlier times such attackers had been beaten off without much difficulty. After a period of peace from 250 to 350, a series of inroads swept Britain right up to the walls of London. The villas were burnt and pillaged, and, after about 360, were rarely rebuilt. The walled towns held out longer, but no coins later than 420 are found, for example, in Silchester, where a rude stone found in the forum bearing an Ogham inscription shows that Celtic tribalism was reasserting itself even before the Anglo-Saxon invasions.

Even after the first invasions there was a partial recovery but in 407 two events ended the long period of Roman occupation. One was the departure of Constantine, with the bulk of the troops stationed in Britain, in an attempt to secure the Imperial purple. The other was the crossing of the Rhine into Gaul of a host of German tribesmen which cut Britain off from the Roman world and prevented the return or replacement of the departed legions.

The year 407 is usually said to mark the 'departure of the Romans', and, in a sense, this is so. But there was no deliberate plan of abandonment. Constantine only intended to add new

provinces to the one he already held, and the failure of his legions to return may be almost described as accidental. Yet it was at this date that the regular arrival of new imperial governors and officials ceased. The people of South and East Britain, with their tribal organisation destroyed and their new civilisation already seriously weakened, were left to improvise their own government and defence against their never conquered kinsmen of the more remote parts of the islands.

When a new enemy, the Anglian and Saxon tribes from the German coast who had already made themselves feared as daring raiders, appeared about 450 as intending conquerors and settlers they found much of the work of the Romans undone already. The richest and most civilised part of the island, in which their landings were made, had been laid waste before their arrival. Centralised government had disappeared and in its place was a welter of petty principalities under the control of local landlords or magnates at the head of armed bands that were almost as ruinous to the people as the enemies from whom they claimed to provide protection. It was largely for this reason that the traces of Roman rule in Britain are so few and the English conquest so complete.

## II THE GROWTH OF FEUDALISM

### 1 ~~The English Conquest~~

The period between the year 407 when Constantine led away the legions and 597 when Augustine landed in Kent, bringing not only Christianity, but also renewed contact with the mainstream of European events, is an almost complete blank. No written records survive except the melancholy treatise of the monk Gildas 'concerning the ruin of Britain', and though he wrote as early as 560 Gildas is very remotely concerned with history. The traditions of the invaders themselves, committed to writing much later by Bede (about 731) and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (begun shortly before 900), are confused, scanty and frequently misleading. Even the evidence of archaeology is slight, for the low level of civilisation of the invaders had left us few traces of their early settlements except the meagre contents of their burial places. Yet it is from this evidence, supplemented by the written records and a critical use of historical geography, that a provisional account of the course and character of the invasions must be drawn together.

The bulk of the invaders came from among the most backward and primitive of the German tribes, living on the coast around the mouth of the Elbe and in the south of Denmark. These tribes, the Angles and Saxons, were closely akin in speech and customs, so that it is even doubtful if any real distinction can be drawn between them. The third group of invaders, called traditionally Jutes, were probably a Frankish tribe from the lower Rhineland. It was among these tribes that the Romans were accustomed to enlist auxiliary troops in the last days of the Empire, and the burial places of Kent and the Isle of Wight, where the Jutes settled, give evidence of a people at a higher cultural level than the other invaders, and suggest some contact, if only at second hand, with Roman civilisation.

There is thus every reason to accept the tradition that the Jutes were invited to enter the country as allies by a British chief and afterwards ousted their hosts. It is in Kent alone that faint signs of continuity with the settlements and agriculture of the Romans can be discerned. Kent has, indeed, a social history quite different from that of the rest of England, passing directly from small scale individual peasant agriculture to capitalist agriculture.

In general the social organisation of the invaders was still tribal, resembling that of the Celts as described in the first chapter. It will be convenient henceforth to give to the invaders as a whole the name English, though, of course, the word does not come into use for some centuries. The English were an agricultural rather than a pastoral people, and even before they entered Britain their tribal organisation was rapidly disintegrating. Vast migratory movements were sweeping over Europe, scattering and mixing together the settlements of kindred. By the fourth century the institution of kingship was well established in Germany. There was emerging also a class of professional warriors, distinct from and ranking higher than the peasants, who were becoming increasingly content to till the soil as long as they were allowed to do so in peace. The kinship group was losing its importance, on the one side to the war band collected round a chief and bound to him by a personal tie, and on the other to the purely local unit of the village.

The rate of disintegration was immensely increased by the invasions themselves. The first raids on the coast of Britain were probably the work of small war bands, and their effect would be to increase the wealth and prestige of the warrior class as compared with the homekeeping cultivator. In the fifth century the raids were replaced by something approaching national migrations. While in some cases small independent settlements may have been made along the coast it is now believed that the main invasion was the work of one or possibly two great war hosts like that of the Danes which came near to conquering England in 871. Such a host would be composed of both warriors and cultivators, and, probably, a considerable number of women and children, as the Danish host often was. More cultivators and their families probably followed, but in any case the spear-head of the invasion was formed by the warriors with their superior equipment and training.

The settlements formed after the invasion represent in their variety the mixed and transitional character of the host. Here a kinship group would settle and divide the land in a rough equality. In another place a warrior would settle with a group of dependents, in a third a number of Britons might survive and be forced into slavery (often those who survived were precisely those who were already slaves). The main result of the invasion, with its involved movements and incessant warfare, was to mix and remix conqueror and conquered in an infinite variety of combinations and to strengthen the military organisation just as it weakened that of kinship. The same causes greatly increased the authority of the kings, and at the close of the period they emerge with a claim, shadowy as yet and much hedged about with the restrictions of folkright, to be sole and ultimate owners of the land.

The details of the conquest are now hopelessly lost, yet it is possible to reconstruct the main outlines and even to give a few approximate dates. The Jutes have already been mentioned. The traditional and probably correct date of their advent is about 450. Of the Angles nothing is known for certain till we find them in possession of the North-east coast and much of the Midlands by the end of the century. We can guess that the point of arrival was probably Humber mouth, and that the Trent and Ouse were their pathways into the interior.

Somewhere between these dates the host of the Saxons entered the country by way of the Wash. Sailing up the Great Ouse in their long, shallow-draught boats they passed through the Fen Country and disembarked somewhere near Cambridge. Thence they moved South-west along the Icknield Way and burst into the East Midlands and the Thames Valley. Gildas, in words that seem to choke with horror, describes the devastation that followed. For a number of years the country was harried from end to end. Whatever had survived of Roman civilisation was blotted out, and the Britons were killed, enslaved or driven into the west.

About 500 there was a pause, possibly when the cultivators began to parcel out the land and leave the warriors to carry on the fighting alone. Gildas speaks of a certain Ambrosius Aurelianus, the one reasonably probable name in a period of extraordinary obscurity, who rallied the scattered Britons and led them to success in a series of encounters. The last of these,

Mount Badon, Gildas places in the year of his own birth, probably about 516. At the same or a slightly later period, there was a mass migration into Armorica on such a scale as to give that country its present name of Brittany and the Celtic character that it has retained to this day.

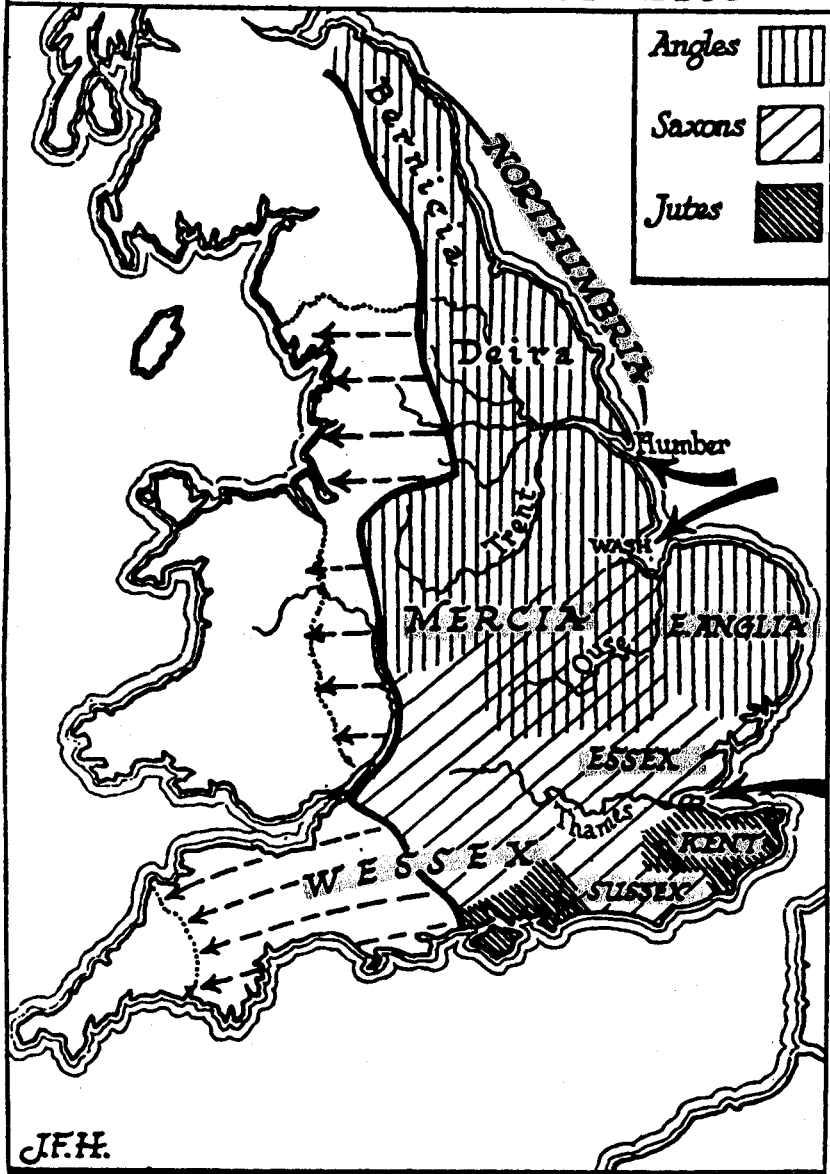
Later in the sixth century the advance of the English was resumed. A victory at Deorham in Gloucestershire brought the Saxons to the Bristol Channel. In 613 a battle at Chester gave the Mercians access to the Irish Sea. The Britons were now cut off into three sections, penned into the mountain regions of Devon and Cornwall (West Wales), Wales proper and Cumberland (Strathclyde). There their reduction was only a matter of time, though Wales held out till well into the Middle Ages.

By this time the English had settled down into a number of small kingdoms whose boundaries advanced and receded constantly with the fortunes of the never ending wars. These wars, as no doubt the initial invasion, were greatly facilitated by the still undestroyed network of Roman roads. Some of these kingdoms survive in the names of modern English shires; others vanished so utterly that we hardly know their names. By the end of the sixth century, seven emerge. In the North, Northumbria stretched from the Forth to the Humber. Its two parts, Deira corresponding to Yorkshire and Bernicia lying between Tees and Forth, appear at times as separate kingdoms. East Anglia covered Norfolk, Suffolk and part of Cambridgeshire. Essex, Kent and Sussex correspond roughly to the modern counties bearing the same names. Wessex lay south of the Thames and west of Sussex with a western frontier being pushed slowly into Somerset. Mercia occupied most of the Midland shires, but the Cotswold region was for long debatable ground between Mercia and Wessex.

The relation of the English to the conquered native population has been a favourite subject for dispute among historians. It has been maintained, on the one hand, that the Britons were all but exterminated, and on the other that a quite small body of conquering English settled among masses of natives. No finality has ever been reached, but certain pointers may be noted. First, there was a catastrophic fall in the total population. The towns were destroyed without exception and long remained uninhabited. London may be a partial exception, for though there is no evidence that it was



# The SAXON INVADERS



Extent of Anglo-Saxon conquest and occupation at the end of the sixth century; the smaller arrows show the further advance westwards by the eighth century.

continuously occupied its position at the heart of the system of roads made it the inevitable focus for trade the moment it began again, and it reappears early as a place of some importance. Apart from the destruction of the towns, the area of cultivation was greatly diminished. Most of the forest land cleared by the Romans was abandoned, and the early English settlements are strung along the rivers and cluster in one or two specially favoured areas like Kent and the Thames Valley. It is reasonable to suppose that the displacement of the British rural population either by slaughter or migration must have been correspondingly great.

Secondly, the evidence of language is opposed to the view that the invaders settled down as a small minority. In Gaul, where the Franks were in such a position, it was the language of the conquered which prevailed. In England, Celtic words and place names are few except in the West. The analogy of the Danish invasions shows that it is possible for invaders from overseas to settle in such numbers as to form their own self-contained communities. Yet there is equally no reason to suppose that the Britons were wiped out even in the East where the English settled in the greatest numbers. Early English laws make provision for Welshmen living alongside their conquerors quite as a matter of course. And in Suffolk today, after two thousand years and Roman, English, Danish and Norman invasions, the shepherd calling to his sheep still uses the Welsh word for 'Come here'. Many of the English brought their womenfolk, but these were certainly far fewer than the men and much intermarriage must have taken place from the start.

Perhaps it is most reasonable to conclude that in the East, at any rate, the bulk of the population was English, and that such Britons as survived in these parts were enslaved. The further west we go the greater becomes the proportion of Britons in the population. Wessex law even allowed for the existence of Welsh landowners who have their own place in society and a *wergild*<sup>1</sup> half that of their English counterparts. For the most part, however, the Britons who survived would be those of the lower classes, and villagers rather than town dwellers. This was just the section who were the least Romanised and between whom and the English the narrowest cultural gap existed.

<sup>1</sup> See page 6.

## 2 The Township

From the earliest times the settlements of the English were marked by a striking duality, the outcome of their transitional position between tribal and what we must begin to call feudal organisation. On the one hand we have the hide, a form characteristic of the tribe, on the other the township, a purely local entity with no necessary connection with kinship. It is the growth and direction of growth of the township, and of social classes within it, that forms the internal history of the period between the English and Norman conquests.

Everywhere in England, except in Kent, the hide was, as the *gwely* had been before it, the holding of a normal peasant family. Roughly it may be taken as representing the amount of land that could be kept in cultivation by an eight-ox plough. It is not, however, easy to discover the actual number of acres which the unit of the hide might contain. In Eastern England a hide of 120 acres seems to have been usual, but in other areas it may have contained as few as 40. But while the *gwely* was an economic as well as a social unit, the economic unit among the English was not the hide but the township. The normal township was a largish, compact village, markedly different from the hamlets of the Celts which often contained only one family or a few closely related families. The hamlet often coincided with the *gwely*, which in any case was a self-contained whole, complete within its own boundaries. The hide was scattered in single acre strips over the entire extent of the township's common fields.

These fields, two or three in number, were worked in strict rotation. If there were three, one was sown in the autumn with wheat, rye and winter barley, one with oats, beans, peas or spring barley in the spring, while the third was left fallow. Where the two-field system prevailed one field was sown and the other left fallow. The fields were unfenced, and the strips divided only by narrow balks of turf left unploughed. After harvest the whole extent of the fields became common grazing ground for the sheep and cattle of the township. Besides his 120 strips scattered patchwork fashion over the common fields, the holder of a hide had certain customary rights over the common meadows and the township's waste. The latter was usually extensive, a township being often no more than a

clearing in the middle of a large tract of wood or heath land. It was valued chiefly for its timber and the beechmast and acorns on which the pigs fed. So that a hide was really a holding comprising as much land as one plough could work, plus certain well defined rights over the common meadow and waste of the township.

From the start it was treated less as the holding of a family than as the holding of the head of a family. It was not yet private property, it could not be sold and its use was hedged about with all sorts of customary restrictions, yet the germ of private property in land lay within it already. We have seen how the invasions helped to strengthen the military as opposed to the tribal organisation, and the hide was from the start a military holding, carrying an obligation to put one fully armed man into the fyrd in time of war. Its holder was still in theory a free warrior. But when wars were frequent the hide was not a sufficient holding to support a warrior, and alongside the ceorl, holder of a hide, we find the thane, the descendant of the professional war man, who has been granted by the king or who has carved out for himself a much larger holding, usually not less than five hides (600 acres) and often much more. The ceorl might still serve in the fyrd in a special crisis but in ordinary times the fighting was done by the thane and his personal followers. Here begins the rough division of labour, between the man who fights in the wars and the man who toils in the fields, that lies at the roots of the feudal system.

Very soon the thane gained an ascendancy over his weaker neighbours. Times were unsettled, the central authority of the state in its infancy, and the cultivator would undertake to perform services or pay rent in produce as a return for the protection of the thane and his band. Within the ranks of the ceorls a rapid social differentiation set in. Some prospered and became thanes, more declined and the normal holding of a free man grew smaller. The hide, being based on the eight-ox plough, was easily divisible up to a point, that is, into not more than eight portions. The common holding of a peasant cultivator in later Saxon times was not the hide but the virgate or two-ox share (30 acres) or the bovaté or one-ox share (15 acres). Besides this a numerous class sprang up with much smaller holdings, ranging from two to five acres. These were not and could not be part of the common fields, since they were

too small to support an ox to share in the communal ploughing. They were often carved out of the waste, and cultivated with the spade or a light plough. Their holders, whom we shall meet in Domesday Book under the names of bordars and cotters, were often the village craftsmen, smiths, wheelwrights and the like, or pieced out a living by working for wages on the increasingly extensive domain lands of the thanes. It is among them that we have to look for the ancestors of the modern proletariat.

In time the hide ceased altogether to be a real division of land, and in the centuries before the Norman Conquest it appears mainly as a term used for purposes of taxation and administration. In the same way the clan division, for which we have fragmentary evidence, fades into the background and after about 900 is replaced by the hundred, which first appears in Wessex in the time of Alfred and was extended by his successors over the whole country.

As early, perhaps, as 600, the thane was well on the way towards becoming a feudal lord, the ceorl well on the way to becoming a serf, private property in land was beginning to take shape and well-defined social classes were everywhere arising. At the same time the state, growing out of the military conquest and division of the country and the permanent importance of the king as war leader in a period when war was the normal state of affairs, was superseding the looser tribal organisation that had served the English in their German homeland. Such a process, marked by the acquisition of special powers by a minority and at the expense of the remainder of the people, is in fact the only way in which society can advance beyond the tribal stage and must, for all its harshness, be regarded as essentially progressive. All these tendencies were accelerated and given a precise legal form by the introduction of Christianity. Christianity added also to the existing division of labour between fighter and cultivator a third specialised activity, that of the preacher and man of learning.

### **3 Christianity**

Though the Welsh held tenaciously to the Christianity that they had learned during Roman occupation, it was not from Wales that the conversion of the English came. The mutual hatred

between conquerors and conquered was too bitter to allow of normal intercourse, and the Welsh attitude was that the English were no more than a punishment sent upon them by God on account of their sins. It was from Rome, and a little later from Ireland by way of Iona, that Christianity reached England. The seventh century is taken up with this conversion, with the clash between the rival sects and with the final triumph of the Roman type of Christianity.

Augustine, who landed in Kent in 597, was sent by Pope Gregory the Great under whom a marked religious revival, accompanied by much missionary enthusiasm, was taking place. He found Ethelbert of Kent married to a Christian wife and more than half ready to accept baptism. The conversion of Kent was followed by that of Essex and East Anglia. In 625 Edwin of Northumbria married a Kentish princess and northward with her journeyed Paulinus the first Bishop of York. More speedy conversions were recorded, and after the baptism of Edwin we read that Paulinus spent twenty-six consecutive days immersing converts in the River Glen. Similar mass rites followed in the Swale and Trent.

The new religion had a resounding but hollow victory. It made little real impression on the masses and when Edwin was defeated and killed at Heathfield by the Mercian king Penda in 633, the reversion of Northumbria was even more rapid than its conversion had been. Religion was still and for long a matter upon which kings decided from policy or conviction and the people followed.

The next year a new king, Oswald, was crowned in Northumbria. He had been brought up by the Irish monks of Iona, and with him came Aidan who founded the great monastery of Lindisfarne, the real cradle of Christianity in Northern England, and set out in turn upon the task of converting the Northumbrians. The Celtic type of Christianity with its simple piety, its absence of centralisation struck home much more deeply to the rough farmer-soldiers of the North. A Northumbrian poet of the next century writes of Christ as:

The young hero  
That was God Almighty,  
Strong and brave,

and early Northumbrian Christianity was a unique blend of the heroic paganism of the past with the milder but still heroic faith of the Irish Christians. The result was very different from the religion of fear and organisation which had come from Rome and continued to make slow headway in the South of England. When Oswald was defeated and killed by Penda in 642 Northumbria remained Christian and the conversion of Mercia followed within twenty years. Meanwhile Wessex also was slowly adopting the new faith, and only Sussex, isolated behind the Romney marshes and the vast forest of the Andredesweald, remained heathen.

In 664 Roman and Celtic Christians met at Whitby to decide their points of difference. Much more was involved than the trivialities that appeared on the surface: issues such as the date of keeping Easter and the exact shape of the priestly tonsure. Celtic Christianity as it developed in unconquered Ireland had adapted itself to the tribal mould. Its organisation took the form of monasteries that were no more than groups of hermits living together in a cluster of huts. It held little land, and that still remained the property of the group as a whole. It never had any local or parish organisation, and its bishops were only wandering missionaries with the vaguest supremacy over their fellows.

Roman Christianity inherited all that remained of Roman discipline and centralisation, Roman law with its precise definition of property and its recognition of slavery, and a carefully graded ecclesiastical hierarchy. Further, it was already committed to an elaborate territorial organisation of bishoprics and parishes. The nearest Roman Christian country, and the one with the greatest influence over England, was France, and it was here that feudalism had made its greatest advances. The victory of Rome at the Synod of Whitby was therefore a victory for feudalism and all that feudalism involved.

All the qualities, good and bad, of Roman Christianity are summed up in Wilfred, who first came to the front at Whitby and was afterwards Archbishop of York. A bustling, diplomatic man, jealous of the authority of his church and of his own authority because he was its representative, he is the first of the great clerical statesmen who loom so large for centuries to come. He intrigued incessantly, built churches, lectured kings and accumulated the great treasure that he commanded to be

laid out before him in his deathbed. Nothing could be more unlike the ascetic Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, living for weeks together on a handful of raw onions or standing all day up to his neck in sea water to pray, but it was Wilfred's religion and not Cuthbert's to which the future belonged.

Because the priests of the new religion were the only literate class they became a permanent bureaucracy, easily imposing their ideas upon the slower-witted kings and thanes. In no way was this more so than in the matter of property. Accustomed to written charter and to testament by will, they soon began to undermine the already weakened communal rights. We can trace the process in the institution of bookland growing up alongside of folkland. The latter, as its name implies, is land held under customary or folk rights. Even though not common property, no individual could claim absolute ownership of it, and only had possession within the framework of the township. Bookland was land granted to a lord by book or charter. It strengthened his position in two ways: economically because he could have for himself various services which folkland (that is to say, all other land) owed to the king; legally, because he acquired an unusually firm claim to the land, only challengeable in the royal court or 'Witan'. On the other hand, the rights of the kin were still considerable. A law of Alfred says that bookland must not pass outside the kindred of the inheritor if this was forbidden by those 'who at first acquired it' and 'those who gave it to him'. The first charters were made out in favour of church bodies, but once their advantages were realised they were increasingly sought after and obtained by the magnates.

All kinds of devices, from the invocation of the terrors of hell to plain forgery, were adopted by the church to secure land. With each stage in the increase in the landed endowments of the church, went a consolidation of the growing power of the great landowners and of the domination which they exercised over the machinery of the state. The bishop and his retainers, or a monastic body, represented a large group of men who must be maintained in that state to which it had pleased God to call them, and it was natural and inevitable that they should turn to the peasantry and organise them on manorial lines to achieve this end. In this matter the lay landlord was by no means slow to follow and the endowment of the church went hand in hand with the subjection of the cultivator.



On the other hand in its creation of a literate class, its encouragement of trade and closer contact with Europe, and, internally, by the consolidating and centralising tendency of an institution covering the whole country, the church was a strong progressive force. The two centuries between the adoption of Christianity and the coming of the Northmen, were a time of slow but solid material advance. Once more stone begins to be used for building, and if this stone was obtained mainly from the ruinous towns and villas of Roman times, and even from the roads, this was mainly because of the poverty of the more advanced parts of England in suitable building stone. Wilfred's great church at Hexham, for example, was constructed of stone taken from the Roman wall. The houses of the laity, even of thanes and kings, were still of timber. If rough, these houses were often spacious and well proportioned, and if they were poor as compared with the castles and manors of the upper classes after the Norman conquest the house of the Saxon peasant was probably far superior to the mud and wattle hut of the feudal serf built in a time when timber was growing less plentiful. Metal working and the illumination of manuscripts reached a high level, and a remarkable standard of learning was to be found in the best of the monasteries, especially in those of Northumbria. It was in one of these, Jarrow, that Bede, the most learned man in the Europe of his day, and the first and one of the greatest of English historians, lived and worked.

The political history of the age is that of a series of struggles in which first Kent, then Northumbria and Mercia and finally Wessex took the lead. The fluctuations of these struggles depended in great part upon the individual capacity of the kings. Ethelbert of Kent, Edwin and Oswy of Northumbria, Penda and Offa of Mercia and Egbert of Wessex all had a big share in the temporary success of their kingdoms. Yet we can trace, if only faintly, general causes at work.

Kent's early supremacy was due to the initial cultural superiority of its Frankish invaders and its continuous contact with Europe. Its decline was due to its small area and to its failure to secure control of London and the lower Thames Valley. Northumbria's period of greatness coincides with its permeation by the advanced culture introduced by the Celtic church, and can also perhaps be connected with the warlike

character retained by its people on the bleak Northern moors. Its decline was the result of a too ambitious attempt to expand simultaneously north into Scotland and south into Mercia. It suffered also from the imperfect fusion of its two constituent parts, Deira and Bernicia, and from their internal feuds.

The reasons for the rise of Mercia are more obscure, but possibly the growth of a large and prosperous population in the rich Midland plains and the experience of war gained against the Welsh were the most important. Its weakness was the absence of good natural frontiers which laid it open to attack from all sides and exposed it to constant warfare. By contrast, Wessex was a country with good frontiers, and a hinterland in the South-west large enough to allow room for expansion but not enough to be a menace. It had considerable areas of fertile land, and, by the end of the eighth century, was beginning to establish valuable contracts with the Frankish empire of Charlemagne, just rising to its full power across the Channel.

Soon after 800 Wessex under Egbert began to draw away from its rivals, but the issue was still in doubt when the invasions of the Northmen gave a new turn to events. The full force of these invasions fell first upon Mercia and Northumbria, which were soon overrun, leaving Wessex free from its ancient rivals but face to face with a new and more formidable enemy.

#### **4 The Northmen**

In the year 793, on June the 18th, says the *Chronicle*, 'the heathen men miserably destroyed God's church at Lindisfarne with rapine and slaughter.' This brief entry opens a record of calamity and battle lasting nearly 300 years, in the course of which half England was overrun and Scandinavian ways and people had set an indelible mark upon the land.

The invaders are described indifferently as Danes or Northmen, and the two Scandinavian peoples mainly concerned are so closely akin, and their movements so interconnected that it is not always possible to be sure with which we are dealing. Their host was, indeed, often of a composite character, but in the main the Danes were the invaders of England and the Norwegians of Ireland and

Scotland. These peoples, though in some ways more barbaric than the English, had developed a specialised skill that made them most dangerous enemies.

The key to their development is the great iron axe, which appears in their burial places about 600. With this they were able to clear the forests of Denmark, and to spread rapidly up the coast of Norway on the narrow strip of lowland between sea and mountain. By 700 these areas, poor and constricted at best, held almost as many people as they could support. But the axe not only made it possible for the Northmen to clear the forests, it helped them to build larger and more seaworthy ships than the North had yet seen. In these they soon made considerable voyages, and the next stage was the colonisation of the uninhabited Shetland and Faroe Islands. The first settlers were peaceful peasants, but at the end of the eighth century the islands began to be used as a base for piracy.

It was in one of these pirate raids that Lindisfarne was sacked, but so far as England was concerned this was an isolated episode. The movements of the Northmen are only obscure till the simple principle on which they worked is grasped. Though prepared to fight, they were not looking for fights but for loot, and their raids were always directed to that point where the greatest quantity of booty could be had with the least possibility of resistance. In 800 this point was Ireland, which had escaped both Roman and English invasions and where there was a civilisation as brilliant and rich and almost as defenceless as that of the Incas of Peru in the time of Pizzaro. It must be remembered that in early times Ireland was the chief gold-producing country of Western Europe. Though internal tribal wars were frequent, the courteous and convention-ridden Irish warriors were no match for the ferocity and cunning of the Northmen.

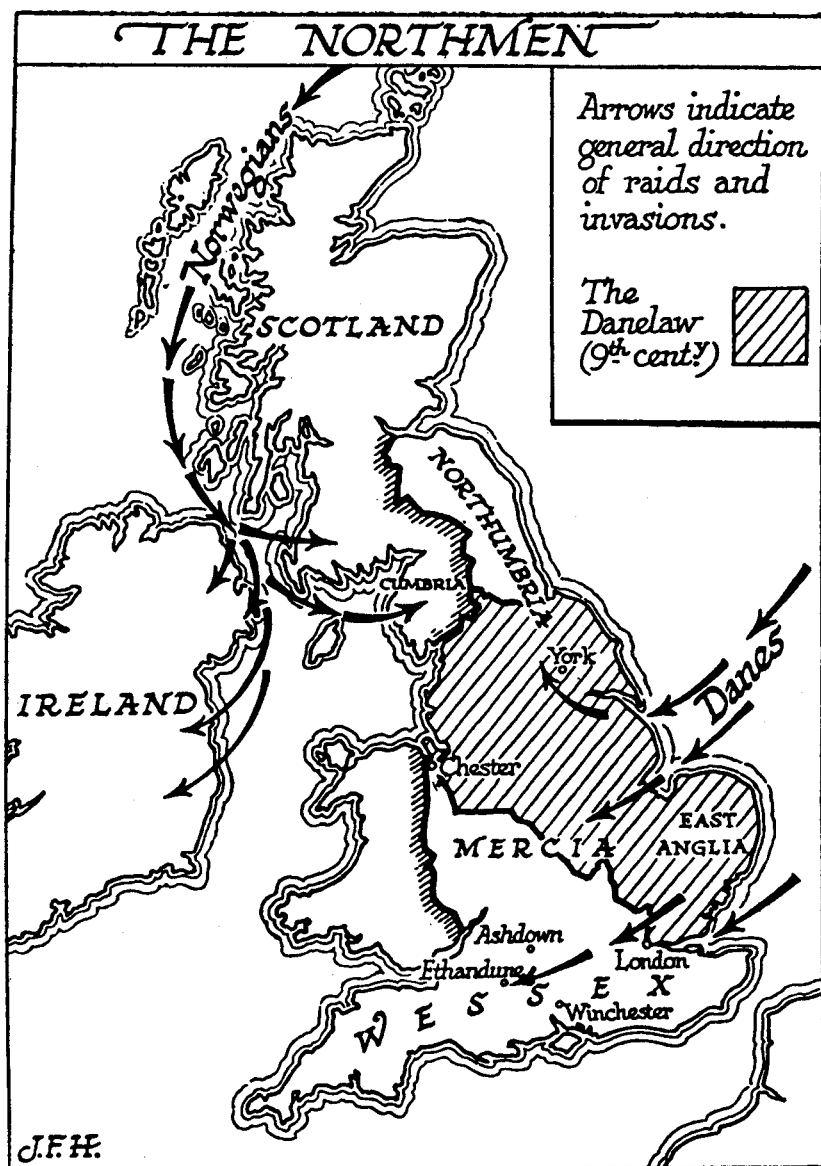
The first years of the ninth century were occupied with the pillage of Ireland. When that country had been so stripped as to cease to yield the raiders a satisfactory return for their labour, the long ships were pointed south towards the fragments of Charlemagne's great but lumbering empire, now falling into hopeless disorder. Paris was sacked and vast tracts of France were overrun. Even more ambitious voyages were made, and in the course of one of these Rome itself was besieged in 846.

Before this date England began to occupy the attention of the Danish fleets. In 838 a large body of Danes was routed by Egbert, but in spite of defeats each year saw fresh hordes arrive. In 842 London was burned. In the winter of 850-1 the raiders wintered in Thanet instead of going home as they had previously done. From this time the raids became bolder, till, in 866, a great war host landed in a real attempt at conquest and settlement. From the military point of view they had almost everything on their side. Iron had always been plentiful in Scandinavia, where the Swedish deposits have been worked from prehistoric times. The plunder of the previous generations gave the Northmen the means of equipping themselves with the best weapons and armour then available. They carried axes and long swords, wore iron helmets and shields, and among the pirates and professional soldiers chain armour was not uncommon.

They had also developed new methods of war. They learned to move fast at sea in their long, many-oared ships carrying up to 100 men apiece, and on land by rounding up all the horses wherever they touched and turning themselves into the first mounted infantry. In battle they learnt to combine the cohesion of the boat's crew with the flexibility of the barbarian horde. They learned also to build strong, stockaded forts, and when defeated retired behind these and defied pursuit.

The English were, in comparison, poorly armed, the mass of the fyrd having only spears and leather coats. Even the smaller body of thanes were beginning to degenerate into landowners and were not always reliable for a long campaign, while the slow moving fyrd was of little use for more than a single battle. Until Alfred built his fleet the advantage of surprise was always with the invaders. The military genius of Alfred, his capacity for learning from the enemy and then going one better, was one of the main reasons for the defeat of the Danes. The other was the undeveloped social structure of the Scandinavian peoples which made them incapable of a prolonged effort on the grand scale. The host always tended to split up into fragments when faced with unexpectedly stout resistance, each minor leader taking his men off elsewhere to look for easier game.

Yet the host that landed in East Anglia in the spring of 866 seemed formidable enough. In the next year it rode north,



crushed the Northumbrians in a great battle under the walls of York, and spent the next three years plundering and subduing Mercia and East Anglia where little resistance was encountered. Early in 871, known for long after as 'the year of battles', the Danes moved down the Icknield Way, as the Saxons had done four centuries before, and made a fortified camp at Reading, strategically an excellent base for an attack on Wessex. Beaten at Ashdown, their fort saved them from destruction and eight battles that followed were indecisive. At the end of the year the host made a truce with Alfred who had succeeded his brother as king in the midst of the battles. During the next four years the invasion passes through a new phase during which the Danes set up independent kingdoms in Northumbria and East Anglia and divided the land among themselves.

In 876 the attack on Wessex was renewed with reinforcements from overseas, and after two years of desperate fighting Alfred was surprised at Chippenham and had to take refuge in the Somerset marshes. Emerging suddenly he won a decisive victory at Ethandune and forced the Danes to make peace. From this time England was divided into roughly equal halves, the Danelaw lying north and east and Saxon England lying south and west of a line running up the River Lea to its source and along Watling Street to Chester. A renewed attempt at conquest fifteen years later was defeated more easily, and from this time the Northmen turned once more to the less stoutly defended lands of Northern France, where, in the first years of the next century, Rollo carved out the principality of Normandy.

The cultural and material havoc of these invasions can hardly be overestimated. 'So great was the decay of learning among Englishmen,' Alfred lamented,

that there were very few on this side Humber and I ween not many north of it who could understand the ritual and translate a letter from Latin into English. No, I cannot remember one such, south of the Thames, when I came to the throne.

A similar picture in another field is given in Alfred's laws, where the scale of payments for various offences (*wergild*) is on the average only half that of Ethelbert's laws of two centuries earlier, a clear sign of a land stripped of its moveable wealth. It

is his successful efforts to arrest this decay even more than his military ability that mark Alfred as one of the greatest figures in English history.

His first task was to secure his kingdom against future invaders. To this end he had ships built superior to those of the Danes: 'full nigh twice as long as the others ... both swifter and steadier and also higher'. More permanently important was his system of fortified burghs, garrisoned by trained and permanent soldiers capable of resisting minor attacks or of forming a core round which the fyrd could rally. These burghs are the earliest English towns and play an important part in the transformation of the English from a purely rural folk. Alfred's defensive arrangements enabled the mass of the people to live and work in peace and the remarkable recuperative powers of all primitive agricultural peoples had full opportunity to come into play.

Alfred encouraged learned men to come from Europe and even from Wales and in middle age taught himself to read and write both in Latin and English, a feat that Charlemagne was never able to accomplish. He sought eagerly for the best knowledge that the age afforded and in a less illiterate time would probably have attained a really scientific outlook. Constantly in ill health, never long at peace, the extent of his work is remarkable, and its thoroughness is attested by the long period of peace which followed his death. Of his successors, Edward, Athelstan, Edmund and Edgar were all capable soldiers and administrators, and the period between 900 and 975 is marked by the reconquest of the Danelaw, which nevertheless kept its Scandinavian character while acknowledging the supremacy of the English kings. The two peoples were sufficiently alike in language and institutions to make tolerably good neighbours, and the tenth century saw the disappearance of many differences between them.

So far the purely destructive aspect of the Danish invasions had been stressed, but this is really only half the story. In some respects the Danes had a culture superior to that of the English. Their greater use of iron has been mentioned, and they were the introducers of the great axe into the country. We have seen that the early English settlements were restricted to narrow limits outside the dense forests that covered the richest agricultural land. When Domesday Book gives us a complete

picture of English rural life we find the whole country dotted with townships. Most existing villages can be traced back to that date. It is reasonable to deduce that it was the introduction of the Danish great axe that gave the decisive impetus to forest clearing and made possible the full exploitation of the richest agricultural areas of England.

Further, as compared with the stay-at-home Saxons, the Danes were trading and town-dwelling people. When they entered England they had already travelled far. Men who had sailed the Mediterranean and seen the great city of Byzantium had no room for the superstitious dread with which the English still regarded the Romans and all their works. The Danes were traders as well as pirates, and commerce was reckoned honourable among them. 'If a merchant thrived so that he fared thrice across the seas by his own means, then he was thenceforth of thane right worthy,' runs an early law,<sup>1</sup> reminding that classes among the Scandinavians as among the English were based rather upon wealth and social position than upon blood or inherited rights. The Danish invasions led everywhere to town building and increased trade, and by the time of the Norman Conquest both towns and trade had attained considerable dimensions.

## **5 The End of Saxon England**

Three generations after the death of Alfred a clearly marked degeneration of English culture and institutions set in. The now virtually complete break-up of the tribal structure had been accompanied by an advance towards feudalism, but English society seemed to be unable from its own momentum to pass beyond a certain point. It is possible that the halt was only temporary but speculation on this point is unprofitable since, in fact, two invasions, one by the Danes under Sweyn and Canute and later that of the Normans, cut short the time in which a recovery might have been made.

During the tenth century the consolidation of England into a single kingdom went hand in hand with the creation of an

<sup>1</sup> This was a Saxon law, but trade was even more highly regarded among the Northmen than among the Saxons.



organisation into shires, often centring round Alfred's burghs or those of the Danes. While the earlier and smaller kingdoms could be administered from a single centre, there was no machinery adequate to cover the whole country, and, though the shire reeve or sheriff was in theory responsible to the king for the administration of the shire, the actual supervision exercised from the centre was in practice slight. Above the sheriff was the ealdorman who controlled a group of shires, often corresponding roughly to one of the old kingdoms. While the sheriff remained an official and later became the main link in the state organisation, the ealdorman, like the count or duke of European countries, soon became a semi-independent territorial magnate. The powers of the ealdorman greatly increased during the short period of Canute's empire, when England was only a part of a much larger whole. This increase of power coincided with the adoption of the Danish title of earl.

In the sphere of justice, also, great strides were made in the direction of feudalism by way of the delegation of royal rights to powerful individuals. The old system of shire, hundred and township courts worked fairly well only so long as no landowner in the area was so powerful as to be able to oppose their decisions. With the advent of powerful semi-feudal lords the authority of the traditional courts was weakened, and they were supplemented and in part superseded by the granting to these same lords of the right to hold courts of their own. Such rights were eagerly sought for the income produced by fines. The new courts continued to employ the old methods of ordeal by fire or water alongside of the newer but still venerable method of compurgation or oath helping, whereby the accused brought into court a number of his neighbours, proportionate to his alleged offence, who were prepared to swear to his innocence. Private courts of justice, always among the most definite marks of feudalism, were well established in England by the time of the Norman Conquest.

The other thing which is characteristic of the manor, a servile peasantry, was also now the rule except in the Danelaw. The Danish invasions had indeed a curious dual result. In the Danelaw itself the enserfment of the cultivator was retarded while in the Saxon half of England it was accelerated. The evidence of the *Colloquies of Aelfric*, a series of dialogues written as a text-book for the boys in the monastic school at Winchester

some time before 1000, is striking with its assumption that the typical cultivator was unfree.

'What do you say, ploughman, how do you do your work?' asks the teacher.

'Oh, sir, I work very hard. I go out at dawn to drive the oxen to the field, and yoke them to the plough; however hard the winter I dare not stay at home for fear of my master; and having made the share and coulter fast to the plough, every day I have to plough an acre or more.'

'And what more do you do in the day?'

'A great deal more. I have to fill the oxen's bins and give them water and carry the dung outside.'

'Oh, it is hard work.'

'Yes, it is hard because I am not free.'

The terms freeman and serf are puzzling to the modern mind, since they are used in a peculiar sense in the feudal age. They can only be understood with reference to the holding of land. A man without land was neither free nor unfree, he did not count.<sup>1</sup> A freeman was one who held land on condition of military service, or of some other service reckoned honourable, or one who paid a money rent. The serf or villein was he who held land on condition of performing agricultural labour on his lord's land. He was bound to the soil, whereas the freeman could leave his land and go elsewhere or even in some case take his land, as the saying went, and commend himself to another lord. In a time when to be landless was the worst of all misfortunes it was not so terrible a thing to be bound to the soil as it might seem today. The serf had his own rights, precisely defined by custom even where not legally enforceable. One of the results of the Norman Conquest was to draw the line between serf and freeman – a very vague line in Saxon England – higher up in the social scale and to reduce everyone below this line to a dead level of servitude.

Late in the tenth century the Danish invasions were renewed under Sweyn, who had managed to unite Denmark and Norway under his rule. The intervening period had been largely filled with inroads on Northern France, but with the

<sup>1</sup> He might, of course, be a slave, but then he would be a kind of property rather than a person.

establishment of a strong Scandinavian principality in Normandy the centre of attack shifted. The wealth and degeneration of England, of which the Danes must have been well aware, made it once more the most profitable objective. These new attacks were organised on a curiously commercial plan, a preliminary harrying being followed by a demand for the payment of money as a condition of withdrawal. Every couple of years the operation was repeated.

These payments of *Danegeld*, as it was called, were made seven times between 991 and 1014 and totalled 158,000 pounds of silver, a gigantic sum for this period. When Canute became king in 1018 and paid off his army, a final *geld* of 82,500 pounds was extorted. From this *Danegeld* grew the first regular taxation. Under Canute and the Norman kings it was levied regularly, and it became the basis of a property tax that was an important part of the budget of all kings until the Stuart period. Its social results were equally far reaching, since it came as a crushing burden upon the cultivator, driving him ever more rapidly into servitude. It increased correspondingly the power of the local magnates who were made responsible for its collection and used this office as a further lever to establish their power as lords of the land and its tillers. The feudal maxims of 'No man without a lord' and 'No land without a lord' can be fully applied to England from this time.

Another feature of these invasions was the leadership of the citizens of London in organising resistance. When the central government under Ethelred the Redeless collapsed miserably, London stood firm. Already greater beyond comparison than any other English town, it now begins to appear in history almost as an independent political force. So great was its importance that we read that in 1016 the *fyrd* of Mercia refused to move against the Danes 'unless they had the support of the burgesses of London'. Year after year the Danes were driven back from its walls, and it only surrendered when resistance elsewhere was virtually at an end. Its wealth can be judged from the fact that when the great *geld* of 1018 was levied, London had to pay 10,500 pounds of silver, more than one eighth of the total for the whole country.

When in 1018 Canute, son of Sweyn, became king of England as well as of Norway and Denmark it appeared for the moment as if the future of England was to be linked with the

Scandinavian lands rather than with France. But the social structure of the Northern peoples was still largely tribal and so inadequate for the basis of a permanent empire. The unity temporarily achieved depended too much on the personality of an individual and ended with his death. It was not till Northern energy had been crossed with French feudal institutions that it was capable of advancing towards a permanent state power.

One further development under Canute was the formation of a small standing army of highly trained, paid, professional soldiers, the housecarls. A recurrent tendency within feudalism is for the feudal or semi-feudal soldier class (knights or thanes) to evolve into landowners and to become less willing to perform military duties. The formation of the housecarls under Canute is thus a close parallel to the replacement of the feudal knight by the professional mercenary during the Hundred Years' War. The one other thing that must be noted in this reign is the rise of the house of Godwin from obscurity to virtual control of all England outside the Danelaw.

When Canute died his sons were incapable of holding his dominions together and the family of Godwin were able to restore the old English line without opposition. The new king, Edward the Confessor, was a pious halfwit who had spent his youth as an exile in Normandy. When he returned he brought a train of Norman monks and nobles to whom he gave the best and richest bishoprics and lands. The history of his reign is one of constant struggle between the Norman influence at court and the power of the Godwins. The permeation of England by the Normans was one of the main reasons for the ease with which their conquest was carried through.

Eventually the family of Godwin triumphed, and established complete control over the king, a control similar to that exercised at a slightly earlier date by the Capetians over the French descendants of Charlemagne. All England was now divided into six great earldoms, and of these three were held by the sons of Godwin. When Edward died in January 1066, the Witan, or council of wise men, a body with some of the characteristics of the Teutonic folk moot and more of the feudal King's Council, proclaimed Harold, eldest son of Godwin, king. William, Duke of Normandy, also claimed the throne and began to assemble an army to enforce his claim.

The conquest of England by the Normans can be regarded

both as the last of the hostings of the Northmen and the first of the Crusades. Though William was a feudal prince, his army was not a feudal army but one gathered from all quarters by the promise of land and plunder. He safeguarded himself with an elaborate chain of alliances, including one with the Pope that formed the basis for many later claims and disputes. His army was not large – perhaps about 12,000 – but was trained in methods of warfare unknown in England. The English had learnt from the Danes to use horses to move swiftly from place to place, but continued to fight on foot in a dense mass behind the traditional shield wall. Their principal weapon was the axe. The Normans employed a skilful combination of heavy armoured cavalry and crossbowmen which enabled them to break up the ranks of their opponents from a distance before pushing home a decisive charge. Once the shield wall was broken the effectiveness of the cavalry in pursuit made recovery out of the question. This was the military reason for William's victory, just as the political reason was his firm control over his vassals as compared with the defiant attitude adopted by the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria towards Harold.

All through the summer of 1066 Harold waited in Sussex for the Normans to land. Early in September the patience of the fyrd broke and they insisted on going home. A few days later Harold heard that his namesake the King of Norway had landed in the North and taken York. With his housecarls he rode swiftly north, and routed the invaders at Stamford Bridge on 25 September. On 1 October he learnt of the landing of William at Pevensey. Within a week he was back in London, waited there a few days for the fyrd to gather and moved south to take up his position at Battle on a chalk ridge overlooking William's camp. Tactically, the speed and decision of Harold's movements were masterly, and his housecarls proved a magnificent fighting machine. Strategically, he would have been wiser to have waited longer in London. As it was, only a part of the fyrd had time to assemble, and the housecarls, who alone could be relied on to stand up to the Norman cavalry, were worn out by hard won victory and two marches almost without parallel in the history of the time.

Yet the new military methods of the Normans made their victory all but inevitable, and one battle was enough to decide the future of England for centuries to come. The Chronicle

records this battle in words moulded to a formula that had become almost obligatory when describing the warfare of the English kings, and with a curious brevity that seems to emphasise its decisiveness:

Tidings were brought to King Harold, and he gathered then the great host and came towards him at the Hoar Apple Tree, and William came against him unawares ere his people were mustered. But the King nevertheless withstood him very bravely with the men that would follow him, and there was a mighty slaughter wrought on both sides. There was slain King Harold and his brothers, the Earls Leofwine and Gyrth, and many good men, and the Frenchmen held the place of slaughter.

### III FEUDAL ENGLAND

#### 1 The Conquest

At Senlac<sup>1</sup> William had broken the power of the Godwinsons and laid all England south of the Thames open to invasion. The Midlands and North were still unconquered, and London once more formed the central point round which resistance was gathering and towards which Edwin and Morcar, the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria, were slowly moving. William's army was too small to make a direct assault on London. Instead, he carried out a brilliant outflanking march, crossed the Thames higher up, devastating the countryside as he advanced, and finally cutting the city off from the North and so from all hope of reinforcements.

London surrendered, a hastily summoned meeting of the Witan proclaimed William king, and on Christmas Day he was crowned at Westminster. All the land of those who had given support to Harold or fought at Senlac was confiscated and divided among William's Norman followers. The rest of England, having acknowledged William as king, was left undisturbed. By 1069 William was ready for the next stage in the conquest, Mercia and Northumbria were goaded into revolt, and received the support of the King of Denmark.

After a campaign that showed William's military genius at its best, this combination was defeated. The conqueror set to work, with a cold ferocity far more terrible than the fury of the Northmen, to make a repetition of the rising impossible. The greater part of Yorkshire and Durham was laid waste and remained almost unpeopled for a generation. It was not till the Pennine slopes were turned into great sheep farms by the

<sup>1</sup> I use this name for convenience, though it is of much later date. The point is that the place of Harold's battle had then no specific name.

Cistercian monks in the twelfth century that the region really recovered. Above the burnt villages of the North rose the great castle of Durham to assure the permanency of the new order. The completion of the conquest was followed by a fresh confiscation of lands and a new division among the Normans.

It is at this point that we can say that feudalism is fully established in England. We have seen how the economic basis of feudalism was evolved out of the English township, and how political organisation was taking on feudal form even before the Conquest. Now the fashioning of a political superstructure to match the economic basis was completed with a rigid and dogmatic uniformity by the Normans. Within a few years the whole of the land of the country passed out of the hands of its old owners and into the hand of the Conqueror.

The essential political feature of feudalism was the downward delegation of power, and all power was based upon the ownership of land. The king was the sole and ultimate owner of all the land, and granted it to his tenants-in-chief in return for military and other services and for the payment of certain customary dues. With the land was granted also the political right of governing its cultivators: the right to hold courts of justice, to levy taxes and to exact services. So far as the king was concerned the most important duty of his vassals was to follow him in war and so the whole country was divided up into areas, known as knight's fees, corresponding roughly to the older thane holdings, each of which was bound to provide and equip one heavily armed cavalryman for the army.

Just because England was conquered within a few years and the political institutions of feudalism deliberately imposed from above, the system here reached a higher regularity and completeness than in most other countries. Elsewhere the king's ownership of all the land was a fiction. Here it was a fact, and the king granted land to his vassals on his own terms, terms extremely favourable to himself. As the *Chronicle* says:

The King gave his land as dearly for rent as he possibly could; then came some other and bade more than the other had before given, and the King let it to the man who had bidden him more ... And he recked not how very sinfully the reeve got it from the poor men, nor how many iniquities they did; but the more that was said about right law, the more illegalities were done.



Feudalism was always in theory a contract between king and vassal, but in England this contract was more a reality than it was elsewhere.

The very completeness with which feudalism was imposed in England created immediately the possibility of a state organisation transcending the feudal system. This state organisation was built around William's power as the military leader of a victorious army and around the pre-Conquest shire organisation of the Saxons. William was able to grant land to his followers in scattered holdings. He was, in fact, forced to do this, since the country was conquered piecemeal, and as each new area came under control he granted what his followers regarded as an instalment of the reward that was due to them. For this reason there was no baron in England, however much land he might hold in all, who was able to concentrate very large forces in any one area. Further, the crown retained enough land in its own possession to ensure that the king was far stronger than any baron or any likely combination of barons. Apart from his hundreds of manors, William claimed all the forest lands, estimated at the time to comprise one-third of the country. It is unlikely that he did this merely because 'he loved the tall deer as if he had been their father'. More probably he sensed the huge possibilities of development in these still unexploited tracts.

With the exception of Chester and Shrewsbury, which were border earldoms planned to hold the Welsh in check, and the County of Durham under its Prince Bishop which served the same purpose against the Scots, no great principalities whose holders might become semi-independent princes as many of the French feudal nobles had done, were allowed to arise in England. Consequently, the sheriff, the representative of the central government in each county, remained stronger than any baron in his territory. And, since it was not necessary to strengthen the sheriffs unduly to enable them to control the local nobility, there was no danger of the sheriffs in their turn making themselves independent of the crown.

England had, therefore, a development that was unique in European history. From the start the power of the state was greater and the power of the feudal nobility less. Private war between nobles was the exception rather than the rule, and private armies and castles were jealously watched by the crown

and prohibited as far as possible. The agents of the crown were certainly oppressive, and the exploitation of the villen masses was severe. But these exactions of the crown were to some extent fixed and regular, and a limit was set to the much more oppressive exactions of the feudal lords.

There is, indeed, some evidence that the English regarded the power of the crown as a protection against their own immediate superiors. When in 1075 there was a revolt of the barons who were disappointed at the restrictions placed upon them, William was able to call out the fyrd to suppress it. The harshness of the conquest was soon forgotten by a peasantry who had been accustomed to conquest and pillage during the long Danish invasions, and who regarded William's severe but firm rule as preferable to an anarchy in which they were always the worst sufferers. In practice it was obviously of much greater importance to the cultivator that he had a foreign lord in the manor than a foreign king at Westminster. Thus, while it is true that the primary antagonism in feudal society was that of the peasants as a whole against all their exploiters, who included both king and barons, and the interest of king and barons therefore generally coincided, there were times when the king was able to make use of the peasantry in a crisis when his position was threatened by a baronial rising. In the reign of Henry I, when such a baronial rising attempted to place his brother Robert, Duke of Normandy, on the throne, Henry was able to invade Normandy with an army containing considerable Saxon elements which defeated Robert and his feudal forces at the Battle of Tenchebray in 1106.

The century and a half between the Conquest and Magna Carta was the period during which feudalism existed in its most complete form in England. Yet it would be a mistake to imagine that at any time during these years things stood still. The common conception of the Middle Ages as a period of stability, or of barely perceptible change, is very wide of the mark, for not only every century but each successive generation had its specific characteristics, its important departures and developments. It is quite impossible to put one's finger on any date and to say, 'At this moment feudalism in England exists perfectly and completely.'

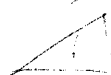
Throughout the period there was a constant struggle between the centralising power of the crown and the feudal

tendency towards regionalism. While the main trend was always towards increased central authority, this authority developed within the framework of feudal institutions which limited and conditioned it. Some of the forces at work were general forces common to all Europe, others sprang from the special conditions created by the survival of pre-feudal Saxon institutions, and others again from the geographical situation of the country. We have now to trace the progress of this struggle in the history of the time and to observe the growth of new combinations of class forces both locally and nationally.

## 2 The Social Structure of ~~Domesday~~ England

Twenty years after the Conquest William sent commissioners to almost every town, village and hamlet throughout England with power to call together the leading men of the townships, to examine them, and to make a complete survey of the economic life of the country. They asked all kinds of questions: How much land? Who holds it? What is it worth? How many ploughs? How many tenants? How many oxen, sheep, swine? The inquisition was highly unpopular: 'It is shameful to tell but he thought it no shame to do,' grumbles a monastic chronicler resentfully. Yet nothing shows more conclusively the completeness of the conquest, or of William's power than the carrying through of the Domesday Survey within twenty years of Senlac. It is without parallel in any other country. It would have been equally impossible in Saxon England or in feudal France, but there is not the slightest sign that any effective opposition was made to it even by the most powerful of the barons.

The survey had two objects: first to provide the necessary information for the levying of the geld or property tax, and second, to give the king a detailed knowledge of the extent and distribution of the wealth, lands and revenues of his vassals. For us it has a greater importance, in that it affords a comprehensive if not absolutely accurate picture of the social structure of England at the time when it was made. The unit of agricultural economy was the manor, which had been imposed upon the earlier township. It must be remembered, of course, that the country was still overwhelmingly agricultural. Some of these manors were held directly by the king: the rest were held

 importance of the manor

from him by a number of vassals, lay and ecclesiastical. They in turn had a larger or smaller number of subvassals who were the actual holders of the manors. Every village, however small and remote, had to fit into this framework, and society was graded into a series of groups mounting step by step from the serf at the bottom to the king at the top.

The Domesday Survey classified the cultivators of the soil into classes, and even numbered them, so that it is possible to present a rough statistical account of the population, remembering that account is only taken of the adult males who were the actual holders of tenements. The result can be tabulated as follows:

<i>Class</i>	<i>Proportion of total population</i>	<i>Number</i>
Slaves	9 per cent	25,000
Bordars and cotters	32 per cent	89,000
Villeins	38 per cent	106,000
Freemen	12 per cent	33,000

Multiplying these figures by five to make an average family, allowing for the classes not included (lords and their direct dependants and manorial officials, priests, monks and nuns, merchants and craftsmen, landless wage labourers and isolated cultivators who may have escaped the net of the Domesday commissioners), the total population may be estimated at somewhere between two million and one and three-quarter million.

The classes actually mentioned in the survey were distributed unevenly in various parts of the country. Slaves were most numerous in the South-west, rising to 24 per cent of the total in Gloucestershire, 21 per cent in Cornwall and Hampshire, and 17 per cent in Shropshire. In Lincoln, Yorkshire and Huntingdon, they are not mentioned at all, and there were very few in East Anglia, or the East Midlands. Bordars and cotters were more evenly distributed, few counties having more than 40 per cent or less than 20 per cent of their population in this class. Villeins were also evenly distributed, except that they were less common in East Anglia and Lincoln where there were many free tenants, and in Essex and Hampshire where bordars and cotters were specially numerous. Free tenants were only

found in the East and East Midlands, the counties of the old Danelaw. In Lincoln they form 45 per cent of the total, in Suffolk 40 per cent, and in Norfolk 32 per cent. Numerous in Nottingham, Leicester and Northampton, they hardly appear in any other counties. For convenience the closely similar group known as socmen has been reckoned as free.

To examine these classes separately and to trace their fortunes through the succeeding generations will perhaps be the best way of outlining the social history of this period.

Slaves were, by the time of Domesday, a rapidly vanishing class. For the most part they were house-servants or shepherds and ploughmen on the lord's domain. The lords were finding it more economical to hire personal attendants and to work their domain lands with the forced labour of the serfs. By about 1200 slaves have disappeared, becoming completely absorbed into the classes of villeins and cotters above them.

Bordars and cotters, who appear to have been the same kind of people listed under different names in different parts of the country, have been mentioned already. They were the holders of small patches of land outside the framework of the open-field system. Though most of them were serfs, some were reckoned as free tenants, and when the tide set away from serfdom in the fourteenth century they tended to free themselves more rapidly than the villeins who were bound up in the joint agriculture of the manor. Many who were craftsmen paid dues in the products of their craft, cloth, smithy or wood-work, instead of in labour on the lord's domain. This was considered less servile, and with reason, since the craftsmen did their work as individuals instead of under the direct supervision of the manor officials.

The villeins, holders of fifteen- or thirty-acre shares in the common fields, were the pivot around which the whole life of the manor revolved. Their services were regularised and most often increased after the Conquest. They were of two kinds: day work, and boon work. Day work was performed on a regular number of days a week, usually three. Boon work consisted of extra labour which might be demanded at any time. It was the more disliked of the two, and the harder to get free from, since it came at times, such as harvest and sheep shearing, when the serf's work was most needed both on the lord's domain and on his own land.

It is clear from the amount of labour services due from the villein that the bulk of the work in his own holding must have been performed by the other members of his family, just as in Africa today the incidence of the hut tax takes the adult males away from the village and throws the work of the villages upon the women and children.

The relation of villein to cotter was close. Cotter tenements were often held by members of villein families for whom there were no shares in the common fields, while the cotters formed a reserve from which villein holdings could be stocked if they fell vacant.

As time went on the two classes tended to be more and more lumped together by the lawyers under the common name of villein or serf.

Like the slaves, the freemen of Domesday were a declining class. Even in 1086 many who were free before the Conquest had come to be reckoned unfree as a result of the changes in ownership of the land, and the whole tendency of the time was to consider any peasant as a serf unless he could prove himself otherwise beyond any question. After the Domesday period the free disappeared rapidly, and when we once again find free smallholders in number they are not usually the direct successors of the *libri homines* of Domesday but are villeins who, by one means or another, have managed to win a certain measure of freedom.

The Normans introduced into England a body of written and rigid feudal law which was the expression of an intensified exploitation that tended to force all cultivators into the one mould, that of serfs, 'possessing nothing but their own bellies' as the saying went, and with no legal rights against the lord of the manor except that they might not be killed or mutilated without a proper trial. This meant an improvement of the status of the slave, but for the rest of the population it was a step backwards, and the time is one of increasing burdens and general misery.

Every trick of the lawyer was used to add to these burdens, and besides his heavy labour services the villein had all sorts of disabilities. The village mill, for example, was the lord's, and all corn must come to it to be ground. So common a ground was this privilege for abuse that there is hardly a single miller in the whole of popular medieval literature who is not a rogue. Then,

just as the king claimed all the forests, the lord of the manor claimed exclusive rights over the village waste. When these rights were strictly enforced they meant no more turf or wood cutting by the villein and no pasture for his swine. The long series of game laws that have lain like a blight upon rural England for centuries begin at this time. Worst of all, perhaps, all land that was won back from the waste was added to the lord's domain and was not available for extending the common fields.

On the whole, and after due allowance has been made for local peculiarities, we can apply to England the generalisation made by a contemporary of King John, the Pope Innocent III:

The serf serves; he is terrified with threats, wearied by *corvées* [forced services], afflicted with blows, despoiled of his possessions; for, if he possesses nought he is compelled to earn; and if he possesses anything he is compelled to have it not; the lord's fault is the serf's punishment; the serf's fault is the lord's excuse for preying on him ... O extreme condition of bondage! Nature brought freemen to birth but fortune hath made bondmen. The serf must needs suffer, and no man is suffered to feel for him, he is compelled to mourn, and no man is permitted to mourn with him. He is not his own man, but no man is his!

Such was the legal view, which the lords and their clerks fought to apply universally. In practice law was modified by custom, and on the average manor and in average times the serf had a rough security. Lawyers might say that a serf 'ought not to know one day what labour he will be commanded to perform the next'. In practice the whole year's work was probably known with a monotonous certainty. If nothing else served, the very obstinacy and conservatism of the villein, his refusal to change his ways, was a formidable weapon with which to defend the barricade of the ancient customs. For more than two centuries a battle raged in every manor between this peasant obstinacy and the craft of the Norman lawyer. At the start the lawyer won spectacular victories, but beyond a certain point he was never able to go. Even at the worst there remained on the manor a core of rights that kept the serf a person and not a thing, a residue of freedom which served as a starting point for the gaining of new rights when, in the fourteenth

century, economic forces began to work powerfully in another direction, transforming the serf into a free wage-labourer or into a smallholder paying rent for his land instead of giving labour services.

This perpetual village conflict must be kept in mind when we come to interpret the political history of the period, for the one helps to explain the other, and either alone is insufficient to enable us to understand the drift of the age.

### **3 State: Baron: Church**

The Conqueror's two sons, William II and Henry I, continued to strengthen the power of the State at the expense of the feudal nobles. Henry, who was remarkable among the kings of his time in that he could read and write, and so knew how to value and make good use of a literate bureaucracy, was responsible for a number of changes. He began his reign with an attempt to conciliate the Saxons by compiling and reaffirming the old laws that were by now being quite mistakenly attributed to Edward the Confessor. These laws he combined as far as possible with the newer conceptions introduced by Norman feudalism.

Henry developed a process which was in time to take the administration of justice out of the hands of private individuals and make it solely the affair of the state. In earlier times a crime had been first of all an offence against the victim or his family, and was therefore to be settled by suitable payment to the sufferers. Now crime came more and more to be regarded as an offence against the king's peace for which it was the right and duty of the state to exact punishment. The conception of the king's peace, which emerged in later Anglo-Saxon times, grew stronger with each addition to the power of the state.

Travelling judges were sent out to hold courts, and a new form of procedure was employed – the use of a jury. In its early form the jury was a selected body of men who were obliged on oath to 'present' for trial all the people in their district who were believed to have committed crimes. They were not chosen for their real or supposed impartiality but because they were believed to know the facts already. Trial by jury was not thought of as a right of the individual but as the special



privilege of the king. It was a new form of judicial machinery devised to attract cases into the royal courts and no one else was entitled to make use of this machinery without paying for it. The state's interest in administering justice was mainly financial: 'There's big money in justice' would be a rough translation of a legal maxim current at the time. The crown wished to attract cases to its own courts for the sake of the fines to be levied, and if the growth of the king's courts did weaken the power of the nobility this was rather the result of accident than of design.

Almost all of Henry's innovations had a financial object, and one of the most important was the establishment of a special department, the Exchequer, to deal with the collection of revenue. Much of the king's income came from the crown manors, the rest from the geld and the various feudal dues and tallages. All these were collected by the sheriff in each county and paid over to the Exchequer. The Exchequer was a special development of the *Curia Regis*, a body composed of officials, ~~through which the day-to-day work of government was carried on.~~ The *Curia Regis* met constantly, whereas the King's Council, a feudal body consisting of the tenants-in-chief, or as many of them as the king thought fit to consult, was summoned only a few times in a year. Quite early the council began to split up into departments. The council itself assembling all the chief nobles and church dignitaries, was the origin of parliament. A smaller body which could be consulted from day to day grew into the Privy Council and indirectly into the modern Cabinet. The King's Court thus subdivided, grew into the King's Bench, the Exchequer, and other courts. These developments mostly lie far ahead and are noted here for convenience. At the time they were not thought of as separate bodies but as different forms that the council might take for doing particular jobs, and all in theory remained equally the King's Council. What is important is that it was out of this feudal body that a permanent bureaucracy evolved to carry out the work of the central government.

On Henry's death these developments were checked because he left only a daughter, Matilda, to succeed him. A powerful group of barons refused to recognise her and supported Stephen of Blois, Henry's nephew. Twenty years of war followed, neither side being able to win a complete victory. It

was a time that left a lasting impression on the minds of the people. All the worst tendencies of feudalism, which had been suppressed under the Norman kings, now had free play. Private wars and private castles sprang up everywhere. Hundreds of local tyrants massacred, tortured and plundered the unfortunate peasantry and chaos reigned everywhere. 'Never were martyrs tormented as these were,' writes a chronicler who recorded the wretchedness of the times.

Yet what is significant about the events of Stephen's reign is not its misery but its uniqueness, the fact that such conditions, normal in many parts of Europe, only arose in England under the special circumstances of a disputed succession and a crown too weak to enforce order. This taste of the evils of unrestrained feudal anarchy was sharp enough to make the masses welcome a renewed attempt of the crown to diminish the power of the nobles but not long enough for disorder to win a permanent hold. In 1153 the two parties met at Wallingford and a compromise was reached. Stephen was to reign during his life and Matilda's son, Henry of Anjou, was to succeed him.

In the next year Stephen died. Henry, adding England and Normandy to his own large domains, became unquestionably the most powerful monarch in Western Europe. Though in theory his continental possessions, the larger and richer half of France, were held from the French king on a feudal tenure, he was in fact their absolute ruler. He began at once to break down the power which the barons had acquired during the previous reign. Hundreds of castles were destroyed, and in their place began to be built the unfortified manor houses that were the characteristic dwelling places of the upper classes in England throughout the remainder of the Middle Ages.

The state machinery which Henry I had set up was overhauled and extended. More and more powers were given to the travelling commissioners who represented the king in all parts of the country, and Henry himself travelled unceasingly over his domains. These travels were in part necessary because much of the royal revenue was still paid in the form of corn, meat and other produce of the crown estates. In a time when land transport was slow and costly, the only way in which this produce could be used was for the king and his court to go from manor to manor and consume it on the spot.

Increased use was made of the sheriffs as permanent representatives of the crown. At the same time they were kept under the closest control and some sort of limits were put to their habits of enriching themselves by the double process of fleecing the population of the shires and defrauding the crown of the payments that were due to it. In 1170 a general purge, the so-called 'Inquest of Sheriffs' was held and more than half were dismissed and replaced by others more closely connected with the royal exchequer. The interest of the crown was to discourage unauthorised exactions so that its own revenue could be as large as possible. Almost every reform of this age has as its object the increasing and better collection of the king's dues.

Apart from the barons, the increasing power of the state had to meet the claims of the church to be recognised as an independent, international organisation transcending all national limits. The struggle between church and state in England was only a part of a battle that extended all over Europe with varying results. In Germany, the Emperor Henry IV was forced to make a humble submission to Pope Gregory VII at Canossa in 1077, while in France the substance of victory rested with the crown. The dispute turned on the dual character of the church and its officers. On the one hand, bishops and abbots were feudal lords with vast lands and revenues. On the other hand, they were representatives of a power with an international organisation and headquarters at Rome. The crown wished to appoint and control them as feudal magnates; the papacy claimed to appoint and control them as its representatives. The situation was complicated because the bureaucracy on which the crown depended was almost entirely composed of churchmen, and, in general, the church supported the state against the barons while pushing its own claim to independence. Later, the success of the baronial revolt against John was largely due to the exceptional support which the rebels received from the church.

Under William I an uneasy equilibrium was maintained, but in the next reign a long battle over investitures – the right to appoint the leading officials of the church – opened. Not till 1106 was a compromise reached, by which the crown won the right to choose the new bishops, who were then elected by their cathedral chapters, formally invested by the Pope, and finally

did homage to the king as feudal vassals. In substance this was a victory for the crown.

Under Henry II the struggle took a new form. While the crown was attempting to bring more and more cases within the scope of its own courts, the church claimed the right to try all clerics in special ecclesiastical courts. These courts operated under the canon law and inflicted penalties much lighter than those of the ordinary courts. It must be remembered that clerics included not only priests but also a much larger number of people in minor orders, a class so large and important that it came to be assumed that any man who could read was a cleric and was entitled to be tried under canon law. The central figure of the struggle was Thomas Becket, who sums up in his personality and career the curious dual position of the church in his age. The son of a rich London merchant, he entered the king's service and became Chancellor, working with great energy to implement Henry's centralising reforms. When Henry wished to extend these to the church he made Becket Archbishop of Canterbury, expecting him to carry out his plans. Becket had other ideas and opposed the king as vigorously as he had before worked with him.

After a long struggle Henry was rash enough to allow some of his followers to murder the archbishop. The scandal that followed, probably deliberately worked up by the church, was so great that Henry was forced to drop his plans and to allow the church courts to continue to deal with all criminal charges against clerics. The practice of 'benefit of clergy' went on right up to the Reformation. Becket's murder had one curious and unexpected result. He was canonised and his tomb became the most popular of all resorts for pilgrims. Two centuries later, the first great classic of the English language, made possible by the fusion of Saxon with Norman French, was written. It was the *Canterbury Tales*, and recorded the conversation and pastimes of a group of typical pilgrims riding to the shrine of St Thomas.

Yet the victory of the church was not complete. The state had to surrender criminal cases: civil cases it retained. And during this period there grew up what came to be called the common law, a body of law holding good throughout the land and overriding all local laws and customs. This common law was based in criminal cases on the principles and practice of the

Anglo-Saxon law of the pre-Conquest days. In suits dealing with land tenure and property rights a complicated system of case-made common law developed after the Conquest. Because of the strength of the common law, Roman law, which became the basis of most European codes, was never acclimatised into England. As a result the ecclesiastical canon law, based on Roman principles, was isolated and weakened and remained alien to the main tendency of legal development. Here we meet another of the puzzling cross-currents characteristic of the class relations of the feudal period. Whereas the church supported in the main the centralising designs of the crown against the barons, the latter were opposed to the power of the church courts. These courts took cases away from the local feudal jurisdiction just as much as from the crown courts, and the barons were suspicious of any attempt on the part of the church to introduce Roman law because of the support which it gave to state absolutism. Reasons of this kind explain the unstable alliances and constant shifting of support which mark the three-cornered antagonism of crown, barons and church in the Middle Ages.

#### 4 Foreign Relations

After the Norman Conquest the Kings of England continued to be Dukes of Normandy and even used England as a base from which to extend their domains in France. In the same way, the large section of William's followers who were also feudal lords in Normandy continued to hold their estates in both sides of the Channel. For at least a century and a half the ruling class in England was a foreign ruling class, or, from another point of view, a class with a double nationality. Until at least the end of the thirteenth century French was its normal language, and when Chaucer, writing his *Canterbury Tales* as late as 1380, mildly satirises the Prioress who spoke French,

...full faire and fetisly  
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,

we are not intended to conclude that the French of Stratford atte Bowe was not still tolerably good.

The bi-national character of kings and barons, the fact that at

first they were even more at home in France than in England, determined the main direction of foreign relations. It was no more than a matter of routine for the kings and those of the barons who had interests across the Channel to spend half their summers campaigning in France. At first England was valued, probably, more for the men and treasures it could provide for these adventures than for any other reason.

Of far greater importance than these wars, which had few permanent results and whose details are now forgotten, were the new economic links forged, the new fields of trade and articles of merchandise, the new crafts introduced by foreign artisans. Not all those who followed the Conqueror were soldiers. Many were traders who were drawn as if by a magnet to London as the inevitable centre of the commerce of Northern Europe. London's growth has been referred to already, and its pre-eminence was now assured. It was the depot for all the trade of the rich English lowlands. It lay opposite the mouth of the Rhine, main highway for trade between the Mediterranean and the North. It had already close trading connections with Scandinavia and the Baltic. By the time of Ethelred 'men of the Emperor', merchants from the Rhineland probably, had a permanent settlement there. Others from the Hanse towns of North Germany and the Baltic followed.

Now a new influx, this time of Normans and Flemings, arrived, attracted, as a contemporary writer expressly says, 'inasmuch as it was fitter for their trading and better stored with the merchandise in which they were wont to traffic'.

Apart from London, a lively trade across the Channel from the ports of the South coast and from such places as Lynn, Boston and Ipswich to Flanders and the Baltic grew up. If the volume of this trade was small by present day standards, it included a number of absolutely vital commodities such as iron, salt and cloth. Little iron was mined and smelted in England till the fifteenth century, the bulk of what was used coming from Sweden and the north of Spain. At a time when the general price level was about one-twentieth of that of today wrought iron cost as much as £14 a ton. The dearth of iron was one of the greatest handicaps to agricultural progress and it was used with the utmost economy in farm implements. Harrows, for example, were almost always of wood, and in the plough only

the share and coulter were made of iron. Wool and cloth were also disproportionately dear. Readers of the ballad *The Old Cloak* will remember that the goodman speaks of his cloak as a lifelong possession, and garments were often handed down by will from generation to generation. Only the roughest kind of home-spun was made in England, the finer cloths being imported from Flanders. Salt too, though a little was obtained from the brine pans around the coast, was mostly imported from the South-west of France.

With the Norman Conquest the list of imports was considerably increased. Wine from Gascony, a greater quantity and variety of fine cloths, spices from the East, and, most surprisingly, so bulky a commodity as building stone, begin to feature prominently. Many of the Norman castles and churches around the coast and on navigable rivers were built from stone quarried round Caen. Exports, according to a list given by Henry of Huntingdon, a writer of the middle of the twelfth century, included wool, lead, tin and cattle. The rule of the English kings on both sides of the Channel made travel relatively safe for merchants over a wide area and discouraged piracy in the Narrow Seas.

Besides the merchants, skilled artisans also began to enter England. The Normans were skilled builders in stone, and must have needed many foreign masons to raise their churches and castles. William I, who had married the daughter of the Count of Flanders, encouraged the settlement of Flemish weavers. These settlements began immediately after, if not in some cases before, the Conquest. We find, for example, that the Suffolk village of Flempton appears in Domesday as Flemingtuna. The parish church of this village is still dedicated to Saint Catherine whose fortuitous connection with the wheel made her the patron saint of textile workers. The Flemings were scattered widely over the country till Henry I forced a great many of them to settle in South Wales.

It is in connection with these weavers that we can detect the first faint signs of what looks like a class struggle in the towns. The guilds of merchants that were beginning to grow up in the twelfth century often made regulations to prevent the weavers from securing the rights of burgesses. It seems clear that the merchants were attempting to keep the weavers in a dependent position as artisans, and not, as was once suggested, that there

was merely opposition from established inhabitants of the towns to intruders from outside.

As trade grew, the centre of gravity shifted, and England grew more important to kings and barons than Normandy or Anjou. And as his English estates became more and more the centre of his interest the baron began to be unwilling to spend his summers following the king in his French campaigns. A feudal army was in any case only bound to serve in the field for forty days in any year. This might do for a war between two neighbouring European states or baronies, but was far too short for an expedition from England to France. To meet this difficulty Henry II began to allow and even encourage his barons to make a payment called scutage as a substitute for personal service in the field. The proceeds were used to hire troops for the duration of a campaign.

Scutage is an indication of the extent to which money payments were now replacing many of the older dues in kind or services which had still survived in the eleventh century. At the same time there was a marked tendency for landlords in turn to seek to transform parts of their demesnes into tenements held for rent, and even to 'commute' labour services owed by their villeins on the same conditions. Money was becoming a normal and increasing requirement, partly as exchange became more normal and partly with the beginning of a century and a half of rising prices which dates from the middle of the twelfth century.

In this development whereby money passed increasingly into normal use, a certain part was played by the series of wars known generally as the Crusades which began in 1096.

The Crusades were wars of a transitional character, mingling some of the features of the expeditions of the Northmen in search of plunder and lands with others characteristic of the later wars of trade and dynastic conquest. At first, especially, they were undertaken not by kings but by barons who wished to carve out new fiefs richer and more independent than those they already held. In these early Crusades the barons of the regions conquered in France and Italy by the Northmen were the most active. The regular armies were in some cases preceded by hordes of land-hungry peasants who straggled across Europe plundering and being attacked till they perished miserably.



At the same time, the Crusades were a counter-attack against a new invasion of Moslems who threatened to cut the trade routes to the East and even menaced Constantinople. A religious motive was added by setting the holy places at Jerusalem as the objective, but Palestine was then, as now, the strategical key to the Levant. In any case, the Moslem invasion had put a stop to the stream of pilgrims going to Jerusalem, and these pilgrimages were a highly organised business, as vital to some parts of the Mediterranean as the tourist trade is to modern Switzerland. The papacy took the lead in organising the Crusades as a method of increasing its political power.

England took little part in the earlier Crusades in which Jerusalem was captured and a 'Latin Kingdom' set up there. The reason was, first, that the English barons were busy establishing themselves in their newly won domains, and, later, because Wales and Ireland afforded the more adventurous and land-hungry type of baron such as formed the core of the crusading armies a similar but more promising outlet nearer home.

In the Third Crusade, whose occasion was the recapture of Jerusalem by the armies of Saladin, the kings of Europe first took a direct share. Prominent among these kings were Philip of France and Richard I of England. For the first time in history English ships entered the Mediterranean, and the adoption of St George by Richard as his patron saint was at once a symbol and a direct result of his alliance with the rising maritime republic of Genoa. The Crusade itself was a failure, immensely costly in lives and treasure, and Richard, having spent one fortune in preparing his expedition, had to raise a second to ransom himself from the Emperor of Germany by whom he was captured while returning. Nevertheless, it led to the establishment of direct and permanent connections between England and the trading cities of Italy, that is, to her entry into world as opposed to local trade.

In England itself one of the first results of the Crusade was a pogrom directed against the Jews. They had come into the country soon after the Conquest, and were regarded as the special property of the king. They were barred from all ordinary trade and industry, and, as money-lenders, were used by the crown as a kind of sponge to gather up wealth from their neighbours and then be squeezed by the royal treasury. In this

way the exactions of the Crown were concealed and the anger they aroused turned upon the Jews instead of their master. Whenever the protection of the crown was relaxed, as in 1189, they were exposed to massacre and pillage.

To equip so large a force as accompanied Richard on the Crusade exceptional sums of ready money were needed. They were raised in various ways, but above all by the sale of charters to the towns. At the time of the Conquest these towns, except London, were no more than overgrown villages under the rule either of the crown or of some feudal lord or abbey. Still depending upon the cultivation of their common fields, they differed from the surrounding countryside mainly because of the rather freer conditions on which land within them tended to be held. Nevertheless they were subject to a variety of rents and taxes which were frequently both arbitrary and oppressive. As they grew they began to make bargains with their lords, undertaking to pay a lump sum, or, more often, a yearly 'farm' to be quit of their obligations. This involved the grant of a charter and the creation of a corporate body collectively responsible for the payment of the farm. As the merchant guilds<sup>1</sup> grew up they tended to coincide with the town corporation and often the two became indistinguishable.

Henry II had granted such charters, albeit rather sparingly. Richard's need of money led him to extend the practice, and the urgency of this need made it possible for the town to drive bargains very favourable to themselves. In any case, at a time when trade and towns were growing, a payment that was fixed in amount, and so grew lighter in proportion as the wealth of the town increased, was a certain gain to the citizens. Once more we can observe the growth of a money economy within the feudal framework.

The rise of corporate towns, 'communes', freed from the system of personal relations and services, led to the formation of new classes ready to enter the political field. Richard's short reign was thus a time of important developments. It was also a time when the bureaucratic machinery elaborated by Henry II was tested out in the absence of the king himself. Under the guardianship of the Justiciar, Hubert Walter, these institutions proved their vitality when an attempt by Richard's brother

<sup>1</sup> See page 69.

John to revolt was easily crushed. This revolt was the last occasion in English history in which any feudal magnate ever attempted to establish an authority opposed to and independent of that of the state.

## **5 The Great Charter**

Though the period between the Conquest and 1200 was one of growing state power, and of the growth of the power of the king as head of the state, this growth remained within the conditions imposed upon it by the character of feudalism. No king aimed at autocratic authority or hoped to override the imperfectly defined but generally appreciated limits of the feudal contract in which the existing balance of class forces was embodied. It was recognised that the king had certain rights and duties – the duty of keeping the peace, of leading the army in war, of securing his vassals in the possession of their fiefs, and the right to levy certain dues, to exact certain military and other services from his vassals and to receive their homage as the ultimate owner of the land. In the same way the vassal had his corresponding rights and duties.

In particular, the dues that he paid were confined to specified occasions and amounts, and upon his death his fief must be allowed to pass to his heir after the payment of a customary fine.

Second only to these rights were those of holding a court for his tenants, these courts being an important source of income. Though, as we have seen, the royal courts had been extending their scope at the expense of private jurisdictions this had been done with discretion and rather by providing machinery that was obviously more efficient than by compulsion.

In the last resort the barons retained the right of rebellion. If the feudal contract was shamelessly violated by the king and all redress failed, the baron was entitled to renounce his allegiance and to enforce his rights by war. This was always a desperate expedient, and in England, where the power of the crown was greatest and that of the barons least, it was almost hopeless. Even the strongest combination of barons had failed to defeat the crown when, as in 1095 and in 1106, it had the support of other classes and sections of the population.

John, ablest and most unscrupulous of the Angevin kings, did make the attempt to pass beyond the powers which the crown could claim without a violation of the feudal contract. He levied excessive fines and aids in ways and on occasions not authorised by custom; he confiscated the estates of his vassals without a judgement in court; he arbitrarily called up cases from the baronial courts to his own royal courts. In short, he showed no respect for law or custom. His administrative machinery directly threatened baronial rights, and indeed the rights of all free men, of all, that is, who were concerned with keeping in effective working order the feudal state, one of whose main objects, it must never be forgotten, was to keep in their place the mass of serfs and cottagers. Nor were his innovations confined to the barons. The church was similarly treated, and the towns, which during the two previous generations had been growing increasingly conscious of their corporate rights, were made to pay all kinds of new taxes and dues.

The result was the complete isolation of the crown from those sections that had previously been its strongest supporters. John was peculiarly unfortunate in that his attack on the church was made when it was at one of its periods of exceptional strength under a superb political tactician, Pope Innocent III.

Even so, it is possible that he might have been successful but for the failure of his foreign policy. A dispute over the succession with his nephew Arthur led him into a long war with France. One by one he lost the provinces his father had held, including the dukedom of Normandy. The loss of Normandy meant for many of the English barons the loss of huge ancestral estates. In their eyes John had failed in his first duty, that of guarding the fiefs of his vassals.

At the same time the loss of their foreign possessions made them more anxious to preserve those still held in England.

At this moment, having lost the support of the barons, John became involved in a direct dispute with Innocent III over the filling of the vacant Archbishopric of Canterbury. Ignoring the king's nominee, and contrary to the well-established custom, Innocent consecrated Stephen Langton, and to enforce the appointment placed England under an interdict. He followed this by declaring John excommunicated and deposed, and

persuaded the kings of France and Scotland to make war on him. John organised a counter alliance which included Flanders and the Emperor. His forces were crushed at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214 and the English barons refused to fight. Even a last minute submission to Innocent failed to win back the support of the Church in England, and Langton continued to act as the brain of the baronial revolt.

John stood alone. It was not even possible for him to call out the fyrd, which in the past had been the trump card of the Crown in its struggles with the nobility. This fact in itself indicates that the movement against John was to some extent of a popular character. Unwillingly he submitted, and at Runnymede on 15 June 1215 he accepted the programme of demands embodied by the barons in Magna Carta.

Magna Carta has been rightly regarded as a turning point in English history, but almost always for wrong reasons. It was not a 'constitutional' document. It did not embody the principle of no taxation without representation. It did not guarantee parliamentary government, since parliament did not then exist. It did not establish the right to trial by jury, since, in fact, the jury was a piece of royal machinery to which the barons had the strongest objections.

What it did do was to set out in detail the ways in which John had gone beyond his rights as a feudal overlord and to demand that his unlawful practices should stop. It marked the alliance between the barons and the citizens of London by insisting on the freedom of merchants from arbitrary taxation. In other ways, as in its attempts to curtail the power of the royal courts, the charter was reactionary. And, while its most famous clause declared that

No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned or disseised or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we go upon him or send upon him except by the lawful judgement of his peers and the law of the land,

the second word excluded from any possible benefit the overwhelming mass of the people who were still in villeinage. Later, as villeinage declined, this clause took a new meaning and importance.

More important than all the specific points of grievance was the clause setting up a permanent committee of twenty-four

barons to see that John's promises were kept. This was a real attempt to create machinery that would make it unnecessary to resort to an open revolt that could only succeed under such unique circumstances as those of 1215, or, at the worst, to ensure that a revolt would begin in a way as favourable as possible for the barons. This particular device did not work very well, but it did open a new avenue along which the barons could conduct a political struggle as a class rather than as individuals. It also prepared the way for the entry of new classes on to the political field. It led to the development of parliament as the instrument through which first the nobles and afterwards the bourgeoisie defended their interests.

The moment the barons dispersed, John denounced the charter and gathered an army. The barons replied by declaring him deposed and offering the crown to Louis, son of the King of France. A civil war followed which was interrupted by the death of John in October 1216. His son Henry was only nine, and the supporters of Louis quickly deserted to the young prince. He was crowned, and government was carried on in his name by a group of barons led by William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, and Hubert de Burgh. During this long minority the principles of the Charter came to be accepted as the basis of the law. In the following centuries Magna Carta was solemnly reaffirmed by every king from Henry III to Henry VI.

Its subsequent history is curious and falls into three chapters. As feudalism declined it ceased to have any clear practical application and passed out of memory. The Tudor bourgeoisie were too closely allied to the monarchy to wish to place any check upon it, while the power of the nobles was broken in the Wars of the Roses. Shakespeare, writing his play *King John*, never mentions Magna Carta and quite possibly had never heard of it.

When the bourgeoisie entered their revolutionary period under the Stuarts the Charter was rediscovered, and, being framed in technical feudal language, was completely misinterpreted and used as a basis for the claims of parliament. This view of the Charter as the cornerstone of democratic rights persisted through the greater part of the nineteenth century. It is only within the last fifty or sixty years that historians have examined it critically as a feudal document and discovered its real meaning and importance.

Just because it marks the highest point of feudal development and expressed most precisely the nature of feudal class relations, Magna Carta marks also the passing of society beyond those relations. It is both a culmination and a point of departure. In securing the charter the barons won their greatest victory but only at the price of acting in a way which was not strictly feudal, of forming new kinds of combinations both among themselves and with other classes.

## IV THE DECLINE OF FEUDALISM

### 1 Trade and Towns

The thirteenth century in England is marked by a general transformation of feudalism, leading ultimately to its decline and the growth of a capitalist agriculture. But the immediate effects were not altogether those which might at first sight have been expected. In the twelfth century there had been a certain development of the process known as 'commutation', in which labour services are partly or entirely replaced by money payments. With the increasing use of money already noted<sup>1</sup> a reverse process set in, especially in the more accessible and prosperous regions and on the estates of the monasteries and great lords. Here the increased use of money and the steady rise in prices made it more profitable to extend the direct cultivation of the demesne with serf labour, and to sell the wool, meat, hides or corn so produced, than to accept a fixed money payment whose real value tended constantly to decline. The result was that during the thirteenth century many lords on whose estates services had previously been commuted now reimposed them, often adding new burdens and always resisting any demand for new commutations. It is only in the remote areas, far from the main markets and trade routes, that we occasionally find commutations taking place during this time.

By the fourteenth century a new turn can be noticed. The very increase in agricultural production for the market, more rapid than the increase in the production of manufactured goods, led to a relative fall in agricultural prices. Once more the landowners reversed their policy. A new drive towards commutation began, or at worst the demands of the peasants

<sup>1</sup> See page 60.



for commutation were no longer so strongly resisted, and with this went an increased use of wage-labour on the land. This in time led to the decline of villeinage and the break up of the manor. At the same time, the large-scale production of wool for the Flemish market led to the development of trade on an international scale and of merchant capital. In the field of politics we have seen how the state assumed by degrees the functions of the feudal nobility – the administration of justice in the baronial fiefs, the protection of the cultivators and the service in the feudal host in time of war. As the barons shed these functions they were gradually transformed into landowners in the modern sense, drawing an income from their estates and tending to look to the court and capital as the natural sphere of their political activities.

In the last chapter mention was made of the growth of towns, and the methods by which they secured charters freeing them from burdensome feudal obligations. Such charters were most easily had from the King, to whom money was always more useful than the accustomed feudal services, less easily from the nobles and with great difficulty from the great abbeys under whose walls towns had grown up in many places. The histories of such towns – St Albans, Bury St Edmunds and Reading – are punctuated with bitter conflicts, sometimes amounting to armed risings of the townsmen, as at Bury in 1327. Here the townfolk, supported by the villeins of the surrounding villages, stormed the abbey and set up a commune that lasted six months before it was suppressed. It is noteworthy that after the rising no fewer than thirty-two parish priests were convicted as ringleaders.

By the end of the thirteenth century almost all towns of any size, except a few under monastic rule, had won a certain measure of self-government. After gaining freedom from feudal exactions, the main object of any town was to keep its trade in the hands of its own burgesses, on the principle that only those who paid their share towards the freedom of the town had the right to share in its privileges. This object was attained through the organisation of the burgesses in the merchant guild. These guilds, which included all the traders in any given town (at first no clear division existed between the trader who bought and sold and the craftsman who made the goods, both functions being normally performed by the same

person) were rigidly exclusive and their regulations were enforced by fines and, in extreme cases, by expulsion.

As the towns grew in size craft guilds came into being, in addition to, and sometimes in opposition to, the merchant guilds. These included only the men of some particular craft; smiths, saddlers, bakers or tailors. They aimed at regulating the whole of industry, laying down rules as to price, quality, conditions of work, and so on. They were composed of master craftsmen, each working in his own home, usually with one or more apprentices and sometimes with journeymen or wage labourers. The latter were men who had served their period of apprenticeship but had not yet been able to become master craftsmen.

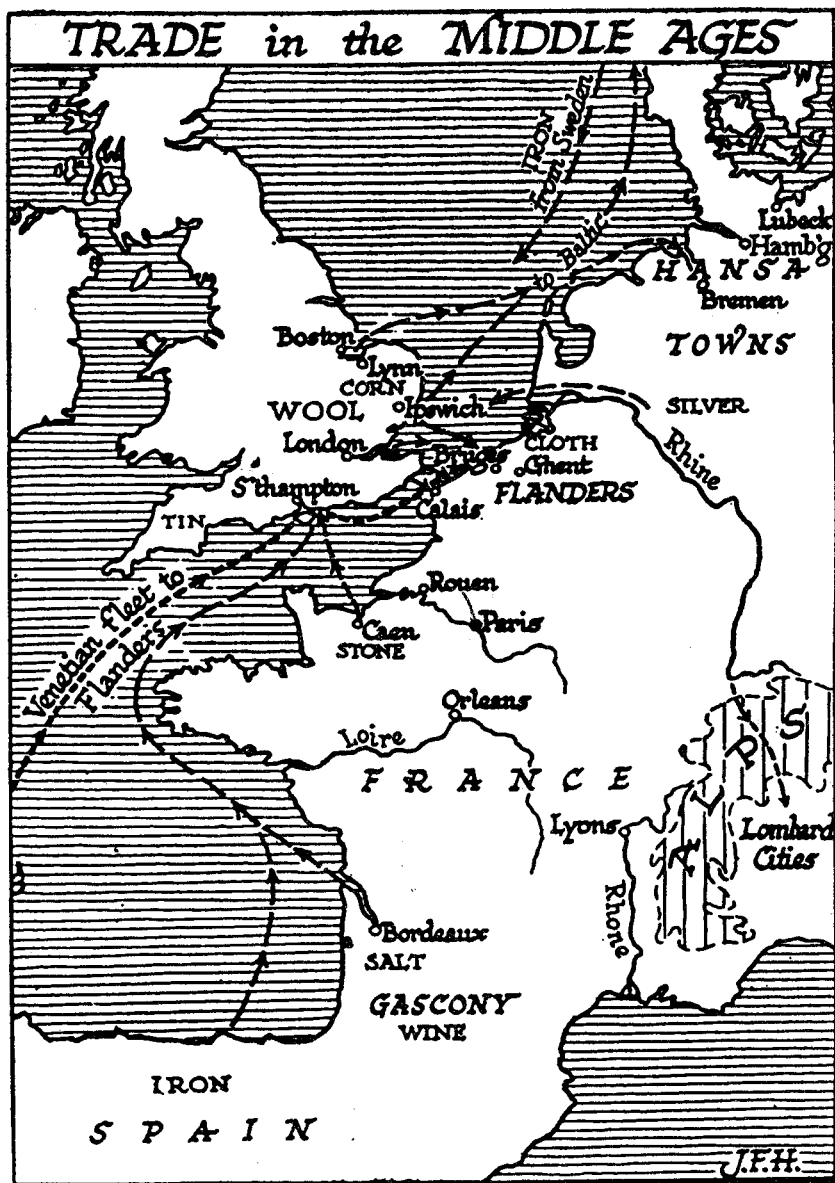
At first the journeymen do not appear to have constituted a separate class, but were men who might expect to become masters themselves. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, however, clearer class divisions begin to appear. The number of journeymen increased, and many of them remained wage earners all their lives. By imposing high entrance fees and by other devices the guilds became more exclusive and harder to enter. As a result, separate guilds of the journeymen, the so-called yeomen guilds, began to arise.

These guilds, like the first trade unions, were discouraged and often forced to work secretly. Consequently we only hear of them casually, when their members appear in court or in such cases as that when the London Guild of Cordwainers (leather workers) declared in 1303 that 'it is forbidden that the servant workmen in cordwaining or other shall hold any meeting to make provisions that may be to the prejudice of the trade.'

In 1387, again

John Clerk, Henry Duntone and John Hychene, serving men of the said trade of cordwainers ... brought together a great congregation of men like unto themselves, and did conspire and confederate to hold together,

and were committed by the Mayor and Aldermen to Newgate prison 'until they should have been better advised what further ought to be done with them'. Similar records of strikes or combinations exist for other trades and towns, as in the case of



London saddlers, 1396, weavers, 1362, and the Coventry bakers in 1494.

Beside the skilled craftsmen, covered by the guild organisation, larger towns soon attracted a floating population of escaped serfs and others who formed a submerged class of unskilled and irregularly employed labourers. In London this section was especially large, and, while the conditions of skilled workers may have been fairly satisfactory, the medieval slum population lived in depths of filth and poverty that can hardly be imagined.

One later development must be noted which accentuated the class differentiations in the towns. This was the growth of guilds of merchants and dealers who dominated the productive crafts. Thus, by the end of the fourteenth century, the London drapers control the fullers, shearmen and weavers, and of the twelve great guilds from which alone the mayor could be chosen, only two, the weavers and the goldsmiths, were productive. The same thing took place more slowly and to a less extent in the other towns, and serves to remind us that it was in the form of merchant capital that the first great accumulation of bourgeois property took place.

The first and most important field that merchant capital found for its operations in England was the wool trade. From quite early times wool was exported from this country to be woven in Ghent, Bruges, Ypres and other towns in Flanders. By the thirteenth century this trade had grown to large proportions, easily exceeding in bulk and value all other exports combined. In some respects England assumed a position with regard to Flanders comparable to that of Australia and the West Riding today.

There were, however, important differences. England was not politically dependent upon Flanders as countries producing raw materials usually are upon industrial countries. This was partly due to the internal situation in Flanders, politically weakened by the constant struggles between the merchants, the handicraft weavers, the counts of Flanders and the kings of France, struggles which kept Flanders divided and, in the fourteenth century, had important consequences in English history.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 87-88.

More important was the monopoly position of England as a wool growing country. Throughout the Middle Ages no other country produced a regular surplus of wool for export, and, on more than one occasion, the prohibition of the export of wool produced an instant and devastating economic crisis in Flanders. The English monopoly was the result of the early suppression of private war, noted already as one of the results of the peculiar strength here of the crown as against the barons. Sheep are of all kinds of property the easiest to lift and the hardest to protect, and only under circumstances of internal peace not normal in the Middle Ages was sheep farming on a large scale profitable.

As early as the twelfth century the Cistercian monks had established huge sheep farms on the dry eastern slopes of the Pennines. The Cistercians were not only large scale farmers, but financiers as well, and through their hands and those of the Lombard and Florentine merchants who acted as their agents was passed much of the revenue which the popes drew from England, a revenue stated in parliament in the reign of Edward III to be five times that of the crown. Much of this revenue was collected in the form of wool rather than of currency.

Besides Yorkshire, the Cotswolds, the Chilterns, Hereford and the uplands of Lincolnshire were important wool growing areas by the thirteenth century if not earlier. At first the bulk of the export trade was in the hands of Italian and Flemish merchants. The former, especially, coming from cities where banking had already made great progress, were able to conduct financial operations on a scale unknown in Northern Europe. It was because the Lombards were able to finance him more efficiently than the Jews that the latter were expelled from England by Edward I in 1290. This action, often represented as a piece of disinterested patriotism, was in fact the result of the intrigues of a rival group of moneylenders who could offer the king better terms.

With the growth of the trade English exporters began to challenge their foreign rivals. Export figures for 1273, incomplete but probably reliable enough, show that more than half the trade was in English hands. The establishment of the Wool Staple marks this stage in the growth of English merchant capital. The idea of the staple was to concentrate all wool exports in one place or a few places, both to protect the trader

from pirates and to make the collection of taxes easy. First various towns in Flanders were selected, then, in 1353, a number of English towns. Finally in 1362, the staple was fixed in Calais, which had been captured during the Hundred Years' War. From the start the staple was controlled by native merchants.

The growth of trade on a national scale involved the loss of many of their exclusive privileges by the chartered towns. Both Edward I and Edward III encouraged alien merchants and gave them concessions that led to conflicts with the burgesses of the towns. Attempts were made to improve roads and harbours and to allow trade to flow freely and safely from one part of the kingdom to another. How imperfect was even the relative peace of England at this time is strikingly illustrated by a clause in the Statute of Winchester (1285) which orders that all highways should be cleared 'so that there be neither dyke nor bush, whereby a man may lurk to do hurt, within two hundred foot of the one side and two hundred foot of the other'.

Another factor that helped to break down local exclusiveness was the trade done at fairs. These fairs were to some extent outside the control of the merchant guilds, and the more important of them attracted traders from all over Europe. They had their own legal code, 'law merchant', an important matter when every country and every district had its own peculiar customs. Law merchant was an international code so that traders from all parts were familiar with the rights and obligations it enforced. It was for the purpose of international trade, too, that a gold coinage was introduced alongside silver. \* The first gold coins (florins) were struck at Florence in 1252. In England gold florins and nobles were issued three years before the capture of Calais in 1347. The greater compactness of gold gave it an obvious advantage, but it was some centuries before gold coins were in common internal use in England.

The decline of feudalism and the growth of trade led to changes in the character of taxation that had most important consequences. In Norman times the king was expected to 'live of his own' like any baron. Only under exceptional circumstances was it customary to raise special taxes and these taxes were at first taxes on land. With the growth of towns taxes were imposed on other forms of property, thus giving other classes besides the barons a direct interest in affairs of state.

The property tax, originally based on a rough assessment, soon became fixed in amount and in its usual form of 'a tenth and a fifteenth' produced on an average about £40,000.

During the reign of Henry III the sharp rise in prices made the ordinary revenue of the crown increasingly insufficient, especially as the state tended to do more and more things previously done by the barons. From this time the use made of the estate of the crown began to be an important political issue. All classes had a direct interest in preserving the crown lands intact, since if they were alienated the burden of taxation would be heavier. It is significant that all the kings who met with specially strong opposition – Henry III, Edward II, Richard II and Henry VI – were kings under whom the crown lands were recklessly disposed of.

Under these circumstances the fusing of the baronial opposition to some aspects of crown policy, which had led to the granting of Magna Carta, and the opposition of the rising merchants of the towns became inevitable since they had frequently a common ground for complaint if more rarely a community of positive interests. The medium through which this new opposition expressed itself was parliament. But while this is so, the crown itself frequently made use of the town merchants as a supplement to the barons and in this sense their growth to political importance can be regarded as a by-product of the struggle between king and nobles, a struggle between two evenly matched powers both anxious to secure an ally. It is at any rate to this clash of classes that we must look for the origin and development of parliament.

## **2 Parliamentary Origins**

During the minority of Henry III the baronial party which had triumphed at Runnymede administered affairs in the king's name. William Marshall, de Burgh and Archbishop Langton appear to have been men of some ability, and under them, and in the absence of opposition, the barons held together and the importance of the Great Council as the core of the state apparatus increased. The barons had a training in administration which enabled them to act as a class, to aim at collective

control of the state instead of at individual power in their several fiefs.

When Henry came of age and attempted to take personal control the struggle was resumed. His incompetence was balanced by a vanity that prevented him from realising his limitations, and his extravagance combined with the rising prices to force him to make constant demands for money. He was personally much influenced by his French wife's foreign friends to whom he gave lands that the barons thought should have been kept and positions that they thought should have gone to themselves. Henry was priest-ridden as no king since Edward the Confessor had been, and it was during his reign that England became the main source of revenue for the popes: this revenue was obtained partly by direct taxation and partly by allowing the popes to sell church offices to whoever – English or foreign – would give the best price for them.

The result was that while Henry was constantly making demands for money the administration of the state grew less efficient. Trade was interfered with and not only the barons but also the lesser landowners and the merchants were once again united in opposition. At first this opposition took the traditional baronial form.

When Henry allowed himself to be persuaded by the Pope in 1257 to accept the kingdom of Sicily for his son Edmund, and asked the Council to provide the money necessary to conquer the island from the Hohenstauffens who were in occupation, opposition came to a head. The barons refused the money and a Council at Oxford set up an elaborate system of committees responsible to the Council itself for the detailed carrying on of the government. They also demanded the right to appoint the Justiciar, Chancellor and other officers as well as the sheriffs of the counties. It was at about this date that the Council began to be known as parliament.

After three years the weakness of the purely baronial movement became obvious. The barons were always liable to be split by personal feuds and the conflict of interest felt by each of the body between the new class loyalty and the old and still powerful desire to work for the strengthening of his own fief. As a result the king was able to win over a section and to begin a civil war. Those of the barons who remained in opposition under Simon de Montfort were forced to rely on the support of



other classes, and when, in 1264, Simon defeated Henry at Lewes a whole wing of his army was drawn from the citizens of London.

After Lewes the desertions from the baronial ranks went on, and the movement began as a result to assume a really popular character. It included the town merchants, the lesser landowners, those of the clergy who were opposed to the growing power of the papacy and the students of Oxford, who, drawn mostly from the middle and lower middle classes, were throughout the Middle Ages strongly radical in temper. It was under these circumstances that de Montfort summoned to his parliament of 1265 representatives of the burgesses of the chartered towns as well as two knights from each shire.

De Montfort's parliament, though called together in accordance with strictly legal forms, has nevertheless been correctly described as a revolutionary party assembly. It contained only five earls and seventeen barons, and the burgesses were clearly intended as a makeweight against the barons who had deserted. Yet if this parliament of 1265 was a revolutionary body, it was also in line with the developments of preceding decades, themselves the outcome of the changing class structure of England.

The decline of feudalism had created a growing differentiation between the great barons and the lesser landowners or knights. While the former retained bands of armed followers and looked to war and politics as their natural activity, the latter were growing content to live on their estates and make the largest possible income from them. While the great lords were still depending on serf labour for the cultivation of their demesnes the knights were already making extensive use of wage labour. The wool trade, by providing them with a product easily and profitably marketable, confirmed them in this course, and in the thirteenth century we can trace already the beginnings of the English squirearchy which dominated the countryside for five centuries.

These knights were early drawn into local government through the shire courts, and in 1254 representative knights of the shire were formally summoned to the Council, though only to report decisions already arrived at in the shire courts. Knights were summoned several times between 1254 and 1265 for various purposes. No very theoretically startling change was

involved, therefore, in de Montfort's action, but in practice the character and balance of the Council was changed and it can no longer be regarded as a merely feudal body.

In the next year de Montfort was defeated by Henry's son Edward, after a brilliant campaign in the Severn valley, and died at the Battle of Evesham. Edward found it wiser to adopt many of the changes which the rebels had demanded and in his reign parliament assumed permanently the form which de Montfort had given it. There is no evidence that at first the knights and burgesses took any active part in the proceedings. They were there mainly to agree to the taxes which the king wanted, to help by giving the information needed to draw up assessments and to go home and see that the shires and towns raised the money. They were also the bearers of petitions from their localities and helped the government to check up on the doings of local officials.

Like the jury, parliament was a royal convenience rather than a right of the subject. The expense of attending or of being represented was avoided when possible both by individuals who had to be forced to go and by towns which often petitioned not to be forced to send representatives. Parliament was developed as a tax-collecting apparatus, and, if it became a focus for opposition, this was quite outside the purpose of the crown.

Between 1265 and 1295 various experiments were made, and it was not till a new crisis took place in the latter year that the next big advance was made. In 1295 Edward was seriously involved in wars with France and Scotland and with the task of holding down the recently conquered Welsh. He therefore summoned what is known as the 'model parliament' because it contained all the elements which were to become recognised as necessary to make a full assembly. This model parliament made a large grant of money with some reluctance, but in the two following years more was needed. Edward levied a heavy property tax, tolls on wool exports and seized some of the property of the church.

These levies were strongly resisted, and in 1297 the 'Confirmation of the Charter' was secured. Edward promised, in effect, that no new taxes would be raised in future without the consent of parliament. The opposition was still largely of the traditional baronial type, but what is important is the new parliamentary forms which this opposition was beginning to

take. The same thing is true of the next reign. Edward II alienated the barons by the failure of his Bannockburn campaign in 1314 and by his grants of crown lands to personal friends, commoners who were raised by these gifts to a position of equality with the older nobility. In 1327 Edward was deposed after a rising of the barons but this deposition was carried through in a regular parliamentary manner, establishing a precedent which was to be of great importance.

It was the continued need of Edward III for money to carry on the Hundred Years' War that led to further developments of parliamentary control over taxation. In the years between 1339 and 1344 grants were actually refused until after grievances had been dealt with. The advance was due more to the king's necessity than to the strength of parliament; it seemed to Edward more important to continue the war in France than to quarrel with parliament over what on the surface seemed minor questions. Consequently he agreed to allow parliament to elect treasurers to supervise the expenditure of the money voted and to examine the royal accounts. This was in substance a recognition of the right of parliament not only to withhold supplies, but, more vaguely, to exercise an indirect control over the way the money was spent and hence over policy.

It would be easy to exaggerate the importance of these precedents. Such parliamentary control was only nominal except in moments when the crown was specially weak. But nevertheless precedents were established which enabled parliament to take up a strong position on the field on which important class battles were to be fought in centuries to come.

It was during the same period that the final steps were taken which gave parliament its modern form. At first all sections sat together as one body, and, inevitably, the proceedings were dominated by the great barons. Then came a period of experiment. Sometimes there were three 'Houses' – barons, clergy and Commons. Sometimes the burgesses sat alone to legislate on matters concerning trade, as at the 'parliament' of Acton Burnel in 1283. Sometimes the knights of the shire sat with the barons, sometimes with the burgesses. Then the clergy ceased to sit in parliament and formed their own convocation, and the division into Lords and Commons took place on the lines which exist today. In this division the knights of the shire –

representing the smaller landowners – took their places in the Commons with the representatives of the town merchants.

This grouping, found only in England, was an exact reflection of the unique distribution of class forces in this country towards the close of the Middle Ages. The prohibition of private war and the growth of the wool trade, as has already been pointed out, caused a sharp differentiation between the greater and lesser landowners. The latter, mainly interested in drawing an income from land, had begun to rear sheep on a large scale. They had a far greater community of interest with the merchants who also prospered from this trade than with the great barons whose outlook was still largely military. At the same time they formed a link between merchants and barons which enabled all three classes to act together from time to time.

This alliance between the merchants and the squires is the key to the growth of parliamentary power. It enabled the former to develop their strength under the wing of an already established class and it enabled the House of Commons to act at times as an independent body without the Lords.

While in most parts of Europe the representative bodies which grew up about this time declined and in many cases disappeared with the decline of feudalism, in England the decline of feudalism only strengthened the position of the Commons as the non-feudal part of parliament.

In the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries the nominal power of parliament was considerable. Yet it would be a mistake to overestimate its strength or that of the merchant class. If parliament was allowed to acquire many powers it was because it was still normally led by the Lords. The decay of feudalism, while creating the class of squires, also concentrated power in the hands of a very small number of powerful noble families, mostly related to the crown and fighting bitterly for supremacy among themselves. They saw in parliament a convenient means through which to dominate the state machine, and its wide powers were in practice often exercised by the ruling clique of nobles. The whole period was one of transition, of a delicate balance of class forces, and parliament became at the same time a reflection and a battleground of these forces.

### **3 Wales: Ireland: Scotland**

The Norman Conquest at first only extended over the area roughly covered by England: the rest of the British Isles was still independent and was organised into a bewildering number of small kingdoms and principalities largely tribal in character. The attempt of the Normans and their successors to subdue and feudalise these areas covers several centuries. Scotland, though already feudal in its southern part, never was conquered, while in Ireland it was not till Tudor times that anything more than a precarious foothold around Dublin was secured.

It was in Wales that the conquest began first and was most thoroughly carried out. The Anglo-Saxon invaders had pushed the Welsh back to a line running roughly from the Wye to the Dee but had made no real attempt to penetrate the mountains or the plain running along the southern coast. After the Norman Conquest the piecemeal reduction of Wales was undertaken, not by the crown, but by the marcher lords whose fiefs lay on the border. Because they were regarded as a protection against raiders from the hills these fiefs were larger and more compact than those granted to the barons elsewhere in England and there was a clear understanding that any marcher lord was entitled to add to them any land he could win from the Welsh.

There followed 150 years of confused warfare in which the Welsh were gradually pushed back into the hills and scores of Norman castles were built in the valleys and along the coast. Their owners reigned as virtually independent princelings – half feudal lord, half tribal chief – over just so much land as their armoured followers could protect from the Welsh up the mountain or their Norman neighbour in the next valley. By about 1200 only the princes of North Wales remained unconquered. With the Snowdon area as a natural fortress and the rich cornlands of Anglesey as a base, the house of Llewellyn ruled Gynnedd and even, in the thirteenth century, was able to make use of the feuds dividing the marcher lords to reconquer much of what had been lost.

It was this revival, reaching its highest point under Llewellyn ap Griffith (1246-1283), which led to the first direct attempt by the English crown to conquer Wales. Edward I followed the

Roman strategy of building castles at points of vantage, linking them with military roads. Moving along the coast from Chester he cut off Llewellyn, who had retired as usual to the Snowdon range, from his food supply in Anglesey, and by 1285 the conquest was complete. North Wales was divided into counties under the direct control of crown officials though elsewhere the authority of the Marcher Lords remained undisturbed.

This partial conquest of Wales had unfortunate political and military results. Long after England had become relatively peaceful, Wales was filled with warlike nobles, Mortimers, Bohuns and Clares, who were a constant disturbing factor in English politics. When feudalism declined elsewhere it retained a spurious vitality here and the marcher lords formed a large section of the gangster nobles who conducted the Wars of the Roses.

The means of war were always to hand, since the poverty of the Welsh people made it easy to recruit mercenaries from the hills of the interior. In the Scottish war and the Hundred Years' War a large proportion of the infantry were Welshmen. Further, the conditions of war in Wales helped to mould English battle tactics. The longbow, the weapon which gave the English a technical superiority over all their opponents, was in the first place a Welsh weapon and it was in the endless guerrilla fighting of the hills and valleys that was developed that combination of heavy armed troops with longbowmen which proved equally effective against the irregular tribal warriors of Ireland, the Scottish pikemen and the feudal cavalry of France.

It was in Ireland that the new tactics were first tested. Taking advantage of internal feuds, the Earl of Pembroke, significantly nicknamed Strongbow, landed there in 1170 with a few hundred heavy armed horse supported by Welsh archers. Their tactics, neither feudal nor tribal but wholly new at the time, were extraordinarily successful in a land of trackless bogs and hills and against a desperate but poorly sustained resistance.

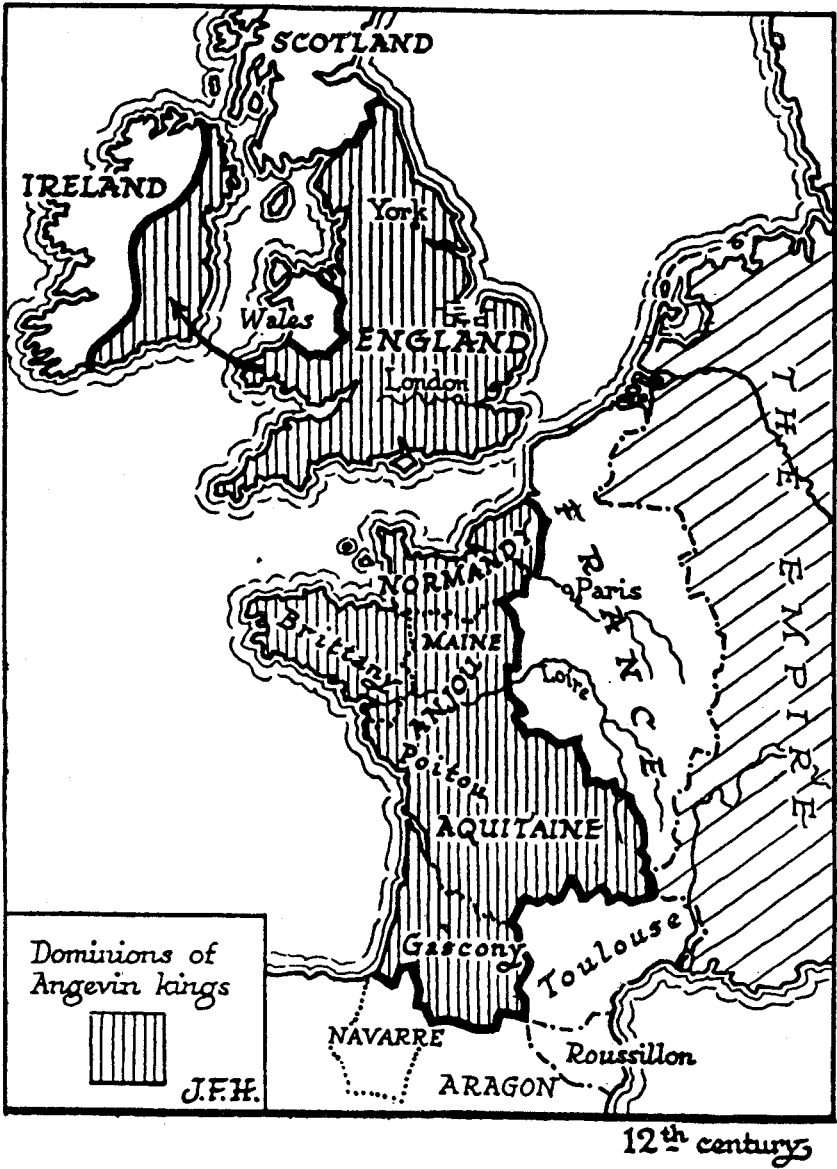
Once the first stages of the conquest were past, the character of the invaders made their assimilation easy and rapid. The majority of the invaders were Welsh tribesmen, different in no essential from the Irish among whom they settled. Even the leaders had been influenced by a century of Welsh conditions.

The result was the creation of a ruling class who were neither feudal nor tribal. The Fitzgeralds became more Irish with every generation and the de Burghs were speedily transformed into Burkes. Apart from their stone castles and their armoured retainers and a feudal tinge imparted to the land laws, there was little to distinguish them from the native Irish O'Connors and O'Donnells of the West. What difference there was was small compared to the gulf dividing them all from the English of the Pale, the area around Dublin garrisoned and ruled direct from England. Every attempt to use the Pale as a base for further conquest was fiercely resisted by Celt and Anglo-Irish alike, and it remained no more than a foothold till the subjection of Ireland was seriously undertaken by the Tudors.

Such attempts were probably bound to fail because there was no means of maintaining at such a distance the large permanent army that would have been needed and no means of preventing new groups of settlers from being assimilated as the first had been. In any case, after the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War no serious attempt was made at conquest except by Richard II who was forced to abandon it because of the weakness of his position at home. Ireland remained divided among innumerable chiefs and barons, a prey to internal wars that checked the economic development of the country and impoverished its people. In this period the tribal structure slowly decayed and the land came by degrees to be regarded as the property of the chief instead of the tribe. At the same time no effective new social organisation grew up to replace decaying tribalism. Ireland, which in the early Middle Ages had been one of the richest and most civilised countries in Western Europe, became, after the successive Danish and English invasions, one of the poorest and most backward.

The methods of war developed in Wales and perfected in Ireland were first put to the test against regular opponents in Scotland. It, unlike Wales and Ireland, had become largely feudal in the centuries between 1066 and 1286, when the death of Alexander III and the extinction of his line gave Edward I the chance to push forward with the policy of extending his kingdom over the whole of Britain.

Centuries earlier, invading Angles had settled along the East Coast up to the North and over the Lothian plain, and this area was for long part of the English kingdom of Northumbria. In





1018 a battle at Carham added the Lothians to Scotland. This battle did more than fix the frontier between England and Scotland in its present position. It was decisive in Anglo-Scottish history because it determined that Scotland would not be a purely Celtic country and that its most fertile and economically developed part was English in speech and race and open to feudal influences from the South. After 1066 a feudal baronage grew up closely connected with England and holding large estates in both countries. Robert Bruce, for example, had 90,000 acres in Yorkshire and his rival John Balliol held lands in Normandy and England as well as in Scotland.

For two centuries relations between England and Scotland were generally friendly, broken only by isolated Scottish interventions into English politics like that which led to the capture of William the Lion at Alnwick in 1170. The great belt of wild moorland dividing the two countries served to hinder invasions and there is little indication of anything like the continuous petty border warfare that grew up later. The claims of the English kings to be overlords of Scotland were occasionally put forward in a vague form and rather less frequently admitted. Meanwhile, Scotland was moving along lines similar to those we have traced in England, always remembering the greater poverty of the country, its distance from European trade centres and the large, sparsely peopled tribal regions still existing in the West and North.

When the death of Alexander III and his young daughter left a dozen or so nobles with claims to the throne, the barons, being as much English as Scottish, naturally turned to Edward I to settle the dispute. Edward marched a strong army to the border, announced that he was Lord Paramount of Scotland and decided to support the claim of John Balliol. His claim to overlordship was not disputed by the barons, though it is recorded that 'the community of the people' made a protest the nature of which no chronicler has troubled to report.

Having made Balliol king, Edward proceeded to goad him into revolt by slights and insults, and, in 1296, he succeeded. He marched north again, took and sacked Berwick, Scotland's one important trading town with a large Flemish population, deposed Balliol and once more received the submission of the Scottish barons.

Edward left the Earl of Warenne as governor with an army of occupation, apparently regarding the conquest as complete. But if the nobles were indifferent from whom they held their lands, the Scottish masses soon found the presence of a foreign garrison intolerable. In 1297 a small landowner, William Wallace, revolted and raised an army of peasants and burgesses which defeated Warenne at Stirling. After a few months Edward returned in person and met the rebels at Falkirk. They were drawn up in the traditional Scottish circle of pikemen, a development of the Saxon shield-wall. The English archers shot gaps in the ranks through which the cavalry were able to charge. Once the circle was broken it was easy for the armoured horsemen to ride down the pikemen at pleasure.

A few years later Robert Bruce, grandson of the claimant of 1286, who had been shifting from side to side with great diplomatic skill, saw the possibility of turning the popular movement to his own advantage. He had himself crowned king at Scone and for some years carried on an able guerrilla war. This was possible because, though Edward could raise an army strong enough to crush all opposition, he could not, with existing transport facilities and the wild tract separating England from Scotland, keep such an army permanently in the field. The regular garrison, numbering some 2,000 men, could do no more than hold a few of the main towns and castles. In 1307 Edward died while leading another army into Scotland.

The irregular war was continued in the next reign, castle after castle passing into Scottish hands till only Stirling was left. In 1314 Edward II took the largest army that had ever left England to relieve it, and was crushingly defeated at Bannockburn. The victory was in part the result of the skill of Bruce in the choice of a battleground, but far more of the stupidity with which the English army was handled. Relying on his great superiority of numbers, and ignoring all the lessons of the past decades, Edward launched his cavalry at the Scottish pikes without a preparatory covering fire from his archers. The limitations of feudal cavalry were as thoroughly exposed as they were later at Crécy and Poitiers.

Important though it was, Bannockburn was not the decisive event it has often been thought to be. Edward was prevented from renewing the war by the internal struggle with the baronage that ended in his deposition and murder in 1327. But

it was resumed by Edward III. Feuds among the Scottish nobles and the skill of the English longbowmen gave him a victory at Halidon Hill, after which Bruce's son David was forced to seek refuge in France. The war continued for some time on the classic guerrilla lines and was finally abandoned partly because it seemed impossible to bring it to any definite conclusion but mainly because the Hundred Years' War was beginning to absorb all the available English resources.

From this time no further attempt at conquest was made, but a permanent irregular war took its place which reduced a great area on both sides of the border to a wilderness, put an end to the early development of Scottish trade and industry and kept Scotland feudal at a time when feudalism in England was rapidly declining.

The result for England was less serious because only the North, which in any case was poor and backward, was affected. But it created a powerful and turbulent nobility, which, like the Welsh marcher lords, preserved feudal traits that were in contradiction to the development of the rest of the country and were largely responsible for the internal disorder and wars of the fifteenth century.

#### **4 The Hundred Years' War and the Revolution in Military Technique**

The wars in Wales and Scotland were wars of a characteristically medieval kind, wars of simple appropriation undertaken to extend the domains of the English kings and barons. The Hundred Years' War was one of a new kind, primarily a trade war and only in form and on the surface a war of medieval conquest. Edward III, who was strongly influenced by the ideas of chivalry that only developed during the decline of feudalism, did indeed put forward a claim to the French crown, but this claim was hardly taken seriously and was little more than a mask for the real objectives of the war.

The switch of English foreign policy from Scotland to France can be accounted for by the greater wealth of France as compared with either Scotland or Ireland, but more than this is really involved. Neither Scotland nor Ireland had any real importance to English trade, whereas the kingdom of France

included the two regions that were of vital importance in this respect. These were Flanders, the centre of the wool industry, and Gascony, still held by the kings of England as a feudal fief. Gascony was the main supplier of wine and salt, and was important as a base for the import of iron.

The Hundred Years' War was thus a reflection of the growing importance of merchant capital in England and of the interest of a large and influential section of the landowners in the wool trade. Its real object was to bring England, Flanders and Gascony, already bound by relations of trade, under a unified political control, and it was on Flanders and Gascony that the main military operations were based.

The origin of the war was so closely connected with the class struggle in Flanders, which in the fourteenth century reached a level not attained elsewhere for centuries, that this must be briefly described. By the end of the thirteenth century Flanders had assumed a definitely urban character and its great cities were manufacturing rather than trading centres. It has been estimated that of the 50,000 inhabitants of Ghent 30,000 were directly dependent upon the wool industry. In Ghent, Bruges, Mechlin and the other woollen towns a small class of rich merchants, who gave out wool to the working weavers to be made up into cloth, formed a close oligarchy controlling the city councils. Among the weavers, strikes and armed risings were common from about 1250. In 1280 a general revolt took place, and the weavers were supported by the Count of Flanders and other nobles who wanted to weaken the power of the cities. The merchants, beaten by this combination, appealed to the king of France, who was in his turn quite ready to take the opportunity to strengthen his hold over the half independent county of Flanders.

A whole generation of bitter fighting followed. In 1303 the weavers defeated the pick of the French feudal nobility in a pitched battle outside Courtrai and for a short time gained control of the towns. An internal feud between the weavers and the fullers soon enabled the merchants to regain control in Ghent, the key town, and the Count of Flanders then turned to England for support. Bruges and Ypres, still governed by the weavers, offered to support Edward III and to recognise him as ruler of Flanders and of France.

In 1327 the English government carried out a masterstroke

of diplomacy. By prohibiting the export of wool to Flanders they produced an immediate crisis there that can be compared in its effect with the cotton famine in Lancashire at the time of the American Civil War. The result was to bring about a temporary alliance of all classes in support of the policy of war against France in return for a removal of the embargo. Edward had now an assured base for his war.

The first campaigns were fought from Flanders, while Gascony was used as a base for a secondary attack. A series of these campaigns met with little success, and their failure soon weakened Edward's position in Flanders. Once the peculiar circumstances that had produced it ended, the unnatural class alliance in Flanders dissolved. In 1345, Jacob van Artevelde, the leader of the Ghent merchants and Edward's chief supporter, was defeated and killed.

The next year saw the first big battle – Crécy. Like Poitiers and Agincourt later, Crécy was the result of the blundering strategy of the English, who marched an inadequate army into the heart of France and were cornered by stronger enemy forces. What was lost by bad strategy was regained by superior tactics. The lesson of the Scottish wars and of Courtrai had shown both the weakness of feudal cavalry and the value of the longbow and of trained and determined infantry drawn up in mass formation. For the first time feudal knights dismounted and fought on foot among the archers. The French, instead of pinning down the cornered English army and forcing it to attack, flung masses of cavalry against a prepared line and suffered total defeat. After this had happened a second time at Poitiers in 1356, the first stage of the war ended with the peace of Bretigny in 1360.

Edward gave up his claim to the French crown and was unable to secure Flanders. He received the greater part of France south of the Loire and the town of Calais which had been taken the year after Crécy. Calais was of great importance as a centre for the wool export. After a few years the war reopened under very different conditions. The English had been weakened by a futile campaign in Spain and the French were now commanded by Bertrand du Guesclin, perhaps the outstanding military genius of the Middle Ages. Du Guesclin, the son of a small Breton squire, had spent the first fifteen years of his career as an outlaw chief in the hills and forests of

Brittany. Here he had shed all the romanticism of chivalry and learnt every trick and ruse of the guerrilla fighter. When he became Constable of France he forced the French nobility against their will to fight on foot, to refuse battle, to attack outposts and stragglers. He was the first general to grasp the value of gunpowder in siege operations, and developed a technique of assault by which supposedly impregnable fortresses were taken in a few days.

More important still, his outlaw days had brought him into close contact with the peasants and he realised that while the English professional army could defeat the ill disciplined feudal forces of France in the field they would be powerless in the face of a national resistance. In 1358 France had been convulsed by the Jacqueries, a desperate rising of peasants driven beyond endurance by the plundering of both sides and the inability of their lords to protect them. Du Guesclin insisted that his troops should be paid regularly, even if he had to find the money himself, and refused to allow them to prey on the country folk. Soon the English found themselves faced with a national resistance in which every village was full of enemies and every movement they made was instantly reported to the French forces.

In nine years (1369-77) not a single battle was fought, but the English were driven from province after province till only Calais, Bordeaux and a few other coast towns remained in their hands. After the death of Edward III in 1377 the French were able to take the offensive and harry the English coast. The Isle of Wight was occupied and a landing in Sussex was pushed as far as Lewes.

The last events of the war, like its opening, were connected with the internal politics of Flanders. Philip van Artevelde, the son of Edward's ally, had in 1375 put himself at the head of the Ghent weavers and seized power as a partisan of the English. He was defeated and killed at West-Roosebeke in 1382 but the next year Spencer, Bishop of Norwich, who had made a reputation by his brutality in suppressing the insurgent peasants of East Anglia, was sent to Flanders with an army to try to revive the war. This campaign, dignified with the title of a Crusade because the French supported a rival pope against the one recognised in England, was a complete failure. The exhaustion of the country after forty years' almost unbroken

war, and the growing internal conflicts among the leading noble families, put an end to the war till it was revived in 1415 by Henry V.

The direct results of the war were almost wholly disastrous for both England and France, neither of which obtained any real return for the vast expenditure of lives and treasure and the continued devastation of the countryside. Indirectly, however, it helped to accelerate the decline of feudalism. The French crown emerged stronger because of the prestige gained as the leader of a national struggle and the regular army and artillery train created during the war. In England, the failure to conquer Flanders led the government to encourage the home woollen industry. Flemish craftsmen were aided to immigrate. Oppressed by the merchants, the weavers were told

how happy they should be if they would but come into England, bringing their mystery with them, which should provide their welcome in all places. Here they should feed on beef and mutton, till nothing but their fatness should stint their stomach.

England became more a manufacturer of cloth and less a mere producer of raw wool. By the fifteenth century she was supplying most of her own needs and beginning to export cloth abroad.

On the battlefields of the Hundred Years' War the prestige of the armoured feudal cavalry had received its death blow. The decisive technical advance which had robbed the knight of his superiority was not, as is sometimes supposed, the invention of gunpowder, but the longbow. This placed the trained peasant archer on terms of equality with his lord, robbing the latter of his main claim to special consideration, his position as a specialist in war. Gunpowder was important at first only as a siege weapon, depriving the castle of its invulnerability. The hand gun or musket did not appear till the very end of the Middle Ages. It was used first in Germany and introduced into England during the Wars of the Roses by foreign mercenaries in the pay of Edward IV.

At first it was in most respects inferior to the longbow. It had a shorter range, a slower rate of fire and less power of penetration. But its compensating quality was that it could be used by slightly trained men while it took a lifetime of practice

to turn out a skilled archer. Introduction of the hand gun coincides with the decline of the yeomanry in England at the close of the fifteenth century and the recruiting of armies from the landless rural population and the slum proletariat.

Finally though this takes us well outside the period covered by this section, a new kind of cavalry was evolved after a period in which the infantry was the most important arm. This new cavalry was unarmoured and mounted on lighter and swifter horses. It relied on the speed of its impact and on pistol fire to break the formation of the enemy. This is the cavalry of the Thirty Years' War and of Rupert and his cavaliers, a cavalry that, though it was mainly composed of gentlemen and their followers, reflects the structure of society in an age of transition between feudal and bourgeois. In a later chapter we shall see how this cavalry was adapted by Cromwell and the English bourgeoisie to suit the needs of their struggle for power.

While the revolution in military technique sprang from changes in the structure of society, it reacted in turn upon this society. War became industrialised, employing more complicated instruments and involving more complicated financial arrangements. The English troops in the Hundred Years' War were hired on a regular basis, the archers on foot getting 3d. a day and the mounted men 6d.

The provision of powder and fire-arms required industry and money, and these were in the hands of the burgesses of the towns. From the outset, therefore, fire-arms were the weapons of the towns and of the rising monarchy drawing its support from the towns, against the feudal nobility (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*).

Feudal wars, growing into national wars, transcended the organising capacity of the feudal system and hastened its decline.

## **5 The Black Death**

When, in the autumn of 1348, two years after Crécy; the Black Death began to spread in South and West England, a slow revolution had been transforming the villages for nearly a hundred years. The organisation of the manor, with its typical



arrangement of serfs bound to the soil and owing labour services to their lord, has been described already. And we have seen that forces were at work modifying this arrangement: the growth of a central government, the replacement of the feudal services of the lords by money payments, the growth of towns and trade and the large scale production of wool for export. All these and other causes worked together to replace the primitive subsistence economy of the manor by the production of goods for sale in the market.

None the less, the first result of these developments had not been in the direction of freeing the serf from his obligations. Reacting to rising prices and increasing demand, the feudal nobility had at first tried to 'go into business' on their own account. The thirteenth century saw a vast movement to increase demesnes, reclaim wastes and marshes and to increase the labour services of the villeins, at any rate on the estates of the greater landowners. This movement certainly added considerably to the area under cultivation, yet, from the point of view of the landowners it was by no means an unqualified success. There was always considerable resistance by the peasantry to the reimposition or the increase of labour services, and the grudging and reluctant labour of the serf can never have been highly productive. Nor was it easy to organise the typical scattered and unwieldy demesne estate of the Middle Ages into an efficient economic unit, or to find honest and efficient administrative officials in anything like the numbers required. And as the commercial and industrial classes in the towns gradually asserted their right to run their own affairs, as they began to dispose of larger resources and to improve their organisation, their control of town markets allowed them to force up the price of their own goods as compared with the price of agricultural products.

The result was a fresh turn, which becomes marked about the beginning of the fourteenth century, to an increased use of wage labour, especially on the small estates, and to what might be called a rent roll policy on the estates of the great lay and clerical landowners. In this way it is possible to see the first signs of the appearance of new class groupings in the countryside, though the pattern does not emerge finally until the sixteenth century. There is the great landowner, increasingly a drawer of rent, while in general the actual cultivation was handed over to

the present and the middling landowner, the ancestors of the yeoman and the squire of later times, already becoming 'capitalist' to the extent that wage labour was the basis of their economy.

The process of commutation thus proceeded irregularly and unevenly, differing in different areas, on estates of different size and at various times. Further, on any given estate it might well be that only some services were commuted at any one time, and quite commonly day labour was commuted while boon labour was retained. In the main, however, the change was made without much friction, since it was in the interest of both parties. Above all, wage labour proved more economic than the forced labour of serfs. It required less supervision, it enabled the lord to employ efficient beasts and implements instead of the inferior ones of the serfs and it was more regular. The disappearance of the class of slaves also led to the hiring of shepherds and other types of worker who had to be continuously employed.

Gradually the traditional structure of the manor was modified, as the dependence of the serf upon his lord became less direct. Commutation did not only involve the creation of a rent-paying peasantry, it involved also the creation, on a scale previously unknown, of a class of wage labourers, since the lords now had to pay for the cultivation of their own domain land. The two classes were not as yet clearly differentiated, nor was there a middle class of tenant farmers standing between the landlords and the working masses. Alongside of, and arising from this economic change was a legal change in the status of the villein, a tendency to concede him greater rights and to interpret more broadly the obligations of serfdom.

Between 1066 and 1348 the population had risen from less than two million to about three and a half million, a rise that was remarkable under medieval conditions and reflects the abnormal security of life in England. But even before 1348 there were ominous signs of change. The drain of the long war was increasingly felt, checking the rise in population and depressing the living standards of the people. This war drain combined with the decline in agricultural prices to end the boom period in which the great estates had been built up. Instead of the land hunger which was apparent earlier, we find signs of a shortage of wage labour. It was into this England that

the Black Death came, increasing the pace of developments and touching off many of the latent antagonisms of the countryside. It should, however, be emphasised that the Black Death only accentuated development along lines that were already clearly marked, and that its effect was less sensational than some accounts would lead us to believe. Indeed, where we talk at all of the 'effect' of the Black Death it must be remembered that what is really meant is its effect in the whole complex of change which was transforming England in the fourteenth century.

The Black Death was the name given to a violent epidemic of bubonic plague, coming from the East and sweeping all Europe. The first English outbreak was at Melcombe Regis in August. In the spring of 1349 it had reached East Anglia and the Midlands. In 1350 Scotland and Ireland were devastated. Like all epidemics entering new territory it was peculiarly deadly. The death toll may have been as much as one-third of the population, though medieval figures are always unreliable and the incidence was uneven. In some areas whole villages were wiped out. Two-thirds of the parish clergy of the Norwich diocese died, a third of the burgesses of Colchester, half the population of Leicester.

The disorganisation of agriculture was complete. Fields were left unsown and unreaped, and prices doubled in a single year. The rise in prices caused a demand for higher wages; even by the harvest of 1349 they had increased in full proportion to the cost of living. There is evidence that the labourers were able to dictate their own terms to the lords and to secure an increase that in most cases meant a rise in real wages.

In 1350 parliament, composed almost entirely of landowners, attempted to check this rise by the Statute of Labourers ordering:

Every person able in body under the Age of Sixty Years, not having (wherewith) to live, being required shall be bound to serve him that doth require him, or else committed to Gaol, until he find surety to serve.

If a Workman or servant depart from service before the time agreed he shall be imprisoned.

The old wages and no more shall be given to servants.

If any ... take more Wages than were wont to be paid he shall be committed to Gaol.

Victuals shall be sold at reasonable prices.

The complete failure of the statute is proved by the fact that it was necessary to re-enact it repeatedly, as in 1357 and 1360, each time with more severe penalties. The lords might pass laws, but when their harvest were rotting in the fields they ignored their own laws and made what terms they could with whatever labour was available. The failure was openly admitted in 1376 by the 'Good Parliament' which declared:

If their masters reprove them for bad service, or offer them the said service according to the terms of the Statutes they fly and run suddenly away out of their services and out of their own country, from county to county and town to town, in strange places unknown to their said masters. And many become staff-strikers and lead wicked lives ... And the greater part of the said servants increase their robberies and felonies from day to day.

If the Black Death brought higher wages and greater freedom to the wage labourers it brought equal advantages to the peasant cultivators. Those who had already commuted their services for fixed payments found the value of these payments halved by the rise in prices. Those who still owed labour services were able to press for them to be commuted under the most favourable conditions. It was round this issue that the main struggle was fought. The lords naturally tried to force those who paid quit rents back to labour and opposed any demands to extend commutation where it did not already exist. But the value of an estate depended solely upon the amount of serf labour that could be exploited upon it, and in practice lords who attempted to drive hard bargains found themselves without tenants. The fugitive serf was liable to heavy penalties if caught, but the chances of being caught were slight and the chances of bettering himself elsewhere good. Some went to the towns, others joined the ranks of the wage labourers and others found lords who were prepared to grant empty holdings upon favourable terms.

The old village community in which families lived generation after generation upon the same land began to break up and a migratory class of labourers and peasants moving from one job and holding to the next which arose. The attempts to counter the effects of the Black Death by direct coercion were unsuccessful, though no doubt many peasants were forced into accepting unwelcome conditions.

The lords were, therefore, forced to find new methods of exploitation. The most important, perhaps, was the extension of the already growing practice of letting out land at competitive rents. The payments made by the serf whose labour services were commuted was not a true rent in the modern sense, since its amount was related rather to the value of the work previously done than to the holding of land enjoyed. But, as land began to be let to substantial farmers, often themselves employers of labour on a considerable scale, these quit rents tended more and more to be transformed into true rents based on the profit which might be expected from the holding concerned.

The second method by which the lords tried to escape from their dilemma was the introduction of a new kind of land tenure – the stock and land lease. Here the tenant took a holding for a certain number of years and the landlord provided the seed, cattle and implements. In return he received a rent calculated to cover both the value of the land and of the stock, and at the end of the lease this stock had to be returned in good order. This was a transitional form leading to the modern type of tenant farming. At first the holdings rented in this way seem to have been usually small but in time many grew and the tenants themselves began to employ labourers.

Both these were important steps towards a capitalist agriculture, to making the land a field for the investment of capital from which a regular return could be obtained. They led to the progressive breaking down of the personal relations which had characterised the subsistence farming of the manor and their replacement by a simple money relation. It is, therefore, not surprising to find in the fourteenth century the beginnings of a class struggle on a national scale in England. The peasants and labourers had had a taste of prosperity and freedom and were now menaced by a determined counter-attack from the lords. The lords had been forced to be content with a smaller share in the produce of the soil than they had hitherto received and were trying to recover their lost position. It was out of this situation that the great agrarian rising of 1381 sprang.

## **6 The Peasants' Rising**

Faced with an attempt to drive them back into the serfdom from which they were slowly climbing, the villeins had three weapons. One, already mentioned, was flight. This was the first and most obvious recourse, but it was a purely individual remedy and for a man with a family it had many disadvantages. There remained two others, organisation and armed revolt.

The flight of the most active and determined of the villeins and their dispersal over the country helped to weld the primitive and spontaneous local unions that grew up everywhere into an organisation on a national scale. The preamble of the statute of 1377 reflects the terror of the lords at this new development. The villeins, it declares

do menace the ministers of their lords in life and member, and, which is more, gather themselves in great routs and agree by such confederacy that one should aid the other to resist their lords with strong hand: and much other harm they do in sundry manner to the great damage of their said lords and evil example to other.

Many villages must have had their local organiser, like the Walter Halderby in Suffolk, who was charged in 1373 because he

took of divers persons at reaping time sixpence and eightpence a day, and very often at the same time made various congregations of labourers in different places and counselled them not to take less than sixpence or eightpence.

The Statute of Labourers had fixed the wages of reapers at twopence or threepence a day.

It was from the labour of these nameless pioneers that the 'Great Society' arose, a nation-wide body with an organisation that included the collection of money to pay the fines of its members in its activities, and prepared a programme of demands that gave a unified character to the rising of 1381.

This rising has features which mark it off sharply from earlier peasant risings of the Middle Ages. While the Jacquerie, for example, was a revolt of despair, a movement of hopeless men without plan and with little purpose other than to do all

the harm they could do their oppressors, the revolt of 1381 was the work of men who had already won a certain measure of freedom and prosperity and were demanding more. The villeins who declared, 'We are men formed in Christ's likeness and we are kept like beasts,' were growing conscious of their human dignity. Many of them had fought in the French war and were fully aware that a well shot arrow could bring down a gentleman as well as a common man. The English peasantry normally possessed arms and were accustomed to their use. As G. G. Coulton says: 'Here more than in any other great country, every man was his own soldier and his own policeman.'

Quite apart from the immediate demands of the peasants, which were the abolition of serfdom, the commutation of all services at a flat rate of fourpence an acre and the abolition of the Statute of Labourers, the rising had a background of primitive communism, strongly Christian in character. It was spread by the poorer parish priests, by the friars, who, Langland wrote,

Preach men of Plato and prove it by Seneca  
That all things under Heaven ought to be common,

and to some extent by Wycliffe's Lollards, though their responsibility for the rising was probably smaller than is often supposed, and Wycliffe himself certainly gave it no countenance.

Of all these preachers of communism only one, John Ball, has come down to us as a living figure. Though a North Countryman, he worked mainly in London and the surrounding counties, deducing the equality of men from their common descent from Adam and declaring in Froissart's often quoted words that 'things cannot go well in England, nor ever will until everything shall be in common'. The personal prestige of Ball among the rebels of 1381, one of whose first acts was to release him from Maidstone gaol, was unquestionably great, though there is no trace of communism in the demands they presented. These demands were probably a minimum upon which all were agreed.

By the spring of 1381, the Great Society had passed from mere organisation on the economic field to preparing an armed revolt on a national scale. The revolt when it came had

all the signs of having been carefully planned, as is shown by its widespread character and the unanimity of the demands presented. Cryptic but well understood messages went from village to village when the moment arrived.

John Schep, sometime Seint Mary's priest of Yorke, and now of Colechester, greeteth well John Nameless and John the Miller and John Carter, and biddeth them that they beware of guyle in borough, and stand together in God's name, and biddeth Piers Plowman goe to his werke and chastise well Hob the Robber, and take with you John Trewman and all his fellows and no moe; and look sharp you to one-head [unity] and no moe

ran one of these messages, and another, clearer in language, declared: 'Jack Trueman doth you to understand that falseness and guyle have reigned too long.'

Apart from the general economic causes of revolt special grievances existed in this year. The long war with France, now bringing defeat after defeat, had forced the government to levy taxes harsher than ever before. While Edward III was in his dotage and Richard II was a child the government had been carried on by a greedy and corrupt nobility of whom John of Gaunt, Richard's uncle, was typical. With them were allied a new class of tax farmers and money-lending merchants like John Lyons and John Leg, both of whom were executed during the revolt. Much of the money raised never reached the royal treasury at all.

Tax has troubled us all,  
Probat hoc mors tot validorum,  
The King thereof hath small  
Fuit in manibus cupidorum,

ran a popular rhyme of the period.

Further, taxation was being deliberately imposed by the landowners in parliament as a means of attacking the new prosperity of the villeins. 'The wealth of the nation', parliament declared, 'is in the hands of the workmen and labourers,' and, in 1380, a poll tax was imposed with the object of taking away some of this wealth. The labouring classes were assessed at sums varying between fourpence and one shilling a family. It



was this poll tax, intended and resented as an oppressive class measure, that precipitated the inevitable revolt in the spring of 1381 rather than at some other time.

Late in May the inhabitants of villages in South Essex attacked and killed tax collectors. They took to the woods and sent out messengers asking for support to other parts of the county and to Kent. On 5 June there was a revolt at Dartford. On the 7th Rochester Castle was taken and on the 10th Canterbury. By this time the revolt was general all over the Home Counties and East Anglia and a concerted march on London began. One army of rebels camped at Blackheath and another to the north of the city.

Inside, the rebels had many supporters. The apprentices and journeymen had their own quarrel with the government and with John of Gaunt, whose financier friends formed a ruling oligarchy in the city. Besides these were the numerous slum dwellers, reinforced during the past two or three decades by hundreds of runaway villeins. Even sections of the well-to-do citizens, including two aldermen, Horn and Sybyle, were friendly. On Thursday 13 June the London supporters of the rising opened London Bridge and Aldgate and the villeins poured into the city unopposed and took complete possession.

John of Gaunt's palace of the Savoy was burnt, but there was little disorder. The rebel leaders tried to prevent plunder and when it took place it was probably largely the work of the slum population. The king and his ministers took refuge in the Tower, and on Friday they met the rebels at Mile End and promised to grant all their demands. At about the same time the Tower was forced and the Treasurer and Archbishop Sudbury, who as Chancellor was regarded as responsible for the poll tax, were taken out and executed. On the next day there was a massacre of the Flemings living in London. This, too, was probably the work of the Londoners, since the peasant rebels had no interest in what was purely an internal London feud.

After the Mile End meeting the majority of the peasants returned home, satisfied that their cause was won. Others, who realised that the government was only playing for time, stayed to see that the pledges given were carried out. It was now that the weaknesses inevitable in any peasant rising began to show itself. The peasants could combine for long enough to terrorise

the ruling class but had no means of exercising a permanent control over the policy of government.

A peasant state was impossible because the peasants were bound sooner or later to disperse to their villages leaving the landlords in control of the apparatus.

On Saturday the king again met the rebel leaders at Smithfield, and, under circumstances still obscure, their spokesman Wat Tyler was struck down by one of Richard's followers. An immediate clash was only prevented by the king hastening to reaffirm the promise made at Mile End. The rebels then left London, most to go home, a few of the more far sighted to prepare for resistance in the provinces.

While London was the centre of revolt, it was not confined to the Home Counties. All England south and east of a line drawn from York to Bristol had risen. Manors were stormed and lords and lawyers who had made themselves specially hated were killed. The monasteries, which had been the slowest to commute the services of their villeins, suffered most. At St Albans the abbey was sacked. At Bury the head of the prior was set up in the market-place alongside that of the Lord Chief Justice. Even after the rebels had left London the pacification of the provinces was still a formidable task.

The gentry and their followers, who had crept into hiding during the rising, now gathered in London to take their revenge. The promises twice made by the king were repudiated and the common people of England learnt, not for the last time, how unwise it was to trust to the good faith of their rulers. The royal army began a bloody progress over the disturbed areas. Hundreds were slaughtered with or without trial, and when the people of Waltham pleaded the promises made at Mile End they were answered brutally, 'Serfs you are and serfs you will remain.'

But, though the rising had failed, there was no complete return to the old conditions. The lords had been badly scared. In 1382 a new poll tax was voted by parliament, placed only on the landowners on a plea of 'the poverty of the country'. In 1390 the attempt to keep wages at the old level was abandoned when a new Statute of Labourers gave the Justices of the Peace the power to fix wages for their districts in accordance with the prevailing prices.

The decades after 1381 saw a series of minor risings and the

villein unions continued to exert pressure for higher wages and for the commutation of services. Commutation went on steadily, and the fifteenth century was probably the period of the greatest prosperity for the labouring population of rural England. Peasant agriculture on small, compact farms began very gradually to replace the open field system. The period was one of slowly falling prices masked in part by a lowering of the weight of silver in the coinage, and real wages were consequently high and tended to rise.

These favourable conditions were not the result of the revolt so much as a general economic trend, but the revolt did give the peasantry a new independence and a sense of their power and common interests as a class. After 1381, even more than after Crécy, it was impossible for the ruling class to treat them without a certain respect springing from a very real fear. The serf became a free peasant farmer or a wage labourer.

## **7 The Political Significance of the Lollard Heresy**

In the first centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire the church had been the sole guardian of learning and of the traditions of the ancient civilisation. Its monasteries were centres of scholarship, poor in quality as a rule but eminent amid the surrounding ignorance. The great monastic orders, Benedictines, Cluniacs, Cistercians, not only helped to keep alive learning and the fine arts but also a knowledge of agricultural and industrial technique. But by the fourteenth century, the influence of the church had declined. Churchmen were neither generally respected nor generally deserved to be. For this there were a number of reasons, some universal, some peculiar to England.

The first was a direct result of the influence the church had gained in the Dark Ages, which it had used to secure its endowment with vast estates and great wealth. As the monastic orders became great landowners they ceased to be anything else and they shared to the full the hatred felt by the masses for their class. By reason of its endowments the church was an integral part of the feudal system and shared in its decline.

The collection of tithes was another constant source of dispute and there was a general feeling that the priests were

more interested in their tithes than in the instruction and relief of their flock. This belief is supported by a list of sins typical of the peasantry drawn up to assist the priest when hearing confessions. The first sin listed is refusal to pay tithes and the next two are neglect to pay promptly and in full. Almost all of the other nineteen sins are breaches of ecclesiastical discipline or failure to render dues and services to the lord of the manor. A German medieval writer expresses a common view when he says:

I saw a man singing and celebrating Mass. It was Money who sang and Money who chanted the responses. I saw ... how he laughed up his sleeve at the people whom he was cheating.

It is difficult to be certain that the church was more corrupt and worldly in the fourteenth than in earlier centuries, but its faults were more apparent because of the higher general standard of civilisation. The clergy were now no longer the only literate class. Laymen were beginning to express views on religion and to criticise uneducated and negligent priests in a way their ancestors would not have been capable of doing. Langland complains that the upper classes argue about theology over their dinner and 'carp against clerks crabbéd words'.

Such changes were common all over Europe. England had special reasons for being anti-clerical. Few countries were so heavily taxed by the agents of the papacy. One of the main causes of the unpopularity of the monks was the fact that much of their wealth was sent out of the country to Rome. In 1305, the dislike of papal taxation was intensified by the transference of the Holy See to Avignon. From then till 1378 the popes were all French at a time when England and France were usually at war and when national sentiment in England was beginning to take shape. From 1378 to 1417 there were two rival popes, one at Avignon and one at Rome, each cursing and waging war on the other to the general scandal of Christendom.

Within the English church it is possible to see signs of a papalist and an anti-papalist grouping. The monks tended to be more directly dependant upon the pope and to try to extend his influence. The bishops, on the other hand, though no less orthodox theologically, were almost all drawn into the state machine and doubled their ecclesiastical posts with positions in

the higher ranks of the civil service. When crown and papacy agreed, as was very often the case, in their division of the spoils, no conflict arose. At other times the exactions of the papal tax-collectors and the demands of the papacy to fill the best English livings with its own nominees, often Italians, led to a clash in which high church dignitaries might be forced to take an anti-papal line.

Englishmen who had visited Rome reported the luxury and corruption of the papal court. Those at home had the opportunity of observing the same traits in the papal agents who flooded England, collecting taxes, selling pardons and doing a busy trade in false relics of saints. In the thirteenth century the last serious attempt to reform the church from within was made by the friars. At first they made a deep impression by their poverty, their simplicity and their democratic teaching. But they were hampered by their close connections with Rome, and by the fourteenth century their early enthusiasm had gone and they were at least as rich and worldly as the other monastic orders.

When about 1370 Wycliffe began to preach the confiscation of the wealth of the monasteries he was encouraged both by the great lords who hoped to profit by this and even by many of the parish priests who felt their own poverty in strong contrast with the wealth of the monastic orders. He based his attack on a theoretical communism which declared all right to wealth and authority to depend on the righteousness of the individual. All things must be held in common by the righteous, he argued, for only the righteous possess all.

His attacks on the 'Caesarean clergy' who held state offices was equally welcome to the nobles, who were beginning to regard themselves as the most suitable persons to fill such offices.

Wycliffe's connection with John of Gaunt, who protected and encouraged him as a weapon to despoil the church, prevented him from applying his communist theories to secular affairs. 'The fiend,' he wrote, 'moveth some men to say that Christian men should not be servants and thralls to heathen [i.e. ungodly] lords ... neither to Christian lords.'

Some of his followers, who were not, like him, subtle theologians, drew the social conclusions he was unable to draw. It was in his purely theological heresies that Wycliffe himself

was boldest and most revolutionary, and every one of these heresies had a political significance, all being anti-clerical, anti-feudal and democratic in implications and content if not in form. They insist on the right to private judgements in religion, on the idea that the righteous layman is as near to god as any priest can be. Hence the attack on transubstantiation and on the practice whereby the layman received only the bread in communion, the wine being reserved for the priest. Like all Protestants Wycliffe tended to regard sacraments as of minor importance as compared with preaching and a study of the Bible. He or his immediate followers produced the first English translation of the Bible and groups of Lollards all over the country were soon at work reading and interpreting it. Finally, he declared that it was better for a man to lead a good and active life in the world than to shut himself up in a monastery.

These ideas soon alienated Wycliffe's highly placed supporters and his theory was condemned and he himself expelled from Oxford, the first centre of Lollardry. This had the effect of scattering Lollard preachers all over the country, of transforming them from academic theologians to mass evangelists. They found support among the lesser gentry, the yeomen farmers and above all among the weavers of East Anglia – the classes from which Cromwell was to draw most of his followers in years to come.

The Lollards made such rapid progress that in 1382 the House of Commons insisted on the withdrawal by the King and the Lords of an ordinance they had passed to facilitate the arrest of heretics. Their resolution declared:

Let it be now annulled, for it was not the intention of the Commons to be tried for heresy, nor to bind themselves or their descendants to the prelates more than their ancestors have been in times past.

This attitude was probably at least as much due to the contempt in which the Church was held as to active sympathy with Lollard doctrine.

In spite of this stand an energetic persecution of the Lollards soon began. In 1401 the Statute *De Haeretico Comburendo* ordered the burning of obstinate offenders and a number of executions followed. In 1414 an attempted rising failed and its leader, Sir John Oldcastle, was burnt, after evading arrest for

nearly four years. The movement soon lost its more influential adherents and became more and more one of the poor and illiterate. In the generations after Wycliffe the Lollard preachers developed all the bourgeois and democratic tendencies latent in his teaching. They came to value poverty and thrift, to despise display and worldly pleasure. Throughout the Lancastrian period the sect lived on, savagely persecuted and driven underground, yet counting many followers above all among the weavers. It was the Lancastrian persecution that made the East of England solid in support of the more tolerant Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses.

When Lutheranism began to reach England early in the sixteenth century the Lollards were still in existence ready to welcome their new allies. In 1523 Tunstall, Bishop of London, wrote to Erasmus that Lutheranism was not 'some pernicious novelty; it is only that new arms are being added to the great band of Wycliffe heretics'. It was in the same classes and in the same areas in which Lollardry had been strong that the Protestant Reformation took the quickest and firmest root.

## V THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

### 1 A Century of Paradox

The fifteenth century was an age of violent contrasts which are reflected in the diverse and contradictory views expressed about it by historians. To some it has appeared a period of general decline, of ruined towns and political chaos. Others have pointed to the real increase of prosperity of the mass of the people, to the growth of trade and industry and to the development of parliamentary institutions in the period from 1399 to 1450. The key to the proper understanding of the age is that both views are correct but neither complete, that while feudal relations and the feudal mode of production were decaying, bourgeois relations and the bourgeois mode of production were developing rapidly.

The decline of feudalism did not only affect the baronage and agriculture, it affected also the towns and the guild organisation. The Black Death and the heavy taxation entailed by the Hundred Years' War dealt a heavy blow at the chartered towns. Contemporary records are full of the complaint of their decay, of ruined houses and streets unpaved, of harbours silted up and of population in decline. Even allowing for some exaggeration these records cannot be wholly disregarded. In 1433 parliament allowed a rebate of £4,000 when voting a tenth and a fifteenth 'in release and discharge of the poor towns, cities and burghs, desolate, wasted or destroyed or over greatly impoverished or else to the said tax greatly overcharged' and such remissions are common. An important exception to this decline was the continued progress of London and a few great ports like Bristol. The most profitable branches of foreign trade became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the organisation known as the merchant adventurers, who were able to squeeze out competitors and to canalise trade into a few



places. The growth, especially, of London became one of the reasons for the decline of lesser trade centres.

There is evidence, too, that the raids of pirates were more frequent as a result of the continued wars and there are many cases of towns as important as Southampton and Sandwich being stormed and burned by such raiders. Inside the towns the guilds were growing more exclusive and the apprenticeship system was ceasing to be a normal stage in the development of a craftsman and was being used to keep the guilds in the hands of a select minority. Under Henry IV it became illegal for any but freeholders with twenty shillings a year to apprentice their children.

The heavy burden of taxation and the rigid guild restrictions in the chartered towns had the effect of driving industry outside them into the village and suburbs. The weaving industry in particular, growing rapidly at this time, developed outside the towns and outside the guild organisation. An important part was played by one of the main technical innovations of the Middle Ages, the application of water power to fulling – an essential process whereby cloth was cleaned and thickened. As this became common practice towards the end of the fourteenth century, fulling mills began to be set up in new centres higher in the valleys, where a better water force could be obtained. Probably, too, this was a means of evading craft opposition to the new method. Gradually weavers were attracted to the areas where the fulling mills were being worked.

For all these reasons then, while many of the older towns were in a state of decay, new centres of production were springing up in villages, some of which in time became themselves towns, but with a new capitalist or semi-capitalist production, as industry was finding a new freedom. The medieval restrictions on usury were by now plainly outmoded and were generally disregarded.

Equally marked were the contrasts in the countryside. The nobles, who were losing those social functions that had been their justification in the earlier Middle Ages, had acquired in the French wars settled habits of violence. They were evolving on the one hand into modern landowners and on the other into gangster chiefs, each with his band of armed retainers, drawn from unemployed soldiers and those of the lesser gentry who

had been unable to adapt themselves to the changed conditions, men who regarded work as beneath their dignity and whose job was to terrorise weaker neighbours. In earlier times the nobles had their own courts of law. Now they used their armed followers to overawe and defy the local courts. Great nobles undertook to protect their followers from justice, and this practice, known as maintenance, became a permanent scandal. Nobody from parliament down to the obscurest bench of magistrates was secure from the menace of these bands, whose open intimidation prevented verdicts being given against the interests of their employers. When a suit brought two such nobles into conflict the proceedings often ended in a pitched battle.

The fundamental cause of this political gangsterism was the decay of the great estates as economic units. Agricultural prices were falling and a corresponding fall in rents prevented the lords from restoring their position at the expense of their tenants. For a time war plunder and the profits of war contracting gave them a partial solution, but with the ending of the Hundred Years' War the only means left by which many great lords could increase their income was sheer brigandage. The result was the use of estates as a base for the creation of new private armies, and it is in this background of the economic decline of the great estates that we shall best understand the Wars of the Roses.

The situation is vividly portrayed in the *Paston Letters*, with their mixture of hard business sense and gangster politics. The same men who are growing rich by sheep farming are seen carrying out armed raids against their neighbours and using every device known to the lawyer to trick these neighbours out of their estates. One of the most characteristic features of the age, and one which marks it off sharply from the age of high feudalism was the wholesale perversion of the law by the ruling class for the ends of lawlessness rather than the open disregard of law.

As they shed their social functions the new nobility developed a fantastic if superficial refinement of manners, an elaborate mask of pseudo-feudal behaviour hiding the reality of decay. Clothing and armour became increasingly ostentatious, gold and silver were made into plate and ornaments as the lords vied with each other to produce the most magnificent

effect at court. Heraldry, the tournament, the elaboration of the code of chivalry reached their highest pitch just at the time when they were losing all relation to the business of war. This extravagance was at bottom the result of the gradual displacement of land by money as the prevailing form of property. While tenacious of their land and as eager as ever to add to their estates, the nobility were mere children where money was concerned as compared with the great merchants. The extravagance of the age enabled many of these merchants to secure a financial hold upon the nobility through usury, and some were able themselves to enter the ranks of the nobles. The de la Pole family, for example, were originally Hull merchants.

Both merchants and nobility were far more literate than their ancestors had been. Humphrey Duke of Gloucester collected one of the greatest libraries of the time, and the Earl of Worcester, famous even in the Wars of the Roses for his brutality, was equally noted for his culture and scholarship. It was this new literate class, coming into existence all over Europe, that provided the conditions necessary for the invention of printing. The former literate class, the clergy, was self-sufficing in the production of books, the copying of manuscript being one of the main occupations of monastic life. The lay reading public of the fifteenth century, besides being much larger, was composed of people who were far too busy to produce their own books and the professional copyists were too slow and too few to keep pace with the steadily increasing demand.

The first books produced by Caxton in England were mainly of a leisure type to suit the needs of this new public. His first book was the *Histories of Troye*; and *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers* (1477, the first book printed in England), Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* and Chaucer's poems, were all of this class. In the next generation the bourgeoisie began to use the press as a weapon, and during the Protestant Reformation a torrent of religious and political polemical works appeared, spreading the ideas of the reformers among a far wider circle than would have otherwise been reached.

The disorder and internal feuds of the fifteenth century seem to have been curiously limited in their scope. While the nobles and their followers fought among themselves the rest of the nation was but little disturbed, even at the height of the

Wars of the Roses. The Chief Justice Fortescue, writing in exile after the Battle of Towton, compares the general insecurity and misery in France with England, 'where no man sojourneth in another man's house without the love and leave of the good man'. Perhaps, as exiles will, he exaggerates the happiness of the land he was forced to leave, but it is clear that the wars which bulk so large in the history of the time were the work and the concern of a very small minority of professional fighters.

Out of the decline of the great estates there arose a very considerable body of substantial and prosperous peasant cultivators. Some of these were working on a small scale, but a considerable proportion were substantial yeomen – what we might now call a 'kulak' class – who, with smaller overheads and no social position to keep up, could make a good living where their 'betters' would have failed. These tenants of a new type were able to drive a hard bargain with the landowners and to pass on to them the fall in the price of their produce by securing lower rents. They might be considerable employers of wage labour, and it is clear that a process was already beginning by which the small cultivator was becoming a yeoman farmer, or, much more often, a wage earner. Nevertheless, there was probably at this time a larger proportion of peasant farmers, cultivating the land either as freeholders or as tenants, than at any other time in English history.

The labourers, benefiting from falling food prices, enjoyed wages that were relatively high. Under the Statute of Labourers they were fixed at threepence or fourpence a day, and the wages actually paid may have been even higher, though there is no means of telling how regular was the employment obtainable at these rates. A man hired by the year received 20s. 8d. in addition to his food and lodgings and a woman was paid 14s. Both the labourers and the peasant farmers were taking up spinning and weaving as domestic industries, and it is probably this at least as much as the condition of agriculture that made the age one of greater prosperity for them than those which preceded and followed it.

Thus, both the chaos and the prosperity of the fifteenth century were equally real and arose from a common cause, the transition from feudal to bourgeois society. The temporary growth of peasant agriculture was the result of the decline of the manorial organisation, taking place in a period when the

accumulation of capital was insufficient to allow of the development of a fully capitalist agriculture. Once this accumulation reached the necessary level, as it did in the next century, the extinction of the peasant farmer was inevitable. With the increase of the wool industry and of merchant and usurers' capital this accumulation was going on rapidly and began to make itself felt even before the close of the fifteenth century.

In the same way, the anarchy of the period was due to the decline of feudalism and of the form of state power which had developed out of feudalism. The bourgeoisie, though becoming more numerous and wealthy, were not yet strong enough to form the basis for a powerful, bureaucratic monarchy, and the local administration was not strong enough to stand up to the great nobles, a few of whom were more powerful individually than any of the feudal barons had ever been in England. The internal wars that resulted had the effect of destroying the power of these nobles, who perished in an unsuccessful attempt to secure control of the state apparatus. The struggle left both crown and bourgeoisie relatively and absolutely stronger than before and ready to form an alliance very much to their mutual advantage.

## **2 Parliament and the House of Lancaster**

For some years after the rising of 1381 the government was carried on in Richard's name by the Council, that is, by the ruling clique of nobles grouped around John of Gaunt. But Gaunt's authority had been weakened by the evidence the rising had given of his universal unpopularity and by the intrigues of rival nobles. An opposition party soon began to gather round the king, challenging the supremacy of Gaunt. To a large extent the grouping was personal, composed of the king's friends and those who found themselves shut out from the spoils of office. It included a number of the younger nobles like the Earl of Oxford and of recently ennobled families like that of Michael de la Pole, the Hull merchant. There was also an important cleavage among the London merchants. The drapers, that is those concerned with the wool and clothing trade, supported John of Gaunt while those dealing in

foodstuffs supported the king. It is probable that the lines of this division were connected with the fact that the royal party were opposed to the continuation of the French war, in which the wool merchants were naturally the most interested.

Some years of struggle between the two parties culminated, in 1386, in the impeachment of the King's Chancellor, the Earl of Suffolk. Impeachment was a new procedure, in which the House of Commons acted as accusers and the House of Lords as judges. It was developed mainly as a method of limiting the royal power by attacking the king's servants and was a primitive method of securing the responsibility of ministers to parliament. The impeachment of Suffolk was followed by the setting up of a committee of control, the Lords Appellant, after the pattern that had become traditional with the barons in their conflicts with the crown. It differed from earlier attempts of the kind by its close relation to parliament, to which it was directly responsible for its actions.

For a short time the Lords Appellant were able to hold power, but in 1389 Richard executed a *coup d'état* and assumed control. The period that follows is one of the most obscure in English history, both because the motives of the parties are quite unknown and because of the complicated cross-currents resulting from personal feuds and the shifting of allegiances from side to side. But it was a period in France and elsewhere of growing royal absolutism and there is reason to believe that Richard was working on a deliberate plan of establishing dictatorial power.

For the first years after his *coup d'état* he was careful to conciliate the Commons and they in turn worked with him fairly harmoniously. The period is important because for the first time the House of Commons begins to appear as a political force independent of the great nobles. This alliance between king and Commons is easily understandable. The king had seized power in defiance of the bulk of the nobility and could not afford to lose the support of the lesser gentry as well. At the same time no government of the period could exist without the financial backing of a strong party among the London merchants and Richard was able to secure for his friends the control of the City of London.

The position of the small landowners was also insecure. On one side they were menaced by the demands of the peasants

and labourers, on the other by the growing power and violence of the great nobles who threatened to engulf them. On this basis an uneasy alliance was formed, in which both sides were aware of the extent to which the other depended upon them and determined to exploit the situation to the full.

An undercurrent of opposition to Richard soon developed as a result of his extravagance in dissipating the crown estates and his ruthless suppression of all opposition. The banishment of Henry Bolingbroke, John of Gaunt's son, and the seizure of his estates when Gaunt died, alarmed even those nobles who had remained friendly or neutral. The merchants were alienated by the illegal taxation and by the failure of the government to suppress piracy. In this situation Richard took a step which has never been adequately explained. He secured a packed parliament by manipulating the elections, and, to make doubly sure, summoned it to meet at Shrewsbury away from a possible outbreak in London, and overawed it with an army of Welsh archers. From this parliament he secured a vote of taxes for life and persuaded it to transfer its powers to a committee under his personal control. For a year his power appeared to be absolute, but it rested on nothing but his Welsh mercenaries, and, when Henry Bolingbroke landed in 1399 to claim his forfeited estates, Richard found himself without supporters.

For the second time a king was deposed by parliament after an armed seizure of power. This time parliament went farther than in the case of Edward II. Then Edward's son had succeeded without question: now a new king was appointed by parliament who was not by hereditary right the next in succession and whose title depended only on conquest and a parliamentary vote.

The new king, Henry IV, was thus committed to a policy of conciliating the gentry and the town middle class, and during his reign parliament reached its high-water mark for the Middle Ages. If the support of the Commons was to be secured, some attempt had to be made to end the anarchy of the great nobles. But it was largely by their support that Henry had come to the throne and they expected in return an even greater licence. As a result the king was faced in 1403 with a general revolt of the wild marcher lords of the North and West, led by the Earl of Northumberland and Mortimer, Earl of March, whose descent from Edward III was nearer than Henry's own.

They were supported by the Scotch and by the Welsh, who had risen under Owen Glendower and enjoyed a generation of independence. It was only the mutual suspicions of these allies and their consequent military blunders that enabled Henry to defeat them in a battle at Shrewsbury.

For the rest of his reign he displayed a diplomatic ability in the avoidance of issues that prevented him from meeting serious opposition. He had added to the estates of the crown those of the Duchy of Lancaster and so was able to avoid making excessive demands for money, demands that would certainly have been resisted. It became customary during this reign for the different taxes to be earmarked by parliament for specific purposes. The crown estates went for the upkeep of the royal household, tunnage and poundage, a tax on imports, to maintain the navy and the coast defences which were considerably improved. The custom on wool was used for the defence of Calais and other taxes for the general defence of the kingdom.

Election to parliament was now a privilege rather than a burden, and in the shires a struggle began to keep the control of the elections in the hands of the gentry. The rising class of free peasant farmers began to take an active part in the elections in the shire courts, and, in 1429, an Act was passed to limit the franchise. It states its object with a remarkable frankness. Whereas, it declares, elections

have now of late been made by very great and excessive number of people ... of the which most part was by people of small substance, or of no value whereof every one of them pretended [i.e. claimed] a voice equivalent, as to such elections to be made, with the most worthy knights and esquires,

in future the right to take part shall be confined to those who 'shall have free[hold] tenement to the value of forty shillings by the year at the least above all charges'. The forty shillings freeholders continued to have a monopoly of the county franchise till the Reform Bill of 1832. In the towns there was no uniform franchise, each conducting elections according to its local custom. The Act of 1429 was followed in 1445 by another requiring that those who were elected to parliament should be gentlemen by birth.



For long before this, elections had been rigged and parliaments packed, but now, with the number of electors reduced and as the anarchy of the fifteenth century grew more profound, the manipulation of parliament became the regular practice. The great lords came to Westminster with bands of retainers and parliament degenerated into a mere instrument for carrying out the desires of the ruling group of the moment. The House of Commons had deprived itself of the mass basis that alone could have made resistance to such pressure possible.

The change is marked by the substitution of the Bill of Attainder for the older practice of impeachment. By a Bill of Attainder the group controlling parliament could have its enemies condemned and sentenced by legal enactment without any form of trial. Throughout the Wars of the Roses every turn of fortune was followed by a wholesale destruction of the defeated.

In these struggles parliament became a cypher and lost almost all of its practical importance. Yet the fact that it was kept and manipulated and used as an instrument was a reflection of the place it had won. All over Europe similar bodies were in decay because there was no middle class powerful enough to keep them alive. In England the middle classes – gentry and merchants – were strong enough to be valued as allies by both sides. The very fact that parliament proved pliable was an argument against reducing its powers and, at the end of the fifteenth century, these powers were if anything greater in theory than ever before. As a result parliament was retained by the bourgeoisie as a weapon ready to hand whenever they were strong enough to use it.

### **3 The Hundred Years' War – II**

No clear economic motives such as led to the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War can be discerned in its renewal by Henry V in 1415. Here, as often during the fifteenth century, we are left with a sense of parody, of a dying class following a policy blindly for no better reason than that it had been tried before. It is almost as if an inner compulsion was driving crown and nobility into the course of action inevitably fatal to themselves

but unavoidable because no course more immediately hopeful could be found. It was a situation characteristic of an age on the edge of a great social transformation and can be paralleled by the equally blind and suicidal impulse which we have seen driving the reactionary forces towards war and fascism.

Such an impulse can usually be defended with plausible political reasoning, and there were an abundance of satisfactory political reasons for the renewal of the attempt to conquer France in 1415. At home Henry's position was still insecure and a campaign in France was the most obvious way both of conciliating and finding employment for the great nobles. For them such a war meant the opportunity of unlimited plunder and in their eyes Richard's peace policy had been one of his main offences. A claim to the French throne, however baseless, meant an immediate strengthening of Henry's position as King of England, diverting attention from the flaws in his own title.

At the same time there was considerable social unrest as was indicated by the Lollard rising led by Sir John Oldcastle in 1414.

In France the ally without whom no attempted conquest could possibly be successful was provided by the civil war that had broken out between the Dukes of Burgundy and Orleans. The Orleanist faction controlled the imbecile king, Charles VI. In the summer of 1415, Henry, having concluded an alliance with the Burgundians, landed with an army in Normandy.

Just as the war was an unoriginal copy of an old policy so the strategy pursued in the first campaign followed slavishly the pattern set by Edward III in his Crécy campaign. After a siege in which disease carried off half the invaders, Harfleur at the mouth of the Seine was captured. Henry then plunged recklessly into the interior, only to be cornered at Agincourt by an army that outnumbered his by about six to one.

Here in their turn the French repeated all the old errors and suffered a defeat even more crushing than that of Crécy. Henry was too weak to follow up the victory and returned to England.

Two years later he began a more systematic invasion which had as its object the piecemeal reduction of Normandy. This was done by a methodical seizure of one district after another, each gain being consolidated and the inhabitants of the new

territory conciliated so that it formed a base for a further advance.

This realistic strategy, together with sweeping successes by his Burgundian allies, enabled Henry to secure, at the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, a recognition of his claim to the French throne to which he was to succeed on the death of Charles VI. At the time of Henry's death in 1422 half of France was under his direct control. His brother the Duke of Bedford continued the war along the same lines and by 1428 the French were desperately defending their last important stronghold at Orleans.

It was at this moment that the curious figure of Joan of Arc appears, throwing a light on one of the obscurest aspects of medieval history. The bare outlines of her career are remarkable enough. A peasant girl from Lorraine, she persuaded the French authorities to give her a position of authority in the army that was attempting to relieve Orleans, an army that had ceased to believe even in the possibility of victory. Her arrival disheartened the English and encouraged the French to such an extent that the siege was quickly raised. Further successes were followed by the crowning of the dauphin, son of Charles VI, as King of France at Rheims in 1429. Less than a year later, after some futile campaigns that there is every reason to believe were deliberately sabotaged by the French military authorities, Joan was captured and burned as a witch by the English in the Rouen market-place in 1431.

Her acceptance by the French authorities appears to have been the result of a court intrigue, but this does not explain the extraordinary effect she had on the common soldiers of both French and English armies. She acted as a trigger force, releasing an energy hitherto latent and giving the war against the English, previously only an affair of the nobility, a popular, national character. Against this national resistance the professional armies of the English were as powerless as they had been in the age of du Guesclin.

It is impossible to be certain about the character of the force released by Joan, but all the evidence there is points to its connection with the witch cult, which existed through the Middle Ages as a secret religion of the exploited masses. The social history of the cult has been lost because it was a religion mainly of the illiterate and because it was savagely persecuted

and forced to exist underground. In part it was a survival of pre-Christian nature worship, in part a direct negation of Christianity. Men who felt that church and state were leagued against them turned for consolation to the old enemy of the Christian mythology, the devil. The French historian Michelet declares that 'the medieval peasant would have burst but for his hope in the devil.'

The cult was strongest where the peasantry was poorest and most wretched – very strong in France and Germany, for example, and stronger in Scotland than in more prosperous England. Fragmentary references indicate that it was often connected with political unrest and conspiracy. Its organisation, in local groups, or covens, and districts with coven and district leaders whose identity was unknown to most of the members was curiously like that of an illegal party.

It was this force that appears to have been swung by Joan or by whoever the persons were who were responsible for her actions, against the English. Her appearance implies a recognition by the tormented French peasantry that the expulsion of the English was the first step towards a mitigation of their misery. Joan's connection with the cult would explain the eagerness of the French authorities to get rid of her as soon as possible when she served their turn, their failure to make any attempt to rescue her from the English and her close association with Gilles de Rais and the Duke of Alençon, both of whom were afterwards proved to have been connected with the cult.

The continued success of the French after the death of Joan was due to other factors besides the enthusiasm that she released. A quarrel between the English and the Burgundians united the two warring factions against the invaders and is probably the main cause of their defeat. The French armies also made an important tactical innovation – the use of artillery in battle as well as for siege operations. The Battle of Chatillon in 1453 exposed the limitations of the traditional English methods when used in attack on a prepared position defended by even the crude cannon of the period.

But long before the Battle of Chatillon the war had been virtually lost. The difficulties of the army in France had been increased by dissensions at home after the death of the one really capable commander and politician, the Duke of Bedford, in 1435.

The corruption and mismanagement of the nobles who ruled in the name of Henry VI – an infant when he came to the throne and later half-witted – led to the army being starved of suppliers and reinforcements. After the Battle of Chatillon the war was finally abandoned and only Calais remained in English hands.

#### **4 The Wars of the Roses**

Barely two years after the close of the French war the long continued anarchy and violence of the nobles burst out into open civil war. The Wars of the Roses, which occupy thirty years from 1455 to 1485, brought the period to a bloody close and completed the self-destruction of the nobles as a ruling class. The defeat in France had brought back the most warlike nobles, more dissatisfied than ever and eager to recoup their losses, with bands of soldiers in their pay unfit for any peaceful employment. Under such circumstances a general outbreak of civil war was inevitable.

In form, however, this war was a dynastic struggle between descendants of Edward III who had rival claims to the throne. To this extent it was the outcome of a policy that had been initiated by Edward III who had married his children to the heirs of the most powerful nobles in the hope of strengthening his family. In this way immense lands and wealth were concentrated in the hands of a small group of men all connected with the royal house and all politically ambitious. In the long run, instead of strengthening the crown it had had the effect of concentrating the opposition and making it doubly dangerous.

The early part of the reign of Henry VI was filled with a constant struggle between these groups, carried out by methods of intrigue, assassination and judicial terror.

By 1445 the king was under the control of a group headed by the Earl of Suffolk, while the opposition was led by Richard Mortimer, Duke of York, and the nearest claimant to the throne. During this long period the corruption of the ministers of the crown reached its highest point. In 1433 the revenue from the royal estates had dwindled to about £9,000 a year, a tiny fraction of what found its way into the pockets of the ruling

clique. The cost of government therefore fell more than ever upon the taxpayers.

Even before the end of the Hundred Years' War the general discontent aroused by this misgovernment had found expression in the Kentish revolt led by Jack Cade. This revolt had a double character. In part it was a kite flown by the Duke of York to test the popular feeling and the strength of the government. From this point of view it can be regarded as the first phase of the Wars of the Roses. But it was also a genuinely popular rising of the middle classes, merchants, and country gentry and yeomen farmers, against the misgovernment of the great nobles.

It was a very different movement from that of 1381. Serfdom was now almost extinct, and in Kent had long been extinct. The demands of the rebels, set out in the 'Bill of Complaints and Requests of the Commons of Kent', are wholly political in character, while the composition of Cade's army, which included many squires and well-to-do people as well as peasants and labourers, was far wider and more varied than that of the earlier rising.

The main grievances listed were the inclusion of 'persons of lower nature' in the King's Council, the mismanagement of the French war, a specially sore point in Kent, which, lying on the direct lines of communication, usually prospered in wartime, and the rigging of elections. The rebels demanded that the Duke of York and his party should be brought into the Council and the followers of Suffolk should be dismissed and punished.

Early in 1450 a strongly Yorkist parliament had met and impeached Suffolk who was banished. On his way to Calais he was seized by sailors on board ship, beheaded and his body thrown on Dover beach. This murder was the signal for revolt and on 1 June an army of 50,000 men from all parts of Kent marched on Blackheath to place their demands before the Council.

They were refused a hearing and a royal army moved out to Greenwich against them. They retired in good order to the wooded country around Sevenoaks. A panic then seized the government. Its army melted away and Cade's followers entered London, where they had many supporters, on 2 July. Lord Saye, one of the most unpopular ministers, and Crowmer, sheriff of Kent, were captured and executed. The rebels kept

good order and there was little looting, but this restraint soon created a real problem. To feed so large an army demanded considerable funds and Cade proposed to levy the rich London merchants for this purpose. They had hitherto supported the rebels, sharing the general hatred of the government, but now they began to wonder what this popular army would do next.

On 5 July they suddenly seized London Bridge, shutting off Cade and his men, quartered in Southwark, from the City. All next day a battle was fought for the bridge, but the rebels were at last driven back. On the 6th, while they were disheartened by this reverse, envoys from the government came offering a free pardon to all and promising to consider their demands. They dispersed, only Cade and a few of his followers remaining in arms. Cade was hunted down and killed and in a judicial progress through Kent, known as the 'harvest of heads', many of the most active rebels were executed.

The rising had exposed the weakness of the government, and in 1455 the Wars of the Roses opened with a victory for the Duke of York over the royal party at St Albans. The war that followed was not feudal in character, that is, it was not waged by barons who wanted to enlarge their domains and make themselves independent of the central authority, but by rival groups of nobles fighting to gain control of the state machine. This is the main reason for its ferocity. In feudal war one of the main objects was to capture opponents and hold them to ransom and only those who were too poor to pay were slaughtered. The Wars of the Roses were wars of extermination, every victory being followed by a crop of murders and by the confiscation of the lands of the defeated to the crown. Hence they were extremely destructive to the participants though they hardly affected the country as a whole. The numbers engaged were usually so small that the economic life of the time was little disturbed and the mass of the people seem to have been generally indifferent as to the result.

The war was in form a battle between rival gangs of nobles, but underlying the struggle was another real though hardly apparent issue. Supporting the Lancastrians were the wild nobles of the Scottish and Welsh borders, the most backward and feudal elements surviving in the country. The Yorkists drew most of their support from the progressive South, from East Anglia and from London, even if this support was not

usually very active. The ultimate victory of the Yorkists was therefore a victory of the most economically advanced areas and prepared the ground for the Tudor monarchy of the next century with its bourgeois backing.

Towton, the one great battle of the war, standing out among a welter of skirmishes, underlines this fact. The Lancastrians had advanced south with a great army of Northerners, plundering as they went. They reached St Albans but London closed its gates and prepared for a siege. Edward, the son of Richard Duke of York who had been killed in 1460, marched swiftly from Gloucester and entered the city. The Lancastrians retired and were caught in a violent snowstorm at Towton on 29 March 1461. Their defeat was as much a victory of the South over the Northern specialists in fighting as that of Yorkists over Lancastrians and brought the first phase of the war to a conclusion.

Edward IV, who came to the throne immediately after the battle, anticipated many of the characteristics of the Tudor absolutism. He maintained friendly and intimate relations with the merchants of London, Bristol and other great trading cities. From the beginning the Yorkists had found the support of the Hanse towns of immense value, securing them the command of the sea and enabling them to land at any point on the coast. At the same time, since his claim to the throne was made good in the face of the parliamentary title of the House of Lancaster, Edward ignored parliament almost entirely and, like Henry VII, preferred to raise money by direct negotiations with his merchant supporters. Not only did Edward establish intimate relations with the merchants, but he embarked upon trade himself on a grand scale. The forfeiture of the estates of his enemies made him richer than any English king before him, and he built whole fleets in which wool, tin and cloth were shipped abroad as far as the Mediterranean. He anticipated the Tudors, also, in devising new and arbitrary methods of taxation.

He also reduced as far as possible the power of the great nobles, creating a new nobility directly dependent upon himself as a counterbalancing force. But he was unable to do much to end the anarchy of internal disorder. His attempts to curb the nobility, including those who had been his supporters, led to a dangerous rising headed by the Earl of Warwick. This was



suppressed, but after Edward's death in 1483 the older nobles under his brother Richard had little difficulty in ousting the new men whom he had left to govern for his young son. Richard made himself king after having Edward's sons murdered but in his turn found himself involved in a struggle with the nobles who had helped him to power. This inevitable struggle involved all the kings of the period in a contradiction that remained insoluble till almost all the great families had become extinct.

When Henry Tudor, who produced a remote claim to the throne, landed at Milford Haven, the treason and desertion that had been a constant feature of the age reasserted itself and Richard found himself almost without supporters. The Battle of Bosworth, fought on 22 August 1485, by a mere handful of men on either side, ended the Wars of the Roses and with them a whole historic epoch in England. The new monarchy founded by Henry VII was of a totally new kind, based upon a new relation of class forces.

## VI THE NEW MONARCHY AND THE BOURGEOISIE

### 1 The Clothing Industry

It was during the political turmoil of the fifteenth century that England passed definitely from being a producer of wool to being a manufacturer of cloth. Though employing far fewer people than agriculture, the clothing industry became the decisive feature of English economic life, that which marked it off sharply from that of most other European countries and determined the direction and speed of its development. During the Middle Ages England was more rural than, for example, France. Its towns were smaller, never succeeded in winning so full a measure of self-government, never came into so sharp an opposition to the feudal lords or the mass of the peasantry. But rural England was more developed, its peasantry freer and less exploited. It was this evenness of development, this relative weakness of a specifically urban and so partially feudal production of manufactured goods, which made the development of a capitalist textile industry, inevitable in any case once a certain technical level had been reached, so easy and rapid.

This textile industry developed first in South-west England and in East Anglia, around Norwich and in the towns and villages of the Stour valley, where the tall perpendicular churches and the many-windowed houses of the rich clothiers remain as evidence of a peculiar and long departed prosperity. East Anglia had always stood in a special relation to Flanders facing it directly across the narrow sea. While the other parts of England had developed a large scale export of wool, East Anglia had exported little. Instead it shipped corn to feed the industrial population of Ghent and Bruges, where, as a poem written about 1436 says:

Alle that groweth in Flaunderes greyn and sede  
May not a moneth fynde hem mete and brede.  
What hath thenne Flaunderes, be Flemmynges leffe or lothe  
But a lytelle madere and Flemmyshe clothe?  
By drapyng of our wolle in substaunce  
Lyvyng here (their) comons, this is here governaunce  
Wyth out on to wych they may not lyve at ease  
There moste hem sterve or wyth us most have peasse.

East Anglian agriculture was of a mixed character, sheep being reared as part of an arable tillage instead of on the large sheep walks of the exporting areas. Their wool was inferior in quality, that of Suffolk being ranked last of a list of forty-four brands drawn up in 1454, and valued at only 52s. the sack against 260s. for the best Hereford wool. Norfolk wool was not even considered worth a place on the list. This wool was not of such quality as to be welcome abroad and so it was woven at home into coarse fabrics from an early period. Probably the fact that it was not produced for export or in bulk led to less effort being made here than elsewhere to improve the breed.

Geographically, East Anglia was the area into which Flemish craftsmen tended to settle, and, as we have seen, such settlements began immediately after the Norman Conquest. Gradually the newcomers taught the natives their superior methods, and by the beginning of the fifteenth century great improvements had been made in the variety and quality of the cloths woven. Villages now quite obscure, like Kersey and Worsted, gave their names to cloths that were known all over the country and even began to compete with Flemish products in the European market.

At first exports were mainly in the form of half-finished cloth which went to Flanders to be sheared and dyed, the greater part of the profit remaining in Flemish hands. Their proverbial saying that they bought the fox's skin from the English for a groat and sold them the tail for a guilder was still almost as true as in the days when exports were confined to raw wool. This trade was at first carried on by the merchants of the Hanse towns who had been ousted from the wool export by the merchants of the staple but were able to gain control of this newer branch. But just as the staplers had been able to challenge and defeat the Italians in the fourteenth century, a native body known as the merchant adventurers wrested the

cloth export from the Hansards in the fifteenth. Establishing a 'factory' at Antwerp in 1407, they prospered in spite of the hostility both of the Flemish clothing towns and of the old-established staplers who still used Calais as their headquarters.

Among their advantages was a free and uninterrupted access to the supply of raw materials, which they could buy cheaper than the Flemings who had to pay a heavy duty. When in 1434 Flanders prohibited the import of English cloth a retaliatory prohibition of the export of wool was far more damaging. After normal trade relations were re-established under Henry VII in 1496, by the treaty known as the 'Great Intercourse', the industry of Flanders continued to decline. In the Tudor period the Spanish invasion of the Netherlands and the fierce wars that followed completed the process, impelling a new wave of craftsmen to settle in England. Holland, which succeeded in winning its independence, was the less industrialised part of the Netherlands and became a commercial rather than an industrial rival in the sixteenth century.

The two-sided development is illustrated by figures showing the decline in wool exports alongside the increase in exports of cloth. In 1354 cloth exported was estimated at less than 5,000 pieces. In 1509 it was 80,000 pieces and in 1547, 120,000. On the other hand the duty on exported wool, which averaged about £68,000 in the reign of Edward III, had fallen to £12,000 in 1448. This development in the export of cloth was by no means uninterrupted. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries exports increased rapidly, then war and unsettled political conditions led to a shrinkage in export markets and even some absolute decline, and it was not till late in the fifteenth century that the advance was resumed. This middle period of decline was one of the main reasons for the growth of restriction and monopoly in the cloth export trade, as the dominant group of merchants tried to compensate for shrinking markets by securing a higher rate of profit in those still open.

Most important of all, the cloth industry developed almost from the start on capitalist lines. Once the production of cloth was carried out on large scale for the export market the small independent weaver fell inevitably under the control of the merchant who alone had the resources and the knowledge to

tap this market. Wool growers had also long been accustomed to sell their clip in bulk. The minute division of labour and the large number of processes between wool and cloth made it almost impossible to organise the industry on a guild basis. The Norwich guilds appear to have made persistent efforts to control the weavers of the surrounding villages but with little success.

The clothier, as the wool capitalist came to be called, began by selling yarn to the weavers and buying back the cloth from them. Soon the clothiers had every process under control. They bought raw wool, gave it out to the spinners, mostly women and children working in their cottages, collected it again, handed it on to the weavers, the dyers, the fullers and the shearmen, paying for each process at fixed piece rates in preference to selling and rebuying at each stage. A statute of 1465 gives a detailed picture of the whole process and complains of the frauds perpetrated by the weavers in giving false weight. This statute is also notable as the first Truck Act, ordering that wages shall be paid in 'true and lawful money' and not in 'pins, girdles, and other unprofitable wares'. The rate of profit was generally high and the accumulation of capital rapid. As the industry spread from East Anglia to Somerset, to the West Riding and to other parts of the country the clothiers began to form the nucleus of a capitalist class more enterprising, more unscrupulous and more ready to explore fresh channels of investment than the conservative guildsmen of the older towns. Bristol, Hull and above all London became centres of far-reaching commercial activity and their great merchants began to rank with the nobility in wealth and influence.

A higher stage of concentration was reached when the clothiers began to collect a large number of artisans under a single roof and to carry out the whole industrial process there. This practice, vividly described in the novels of the Norwich weaver Thomas Deloney (1543-1600), became fairly common in the earlier part of the sixteenth century and roused general protest from the weavers. Some of its evils are described in the preamble of an Act of 1555 which aimed at limiting it.

For as much as the weavers of this realm have as well at this present parliament as at diverse other times complained that the rich and wealthy clothiers do many ways oppress them, some by setting up

and keeping in their houses diverse looms, and keeping and maintaining them by journeymen and persons unskilful, to the decay of a great number of weavers, their wives and households, some by engrossing of looms in to their hands and possession and letting them out at such unreasonable rents as the poor artificers are not able to maintain themselves, much less their wives, family and children, some also by giving much less wages and hire for the weaving and workmanship of cloth than in times past they did ...

The Act went on to limit the number of looms that a clothier might keep in his house, and the development of the industry out of the domestic stage appears to have been checked. Probably the extra profit to be gained by this concentration was not sufficient to drive the domestic weavers out of existence, while the machinery used was not so expensive as to enable the clothiers to secure a monopoly control.<sup>1</sup>

The rising rate of profit, the increase in commodity production and of international trade that were common to a greater or lesser extent through most of Europe at this time, created a serious currency crisis in the later part of the fifteenth century. There was a correspondingly increased demand for gold and silver money as the only satisfactory medium of exchange when credit was still in its infancy. Europe itself could not meet this demand. Small quantities of gold reached it from time to time, but more was exported, was lost in the wearing of coin or was immobilised as plate or jewelry. There was probably less gold in circulation about 1450 than during the Roman period. And while silver was mined, especially in Germany, the amount was not sufficient to meet the greatly increased demand.

A real famine of the precious metals, and especially of gold, the most convenient medium for international trade, began to act as a check to the continued increase of commerce. All European countries attempted, without the slightest success, to prevent the export of bullion, which in England was actually made a felony during the reign of Edward IV. It was the shortage of gold and the desire to find new sources of supply that gave the general impulse to the geographical discoveries which, in the sixteenth century, opened up vast new territories for European exploitation.

<sup>1</sup> See page 287.

Columbus himself, who wrote that 'Gold constitutes treasure, and he who possesses it has all he needs in this world as also the means of rescuing souls from Purgatory and restoring them to the enjoyment of Paradise,' was fully aware of the nature of his objective. His voyage was the signal for the commencement of the first, the greatest and, in its effects, the most far-reaching of the world's gold rushes.

## **2 The Discoveries**

It was in 1492, seven years after Bosworth, that Columbus reached the West Indies. Six years later still Vasco da Gama cast anchor at Calicut after his voyage round the Cape of Good Hope. These events were the climax of a long series of changes and essays, transforming the relations between Europe and the East and beginning its relation with the continent of America.

During the Middle Ages trade between Europe and Asia was carried on along several routes. The most easterly was by way of Trebizond, up the Don and Volga and into the Baltic, with the Hanse towns at its northern extremities. A second was by way of the Persian Gulf, Baghdad and Aleppo and thence by sea to Constantinople, Venice and Genoa. A third was up the Red Sea and overland to the Nile, where Italian galleys awaited their cargoes at Alexandria. All these routes had one thing in common: they involved the transshipment of goods and their carriage overland on horse or camel back, in most cases for considerable distances. The sea voyages were purely coastal, and, in their Asiatic part, were carried out by Arab sailors and shipping. All goods were passed on from merchant to merchant along the route, each taking a substantial profit.

The high cost of land transport made it unprofitable to carry any but the least bulky merchandise. So for Europe the East became 'gorgeous', a land yielding silks, spices and precious stones, an Eldorado of incredible richness. And, in the main, the trade was a one way trade, since Europe had no commodities small enough in bulk to export and was compelled to pay for goods in gold and silver, diminishing her already inadequate store of bullion. The Eastern trade was frowned upon by the statesmen as immoral, wasting treasure in return for luxuries, but the merchants of Italy and the Hanse, who

received goods by a continuation up the Rhine of the Mediterranean routes as well as through Russia, found it profitable. Each route was the jealousy guarded monopoly of a city or group, which kept out all competitors, if necessary by armed force.

During the fifteenth century these routes were threatened by invading Mongols who overran much of Russia and by Turks who drove the Arabs out of Asia Minor and in 1453 captured Constantinople. The Egyptian route, though not cut, was threatened. The overland routes were not rendered impossible but the risk was much greater, freights rose and profits declined. Further, nation states were growing up, with strong central governments, which had no share in the old routes and were anxious to develop routes of their own and so destroy the trade monopoly of Venice and Genoa. These states included Spain and Portugal, created out of the struggle to expel the Moors, France, created out of the struggle with England, and, a little later, the Hapsburg monarchy which arose from the defence of Eastern Europe against the Turks. The new routes were all opened by state and not by private enterprise and could not, perhaps, have been developed at this time in any other way.

Finally, the fifteenth century had seen a great advance in the technique of ship building and of navigation. The typical merchant ship of the Middle Ages was a basin-shaped affair with a single mast in the middle. It was quite incapable of sailing against the wind, and, in rough weather, was almost unmanageable. In England, at any rate, ships larger than 100 tons were seldom built before 1400. After this rapid progress was made. A list of ships used by the government in 1439 for the transport of troops included eleven between 200 and 360 tons. Another similar list made in 1451 contains twenty-three ships of 200 to 400 tons. A little later William Canynge, a famous Bristol merchant, owned 2,853 tons of shipping, including one vessel of 900 tons.

Corresponding advances were made in seaworthiness. The Spanish and Portuguese developed the caravel for coastal trade in the Atlantic. It was a longer, narrower craft, with a high forecastle and three or four masts. The compass, known since the twelfth century, was perfected and came into general use, the astrolabe was adapted for the calculation of latitude and



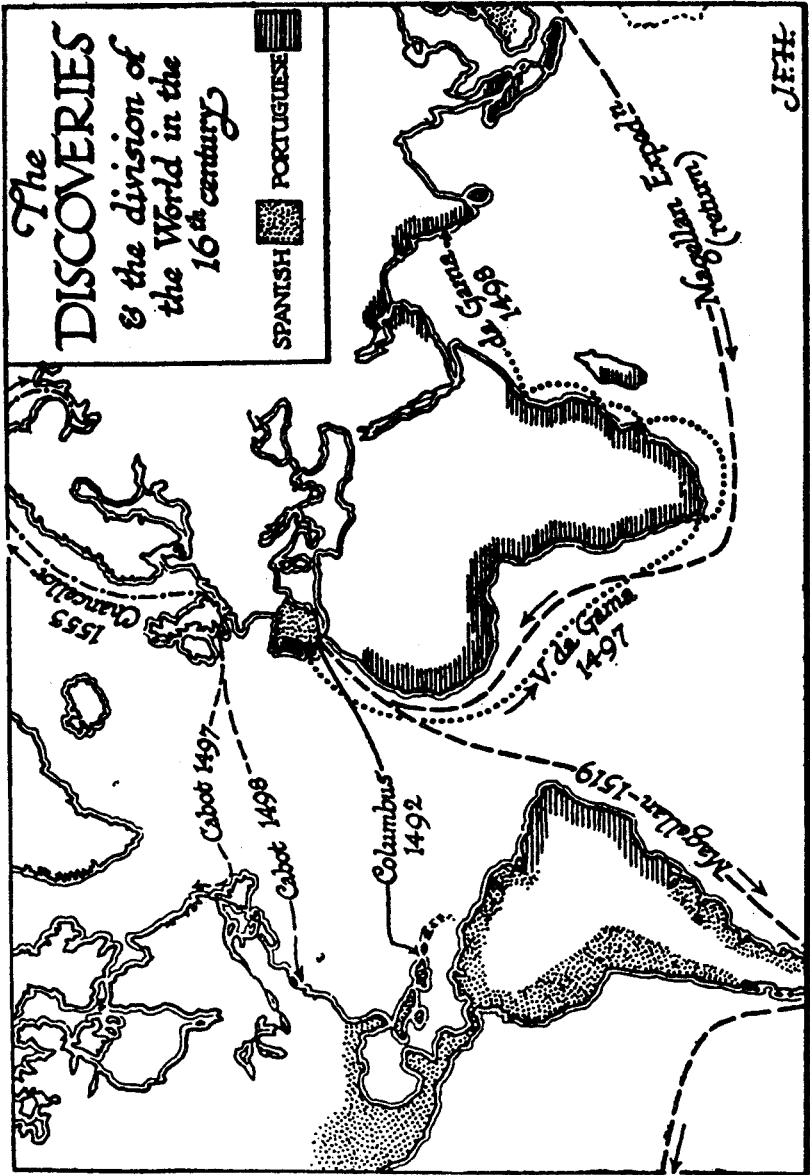
map makers were beginning to replace mythical cities and dragons with a certain measure of accuracy. It was at last technically possible to leave the coasts and to undertake transoceanic voyages.

The first attempts were made by Portugal, whose seamen, under government control, began a systematic exploration of the coast of Africa. Cape Bojador was reached in 1434, Gambia in 1446, the Congo in 1484. When Vasco de Gama returned to Lisbon from India, with a cargo that is said to have repaid sixtyfold the cost of his voyage, the effect was shattering. Even under the most favourable circumstances imaginable the old routes with their high freights and the score of merchants who handled the goods in transit could never compete. The power of the Italian merchant towns was destroyed and the whole centre of gravity of Europe shifted towards the Atlantic coast.

The Cape route was a Portuguese monopoly. Rivals had to find others and so Spain led the way to the West, discovering a new continent where a short cut to the Indies had been expected. The new continent proved to be rich in gold and silver beyond anyone's dreams. From Mexico, from Chile, from Potosi came a river of bullion carried by treasure fleets, that, even after pirates and shipwreck had taken heavy toll, still provided huge profits for the German, Italian and Flemish financiers, the Fuggers and Grimaldis, who equipped and insured them.

For in fact, neither Spain nor Portugal had sufficient capital resources to exploit their new possessions or to absorb the wealth they produced. The Spanish governments made attempts to keep their precious metals at home but they flooded irresistibly over Europe, sending prices soaring and stimulating the commerce of Spain's rivals. Of these, France, Holland and England became the most important.

Not strong enough as yet to challenge Spain and Portugal in the regions where they were established, English seamen were forced to seek ways of their own. In 1497 John Cabot, a Genoese sailor in English pay, sailed from Bristol, discovered Newfoundland and sailed along part of the North American coastline. Gradually the existence of a great land mass forming a barrier between Europe and the East was realised, and, since this bleak coast gave no promise of easy wealth such as the Spanish were finding further south, efforts were concentrated



on finding a way round – that North-west Passage that remained the goal of English navigators for a century. The attempts failed, but had as byproducts the establishment of fur-trading stations in the Hudson Bay territory and of the fisheries in Newfoundland.

Failing to find a way here the English turned their attention to the North-east and in 1553 a group of London merchants formed one of the first joint-stock companies with a capital of £6,000 and sent Richard Chancellor and Hugh Willoughby in an expedition round the north of Norway. Willoughby was caught in the ice and perished but Chancellor reached Archangel and established regular trade relations with Moscovy. A Russian Company was established and in 1557 a Russian ambassador reached London. Other important new fields of trade were Iceland and the Baltic, where the weakened Hanse towns were forced to share their long established monopoly.

The struggle to secure national monopoly of profitable areas and routes and to break up the monopoly of rival powers is the main characteristic of sixteenth century maritime policy. This is reflected in the dominant theory of the time, the so-called mercantilism. The mercantilists aimed at amassing in their own country the greatest possible amount of treasure. To this end Navigation Acts attempted to confine trade to English ships so that the navy could be kept strong. Bounties were paid to exporters of corn since corn exports were held to encourage agriculture and to bring in treasure, and home industries were protected with tariffs. This was the theory held by the government and the bourgeoisie in England right up to the Industrial Revolution. So long as merchant capital was predominant it was natural to regard money as the measure of wealth and national prosperity. With the rise of industrial capital towards the end of the eighteenth century money came to be regarded rather as a commodity among other commodities and the wealth of a nation to be measured by the volume of its production of commodities of all kinds.

In the sixteenth century England's main export was cloth and the two main objects of exploration, in accordance with the mercantile theory, were the securing of gold and silver and the finding of new markets for English cloth. If Hakluyt was allowing imagination to run ahead of practical possibility when he wrote:

Because our chief desire is to find out ample vent of our wollen cloth, the natural commoditie of this our Realme, the fittest place which in all my readings and observations I find for that purpose are the manifold islands of Japan and the regions of Tartars next adjoining,

the century certainly saw a great increase in export trade and those regions which failed to provide a market for cloth were generally turned to some account by English merchants.

In the early part of the sixteenth century exports of unfinished cloth had steadily increased until 1550. After that date, mainly owing to disturbances in the Netherlands, a great trade depression had set in, providing the strongest incentive to find new markets for English cloth. The outlying parts of Europe, as well as Africa, Asia and America, were all considered as possible markets. But the failure of old markets and very slow rate of growth in new ones forced those with capital to invest to try their fortune in new industries. The result was that in the late sixteenth century England saw the beginning of what might be described as a little industrial revolution. To the desire for new exports was added the stimulus of an increasing home demand, and a tendency to make in England many things which had previously been imported.

In this time, apart from great advances in the finishing of cloth, in soap making, brewing, shipbuilding and glass making which had previously existed only on a small scale, a whole range of new industries sprang up. These included the production, on a factory scale, of such things as gunpowder, paper, saltpetre and sugar. What is perhaps more important is that both the scale of industry was increased and new technical processes were introduced and many of these industries demanded quite complicated water-driven machinery. Many of them also, as brewing, soap boiling and salt making, required coal or coke in considerable quantities.

This resulted in a rapid increase in coal-mining, in which England took the lead of all Europe. Deep mining began, made possible by water driven pumps and improved ventilation methods. All this meant that the sinking of a coal mine, which had in the past been little more than scratching a hole in the ground, now became a complex operation demanding large

capital resources. And with the rapid increase in coal output we find the beginning of the concentration of certain industries in the coal producing regions and a great stimulus to shipbuilding to provide the fleets of colliers needed to bring the coal from the pits to London and other centres.

It was due largely to the extent of this first Industrial Revolution of 1540-1640 that England was able to take the lead in the second Industrial Revolution after 1760. It was the success of the new industries which enabled England, especially after the end of the war with Spain, to become a great world trading state. The wealth they brought strengthened the middle classes for their coming struggle for power in the revolution of the seventeenth century.

The quest for gold and silver involved England in a long war with Spain, which must be dealt with elsewhere. Bullion came into the country both as the result of hard competition for trade and of looting from the Spanish and Portuguese fleets. It did not come fast enough for the new capitalists, who were constantly complaining of the lack of adequate capital. But enough came in to create new problems, great misery for the masses as well as great riches for the traders and industrialists. To the growth of the cloth trade, the establishment of new factory industries and the geographical discoveries as features of the economic life of sixteenth-century England we must add a fourth, no less important, and having an even greater immediate effect on the lives of the people. This was the revolution in agriculture, leading to the creation of large-scale unemployment and the beginning of a modern proletarian class.

### **3 The Agrarian Revolution**

We can err, when considering any historical period, as much by fixing our eyes too resolutely upon the future as by fixing them too obstinately upon the past. Especially is this so in a clearly transitional age like the sixteenth century when feudal and capitalist traits jostle one another to form a total world that is neither feudal nor capitalist. What we have been describing in the last two sections is not the formation of capitalist society but the development of conditions out of which it necessarily arose,

the creation of the free market for the production and sale of commodities. In nothing was a free market more important than in land and in human labour, and, since England was still overwhelmingly agricultural, the two things went hand in hand.

Feudal agriculture had been largely collective, based on the plough team and the joint cultivation of the common lands that were both legacies of a distant tribal past. Such a collective agriculture could not pass directly to capitalist agriculture, and we have seen how the individual peasant cultivation of the fifteenth century was a transitory form arising from the break up of the manor. The peasantry had to be atomised, broken up into solitary and defenceless units, before they could be reintegrated into a mass of wage labourers taking part in capitalist production. Here lay the importance of the enclosures of the Tudor period.

Enclosures were not new. They had been going on ever since the Black Death and it is doubtful if the rate of enclosure in the first half of the sixteenth century was greater than in the middle of the fourteenth century. They were not carried out in all parts of the country and in no part was the enclosure of the land complete. Much land remained to the open field system till the end of the eighteenth century. Yet the Tudor enclosures have a decisive importance. The quantitative transfer of land from open field to enclosure and from arable to pasture, proceeding continuously up to this time, assumes the qualitative character of a widespread dispossession of the peasantry. The change coincided with the growth of population to perhaps five million, which may be regarded as the maximum which the land would support under the hitherto existing mode of production. Under these circumstances enclosures of an extent which earlier might have passed almost unnoticed were bound to involve sweeping social changes. Further, these changes coincided with the beginning of a rise in prices, the result of the influx of precious metals into Europe, that had the effect of doubling profits and almost halving wages by the end of the century. The 'prosperity' of the later Tudor period was in fact a vast transfer of wealth from the labouring masses to a small class of merchants and capitalist farmers. The rise in prices became in its turn an inducement to speed up enclosure, since the land became immensely more valuable. Rents and wages lagged far behind prices till it was

almost impossible for a farmer to avoid making a fortune.

The results of these enclosures have been described by More in his *Utopia* with an unsurpassed passion and a wealth of detail:

Your shepe that were wont to be so meke and tame, and so small eaters, now, as I hear say, be become so great devourers and so wylde that they eat up, and swallow downe the very men themselves ... Noblemen and gentlemen: yea and certyn Abbottes, holy men no doubt ... leave no ground for tillers, thei enclose al into pastures: they throw downe houses: they plucke downe townes and leave nothing standynge but only the churche to be made a sheephowse ... The husbandmen be thrust owte of their owne, or else either by coveyne and fraude, or by violent oppression they are put besides it, or by wronges and injuries they be so wried that they be compelled to sell all: by one means or by other either by hook or by crook they must needs depart awaye, poore selye, wretched soules, men, women, husbands, wives, fatherless children, widowes, woful mothers with their yonge babes, and their whole household small in substance and much in number ... And when they have wandered abroad tyll that be spent, what can they else do but steale and then justly pardy be hanged, or else go about a begging.<sup>1</sup>

The army of landless and propertyless men created by the enclosures was reinforced by two other contingents, one at the beginning of the period and one towards the middle. After the Wars of the Roses Henry VII set to work to break up the bands of retainers kept by the great nobles, a policy necessary to prevent the continual revival of civil war. He was able to succeed in this partly because the nobles had been too weakened by the long struggle to offer effective resistance and partly because, as the country began to be less disturbed and the nobles turned to the peaceful management of their estates, these armies of retainers seemed to them superfluous, an unnecessary expense to be got rid of as soon as possible.

These discarded retainers formed the most disreputable section of the unemployed. They were for the most part proud, idle, swashbuckling ruffians who turned naturally to robbery where the expropriated peasantry tried if possible to find new

<sup>1</sup> Hollingshed's Chronicle states that 7,200 thieves were hanged in the reign of Henry VIII.

employment. It was those men who provided some justification for the savage laws directed against beggars.

The third stream poured in when the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 and 1539 turned thousands adrift. The monks themselves mostly received pensions, but the far larger number of monastic servants were less fortunate. The relation of the dissolution of the monasteries to the enclosure movement has not always been properly appreciated. It is not true that the abbey did not enclose lands on their estates. The evidence available shows that there was little difference between monks and lay landowners in this respect. In fact, most monastic lands had been leased to or managed by the local gentry, leaving the monks as purely parasitic rent-receivers. But after the dissolution the greater part of the monastic lands fell into the hands of landlords of a new type, men who had already accumulated considerable capital and bought these estates at bargain prices with the intention of exploiting them to the uttermost. These new owners of the church lands were the men who set the pace and gave their more conservative neighbours an example they were ready enough to follow.

For all these reasons England in the first half of the sixteenth century was faced with the problem of a huge army of unemployed for whom no work could be found. In time they or their children were absorbed by the growing cloth industry of the commercial enterprises of the towns, but this was a slow process and one which the government could do nothing to hasten. They tried two remedies, legislation to check enclosures and ferocious penal laws against the victims. Neither proved effective and their frequent repetition is an indication of their failure. As early as 1489 an Act forbade the destruction of houses to which at least 20 acres of land belonged. Other Acts attempted to fix a proportion between corn and pasture land or to limit the number of sheep that a single farmer might keep. All were ignored or evaded for the excellent reason that the men who were charged with enforcing them, the Justices of the Peace, were the actual landlords who benefited by the enclosures. In any case, what the nascent capitalism required, consciously or otherwise, was not a free and prosperous peasantry – ‘the plough in the hands of the owners’ in Bacon’s phrase – but ‘a degraded and servile condition of the mass of the people, the transformation of them into mercenaries, and of their means of



labour into capital!' (Marx, *Capital*)

For this purpose the series of penal laws against the unemployed were more effective, however useless they might be as a remedy for unemployment. In 1536 it was decreed that 'sturdy vagabonds' should have their ears cut off, and death was made the penalty for a third offence. In 1547 anyone who refused to work was condemned to be the slave of whoever denounced him. He was to be forced to work with whip and chain, and if he tried to escape was to be hunted down, brought back and branded. In 1572 unlicensed beggars of fourteen or over were to be flogged and branded unless someone was willing to employ them. For a second offence they were to be executed unless someone would take them into service. For a third offence they were to be executed without mercy as felons.

Towards the end of the century a change can be noticed. The industries of the towns had absorbed a large part of the unemployed and the very growth of these towns had created an increased demand for bread, meat and other foodstuffs. The result was that arable farming became more attractive and the pressure of enclosure for sheep eased off. But it is important to notice that the movement was not merely from arable to pasture and back to arable again. It was from peasant, small-scale, arable farming to large-scale sheep farming and then back to arable on a large scale, to capitalist arable farming.

In the last decades of the century there was even a certain shortage of skilled agricultural labour, the result of the enclosures which had driven men from their farms to find work in the towns. In 1563 the Statute of Artificers ordered that all able-bodied men and women not otherwise employed were to work in the fields if required. At the same time the Justices of the Peace were to meet annually and to fix maximum wages according to 'the plenty and scarcity of the times'. It has sometimes been claimed that this Act was not intended to keep down wages, though what it actually did was to place with the representatives of the employing classes the power to fix maximum wages and to inflict penalties on all paying or receiving wages above the rates.

A few years later in 1572 the first Act for the levy of a compulsory poor rate was passed. Each parish was made responsible for its poor and anyone falling on the rates could be sent back to his place of birth. The more famous Poor Law of

1601 did little more than regularise existing practice and included arrangements for setting the poor to work upon 'a convenient stock of flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron and other necessary ware and stuff' and for the apprenticing of pauper children. From this Act developed the whole system of Poor Rate, workhouse, and settlement by parish that remained till the shock of the Industrial Revolution destroyed it.

The character of the social legislation of the late sixteenth century indicates that a new stage is being approached. While the primary accumulation of capital through the violent and predatory seizure of land and by other similar methods still continues,<sup>1</sup> capitalism has now secured a certain assured basis and these methods are now increasingly supplemented by the legal and more or less peaceful exploitation of the propertyless class that has been created. This advance was not won without desperate struggles, however, and some account of the peasant risings of the sixteenth century must be given in concluding this section. The first of these, and the most misleading in appearance, was the Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536. In form it was a reactionary, Catholic movement of the North, led by the still half-feudal nobility of that area and aimed against the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries. But if the leaders were nobles the mass character of the rising indicated a deep discontent and the rank and file were drawn in large measure from the dispossessed and from the threatened peasantry. The government had no standing army to take the field against the rebels and were saved only by two things. One was the support of the South and East, the result perhaps of old memories of the days of Towton. The other was the extreme simplicity of the rebels, who entered into long negotiations with the government, during which their forces melted away and those of their enemy collected till they were faced with overwhelming numbers and quickly dispersed. In the terror that followed leaders and rank and file suffered alike and for the rest of the reign of Henry VIII England was covered by force and by an elaborate system of spies and informers.

In the reign of the young Edward VI dissensions among the Council weakened the hand of government and a number of

<sup>1</sup> The primary accumulation of capital through the violent plunder and exploitation of colonial peoples still lay, as we shall see, in the future.

risings took place. The most important of these were a rebellion in Devon and Cornwall and another in Norfolk, both in 1549. The first of these, like the Pilgrimage of Grace, was in form Catholic but was of a more popular character, the upper classes being by this time too gorged with church land to wish for a Catholic restoration. The West was still strongly opposed to the Reformation and in Cornwall, where the people still spoke a Celtic dialect, the new English Prayer Book was specially unpopular, being just as unintelligible as, and less familiar than, the Latin missal it replaced. This rebellion was put down by German mercenaries after hard fighting outside Exeter.

The Norfolk rising was quite different in character and is, after the revolt of 1381, the most important of all the English peasant wars. Norfolk was probably the most Protestant county in England and the rising was entirely directed against the enclosures. Eastern England, with its well developed domestic industries, had a peasantry that was still relatively prosperous, that had held its land for generations and was quick to resist any attempt to take it away. There is clear evidence that the rebellion was brewing long before 1549, and when it began out of a quite trifling incident it spread with extraordinary rapidity.

On the night of 20 June a party of men at Attleborough pulled down fences that a landowner named Green had placed round land he had enclosed. Next day Green advised them to pull down the fences of his neighbour Kett against whom he had a grudge. Kett met the party at the boundary of his land, admitted his fault, expressed sorrow and offered to lead a revolt against the whole system of enclosures.

His part in the rising is obscure. He was a landowner, a member of an old Norfolk family, and throughout the rising we can see that his influence was thrown in the direction of moderation, of toning down its class character. It would appear that he had some feud with members of his own class which he hoped to use the rising to forward. However, he proved a capable organiser and an army of 20,000 men soon gathered for a march on Norwich, the second city of the kingdom. Such a body meant that the whole county was under arms. This is shown clearly when the total is compared with the estimates made later by the government of how many men Norfolk could provide for the army in case of war. In 1557 the number was put at 2,670. In 1560 it was put at 9,000, and this is the highest

estimate ever recorded. It was an optimistic guess, men on paper not men under arms.

On 22 July Norwich was taken and shortly after a force of 1,200 men under the Marquis of Northampton was routed. The government prepared a great army of 12,000, under the Earl of Warwick, known later as the Duke of Northumberland, a capable general and perhaps the greatest scoundrel who ever governed England. After a battle lasting two days Warwick's German cavalry broke the peasants and Kett and his brother rode out of the battle, leaving his followers to shift for themselves. The remnant of the rebels drew together behind a barricade of waggons and held out so stoutly that they secured a personal undertaking of safety from Warwick before laying down their arms.

The Ketts were pursued, taken and hanged, as were hundreds of others. The Norfolk gentry who had been terrified at the openly class character of the rising clamoured for a wholesale slaughter and not even Warwick's brutality could satisfy them. The chronicle which tells the story of the revolt says that he was forced to remind them that the rebels were the source of all their wealth, asking pointedly, 'Will ye be ploughmen and harrow your own land?'

Though suppressed, the rising had some striking results. It helped to stay the progress of the enclosures and to give East Anglia the predominantly peasant character which it long preserved and which made it a stronghold for parliament and of the most advanced section of the New Model Army in the Civil War. Its immediate effect was to bring about the fall of the government of the Protector Somerset, an aristocratic demagogue who had shown himself inclined to treat with the rebels rather than to suppress them, and whom the nobles suspected of wishing to halt the enclosures. He was replaced by Warwick, but four years later he, too, paid dearly for his brutalities in Norfolk. When Edward VI died in 1553, Warwick proclaimed Lady Jane Grey queen in place of Edward's sister Mary. Mary took refuge in Norfolk, where, so intense was the hatred of Warwick, this most Protestant of English counties rallied to the support of a Catholic queen against the self-styled champion of the Reformation.

#### **4 The Tudor Monarchy**

Henry VII, founder of the new monarchy<sup>1</sup> was in the fullest sense a symbolic figure. Winning his kingdom by force of arms he consolidated it by the homespun qualities of thrift, cunning, diplomacy and double-dealing. A capable soldier, he hated and avoided wars because war cost money. A capable business man, he administered and exploited his kingdom as scientifically and thoroughly as the new capitalist landowners did their estates. He was the living embodiment of all the virtues and vices of the thrusting bourgeoisie who prospered under the protection of the Tudor regime and to whose support it owed its stability.

He began his reign with the disadvantages of a strong opposition party, a title to the throne by no means strong and openly disputed, and the persistence of the general disorder which had characterised the whole period of the Wars of the Roses. But he had certain compensating advantages. The relative strength of the crown and the nobility had been greatly altered to the advantage of the former, not only because of the physical extinction of many noble families in the wars and the passing of many peerages into the hands of minors, but because the wholesale confiscations of the lands of the defeated had added immensely to the estate and income of the crown.

Above all, Henry had the support of the merchants, the clothiers, the town artisans, of all those who valued security and feared above all things the resumption of civil war. It is important to note that this support came from what we may begin to call the rural bourgeoisie as well as from the middle class in the towns. With this support Henry was able to go forward steadily to destroy every possibility of opposition and to lay the foundations of a despotism that was to last a century. The Tudor monarchy rested on the fact that the bourgeoisie – the merchant classes of the towns and the more progressive of the lesser gentry in the country – was strong enough in the sixteenth century to keep in power any government that promised them the elbow room to grow rich, but not yet strong enough to desire direct political power as they did in the seventeenth.

Two main objects presented themselves to Henry. The first

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 124-125

was to reduce the independent military power of the old nobility. The second was to accumulate such a treasure as would make him independent. How successful he was in the latter project is shown by the fact that in the twenty-four years of his reign he only had to summon seven parliaments, and only two of these in the last thirteen years. His first step against the nobles was a law prohibiting the keeping of retainers. This was backed by a royal monopoly of artillery, which had been much improved in the latter part of the fifteenth century and was now capable of reducing almost any medieval fortress. He developed the judicial authority of the royal council, in what came to be called the Court of Star Chamber which had powers to deal summarily with offenders who were powerful enough to defy the local courts. The Councils of Wales and of the North carried this machinery right into the heart of the most disturbed parts of the country. These courts, being mainly used against the nobles, were generally popular and through their influence the ordinary local machinery of justice, which had almost broken down under the anarchy of the preceding decades, was gradually restored.

Besides weakening the old nobility Henry began to create a new nobility drawn from the upper middle classes and directly dependent upon the crown. Such families as the Cecils, Cavendishes, Russells, Bacons and Seymours were all new creations of the Tudors. A lawyer, Dudley, one of the instruments of Henry's financial policy, was the father of that Duke of Northumberland whom we have seen as the butcher of the Norfolk rebels.

To Dudley, as to the Chancellor, Archbishop Morton, was given much of the responsibility of collecting the money which Henry desired above all things. The most diverse methods were used. Parliaments were induced to vote taxes for wars that Henry never intended to fight, heavy fines were inflicted upon law-breaking nobles, old laws were revived, and forced loans and gifts made the merchant classes pay heavily for royal protection. By these means, and by the utmost economy, Henry left at his death some £2,000,000 – a vast sum equal to at least fifteen years' ordinary revenue at the time.

In only one direction was Henry prepared to spend with some freedom, on the building of ships. As Bacon said, he 'loved wealth and could not endure to have trade sick'. The

importance which he attached to the development of English shipping is shown by the infrequency with which he sold exemptions from the Navigation Laws, though this would have been an easy source of revenue. The policy of giving bounties on the building of ships, begun by Henry VII, was continued throughout the Tudor period, developing into a fixed allowance of 5s. a ton on all new ships of 100 tons and over.

It was this meagre, thin-faced, calculating man far more than his spectacular successors who established the Tudor monarchy on a firm basis and brought England into line with the general consolidation of centralised nation states going on throughout Europe. France, Spain and the looser grouping of South German states around the Hapsburgs were taking something like their modern shape. With their rise European politics, as distinct from feudal politics, may be said to begin. The new states, instead of being mainly concerned with preserving their internal stability, of checking the disruptive forces of the feudal nobles, began to struggle among themselves for European supremacy. And England, which in the Middle Ages had stood rather aloof in Europe, launching attacks now and then from the outside, became a part of Europe in a more intimate sense and involved in the complication of its political struggles.

The early years of the sixteenth century were full of confused wars, but in essence the battle lay between France and Spain, struggling for the control of the rich territories of Italy and Flanders. England was far inferior to either of these states in wealth and population and developed gradually a policy, the preservation of a balance of power, that has since become a fixed tradition among English politicians. The basis of this policy was to prevent any power in Europe from becoming overwhelmingly strong by creating and maintaining two roughly even groups, by supporting first one and then the other and by never allowing either side to count with certainty upon the continued support of England.

The first and one of the most astute players of this game was Cardinal Wolsey, chief minister during the first half of the reign of Henry VIII. From 1509, when Henry came to the throne, England usually supported Spain and was at war with France. These wars had few outstanding events, but a by-product was the terrible defeat inflicted upon the Scots at Flodden in 1513. After the battle of Pavia (1525) which made

Spain the master of Italy, the European situation changed. Spain, now united with the Hapsburgs, completely dominated Europe and it became clear that England, now unnecessary, was to have no share in the spoils of victory. Wolsey and Henry therefore began to gravitate towards France, precipitating a political situation at home that determined the course and character of the Reformation in England.

Before tracing the course of the Reformation, however, something must be said of the nature of the machinery through which the Tudor monarchy governed.

Though relying on the bourgeoisie as their main supporters the Tudors made little use of parliament. Parliaments were called from time to time to vote taxes or when they were needed for some special purpose such as legalising the break with Rome. But they showed little independence, aroused little interest and the long intervals between their meetings were not resented. Nevertheless the constitutional forms were duly observed and just because the Tudors had nothing to fear from parliament its theoretical powers even increased. Writing in 1589 Sir Thomas Smith declared:

The most high and absolute power of the realm of England consisteth in the Parliament ... The Parliament abrogateth the old laws, maketh new, giveth order for things past and for things hereafter to be followed, changeth rights and possessions of private men, legitimateth bastards,<sup>1</sup> establisheth forms of religion ... condemneth or absolveth them whom the prince will put on trial. And to be short, all that ever the people of Rome might do either in *centuriatis comitiis* – or *tributis*, the same may be done by the Parliament of England which representeth and hath the power of the whole realm, both head and body.

Parliament under the Tudors was, as it were, accumulating reserves of strength for the great struggles of the English Revolution. The direct power of the bourgeoisie was exercised much more forcibly by the citizens of London, whom the Tudors were always careful to flatter and conciliate. London, a great and turbulent city, was always a force to be reckoned with by a government that never possessed a substantial standing army.

The day to day work of government fell upon the royal

<sup>1</sup> Mary and Elizabeth were both declared illegitimate and legitimated again by Act of Parliament.



counsellors. The feudal Great Council fell into the background as parliament developed and was not called after the reign of Henry VII. The working Council remained, sometimes as a small body of the king's chosen advisers and sometimes as an assembly of the greater barons. The right of the crown to call such counsellors as it chose was contested by the nobles, who claimed the right to be summoned, during the fifteenth century, but Henry VII established his right to choose his own counsellors. He drew them from a wide body of government officials and excluded most of the magnates, keeping the exact composition of the Council vague. Under Henry VIII, first Wolsey and then Cromwell more or less monopolised the king's confidence, but in 1540 a Privy Council was formally constituted, consisting of the chief government officials, resembling the modern Cabinet except that it was responsible not to parliament but the king, who was not, however, bound to consult it or to take its advice.

It developed a whole series of committees for special purposes, some settled at Westminster, some moving about the country. These bodies kept their fingers upon every detail of administration, so that the Council and its offshoots besides forming a rudimentary Cabinet contained in itself the first elements of a bureaucracy.

Closely attached to the Council, which guided and controlled their work with minute care, were the Justices of the Peace. Drawn mainly from the lesser landowners, these Justices, who had existed at least from the time of Edward III, grew in power with the weakening of the nobility, who were not now able to act politically in opposition to the crown. The Justices were powerful because they represented a rising class and because they had behind them the wholehearted support of the Council. They have been called the 'Tudor maid of all work' and their functions were far wider than those which they exercise today. Besides holding the sessions they had to fix wages, levy poor rate and administer the poor law, repair highways and regulate trade and industry. A stream of directives constantly poured upon them from the Council and they became virtually the executive part of the machine of government, an unpaid civil service with vast if ill defined powers and duties. The responsibilities placed upon the Justices added to the political weight of the squirearchy in the

localities and gave them an experience which they soon learnt to use for their own ends.

By modern standards Tudor government was cheap government. There was no real standing army except for some troops garrisoned abroad or on the Scottish borders, and only a small paid bureaucracy. But by medieval standards it was costly enough and soon outran the old sources of revenue that had changed little since the Middle Ages. Henry VIII started with the immense accumulation of funds left by his father but soon spent it. The extravagance for which he is notorious was not merely a personal weakness, it had political motives. The kings of Europe in this period aimed at attracting the nobles to court, and, by turning them into courtiers, weakening them as political rivals. For this purpose a lavish expenditure was necessary and kings and nobles competed in display on an ever increasing scale. Where the feudal nobles had shown their importance by the size of their armed following, their descendants were judged by their dress and the style of their houses. Politically sound, this policy was very costly and Henry, always apt to develop political necessity to the point of mania, seemed to take a positive delight in squandering his resources. In addition, the wars to which the balance of power policy committed him proved expensive and brought no return. Finally, as the century went on, the influx of gold and silver from America began to increase prices without bringing any corresponding increase in revenue.

Henry soon faced a financial crisis. He could not reduce his expenditure and so had to find new sources of income. His first was the plunder of the monastic lands (1536-1539) but these were treated as income instead of as capital, and a large proportion had been sold in a few years. His last and most disastrous recourse was what is today politely termed inflation but was then called debasing the coin of the realm. Each debasement gave the government a certain immediate profit, but was followed by a rise in prices which made the situation worse than ever before and necessitated a further debasement. In 1527, 11.08 oz of silver and 0.91 oz of base metal had been coined into 37s. By 1551, 3 oz. of silver and 9 oz. of base metal were coined into 72s. That is, the coinage was diminished to a seventh of its value in a single generation. Trade was thrown into confusion, prices rose rapidly and real wages fell.

The new coinage became a byword. Latimer, even when preaching before the king and Council in 1549, could not refrain from gibing openly at it:

We have nowe a prety litle shilling in dede a very pretye one. I have but one, and the last daye I had put it away almost for an old grote, and so I trust some will take them. The fyneness of the silver I can not se ...

By the middle of the century the debasement had had its effect of plundering the mass of the people and was becoming increasingly inconvenient for the trading and landowning classes. One of the first acts of Elizabeth's government was to call in the whole coinage in 1560. It was paid for at approximately its silver value in new coins and the government actually made a profit on the transaction. The effect was not to reduce prices but to stabilise them at the existing high level. This stabilisation, coming at the end of the period of enclosures and of the plunder of the church, marks a definite stage in the consolidation of the position of the bourgeoisie in England, at the opening of an era of armed struggle with Spain for the more intensive exploitation of the world market.

## **5 The Reformation in England**

The medieval papacy was a centralised, international organisation which succeeded in establishing a highly profitable monopoly in the grace of God. Even in feudal times, as we have seen, this monopoly was often resented by kings and princes. With the coming of centralised nation states it was bound to lead to a general and open conflict, for the breaking of the papal monopoly was a necessary step in the creation of the absolute monarchies. At the same time the degeneracy and great wealth of the church combined to make it an easy and attractive prey both for kings and landowners. The Protestant Reformation was, therefore, in essence a political movement in a religious guise, a part of the long struggle of the European monied classes for power.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It must be understood that 'monied' here includes the new capitalist landowners.

The antagonism to the papal monopoly expressed itself in varying ways, not always in open conflict. The greatest powers, France and Spain, never broke with the papacy because they hoped to be able to control and exploit it for their own ends as the French kings had done while the popes lived at Avignon. In the sixteenth century the struggle between France and Spain in Italy was to a large extent a struggle to control the Papacy. At the worst they were strong enough to extort a large share of the spoil. Both Charles V of Spain and Francis I of France, for example, received large sums for allowing the sale of indulgences in their dominions. Similarly, the Hapsburgs needed the support of the pope to maintain their hegemony over the medley of principalities composing the Holy Roman Empire. It was the poorer and more backward states, Scotland, the Scandinavian countries, and the petty kingdoms and duchies of North Germany, which were forced into open revolt and in most of these countries the Reformation had a broad popular character and assumed democratic forms.

Midway between these extremes in power and wealth stood England. Wolsey and Henry VIII began by believing that they could compete with France and Spain for the control of the Papacy and it was not till they were disillusioned that they took the first steps towards freeing England from papal control. In England the Reformation was not at first a popular movement and in some of its aspects it was certainly opposed by the majority of the population. Three strands can be separated out, not necessarily dependent upon each other and not appealing to the same classes. The first was the break with Rome, involving the cessation of the large revenue paid to the popes, the second was the confiscation of the property of the church in England itself and the third was the victory of the body of theological dogma known as Protestantism.

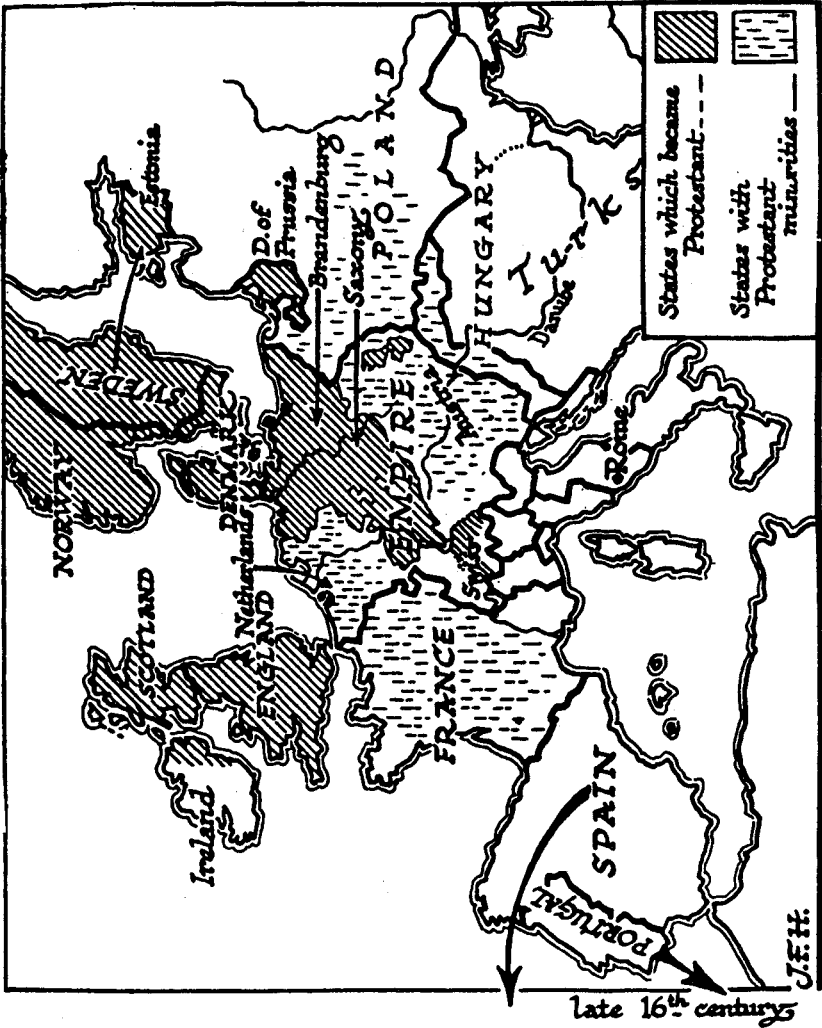
The break with Rome was almost universally welcomed. We have already seen that the exactions of the Papacy were disliked even by large sections of the clergy and when Henry in 1531 declared himself head of the church there was little opposition except from the monks. The seizure of the monastic lands, on the other hand, was the work of the crown and of the landowning class and was much less popular, leading even to armed risings of which the Pilgrimage of Grace was the most important. The theological changes were the work of the

middle and lower classes, who had kept alive the teachings of Wycliffe, and welcomed those of Luther. Protestantism was the body of ideas inspiring the popular mass movement, and, since the Reformation in England began from above, it made slow progress at first. The majority of the people remained Catholic in belief until Catholicism was politically discredited by its connection with the hostile power of Spain.

About 1526 Henry became anxious to obtain a divorce from his wife, Catherine of Aragon, or, strictly speaking, a papal declaration that his marriage was invalid since Catherine had previously been the wife of Henry's brother, Arthur. For this divorce there were two excellent political reasons. First, Catherine was a Spanish princess and in the sixteenth century royal marriages were a recognised method of cementing alliances between states. At a moment when Henry was contemplating an alliance with France this Spanish marriage was highly inconvenient. The second reason was that Catherine had failed to produce a male heir and did not now seem likely to do so.

Henry applied to Pope Clement VII for a divorce and in the ordinary way it would no doubt have been granted. But in 1527 Rome had just been sacked by an army of Germans and Spaniards and Clement was virtually a prisoner in the hands of Catherine's nephew Charles V. He temporised as long as he dared, hoping to find some compromise. But for Henry this was a test case, a test of his power to coerce the Papacy. When he found that this was impossible he determined on a break with Rome. It was a test also of Wolsey's diplomatic capacity and when he failed he was stripped of his offices and died only just in time to avoid execution. Henry turned to a rougher adviser, one who would be less scrupulous in carrying out the plans he was beginning to form for the plunder of the monasteries. This was Thomas Cromwell, a typical 'new' man, born and brought up no one quite knew where and enriched by the most questionable methods of the age.

For seven years – 1529 to 1536 – the Reformation parliament sat, passing without opposition a series of Acts which cut off the church in England from Rome and brought it under the control of the state. Appeals to the pope were forbidden. The king was made head of the church with power both to appoint its leading officials and to determine its doctrine. So far as



England was concerned the church was now no longer part of an international organisation but was part of the apparatus of the state and its fortunes were bound up with those of the crown. One paradoxical result of this change was that from this time leading churchmen played a part in state affairs not more but less prominent than formerly. Before Wolsey few leading ministers had been laymen. After him no cleric held high office under the crown. The church which in the Middle Ages had been an independent power in some respects equal to the state was henceforth subordinated and rigidly confined to its own limited sphere.

In 1536 the direct attack on the monasteries began. A commission had been sent out to gather or concoct enough scandal to justify confiscation on moral grounds. On the strength of their report, received by the landowners in parliament with delighted shouts of 'Away with them!' 376 of the smaller houses were suppressed. In 1539 the rest followed. The reasons for the dissolution of the monasteries and some of its results have been noted already. The monks were too isolated to resist, the old antagonism between them and the parish clergy depriving them of much support even from churchmen.

A few schools were founded out of the spoil, a little was used to endow six new bishoprics. The rest was seized by the crown and sold to nobles, courtiers, merchants and groups of speculators. Much was resold by them to smaller landowners and capitalist farmers, so that a large and influential class was created who had the best of reasons for maintaining the Reformation settlement. This dispersal of the monastic lands by the government was poor economics, but politically it was a master-stroke, ensuring with absolute certainty the permanence of the Reformation as far as it had gone up to that time.

So far the changes had been only political and economic. Henry still, and for the rest of his life, regarded himself as a pious Catholic whose religious beliefs were not altered by his political quarrel with the pope. As for the monasteries, they had been dissolved in the interest of morality and true religion. This view was ultimately untenable, especially as it was by no means shared by the pope or by the Catholic powers. Cromwell, realising this, tried to push Henry along the road to complete

Protestantism and an alliance with the Lutheran states of North Germany.

For some years progress was made in this direction but Henry became alarmed at a policy that would have isolated England from all the great European powers. Cromwell, like Wolsey, overestimated his power to determine Henry's policies and in 1540 he was accused of treason and beheaded. Henry reverted to the old balance of power tactics and found that Charles V was now quite prepared to accept the support of a heretic against his French enemies.

At home there was a corresponding reaction. The Statute of the Six Articles made denial of the main Catholic doctrines punishable by death. Latimer and other prominent Protestants were deprived of their positions. For the rest of his reign Henry quite impartially executed Protestants for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation and Catholics for denying that he was head of the church. With very few exceptions the bishops and clergy took the required oath of obedience to the king and remained in their places. Old forms of worship continued unchanged and only here and there did a reforming cleric preach the new doctrine.

One innovation did have an immense though delayed effect. This was the publication of an English version of the Bible. Once the Bible was common property and not a book in an unknown tongue available only to the priests, the key to the mysteries lay in the hands of any man who could read. Protestants made the Bible the text-book of their party and its study the centre of their practice. For the men of the sixteenth and still more the seventeenth century it was a veritable revolutionists' handbook, making the priestly monopoly of grace for ever untenable.

A more powerful and immediate force spreading Protestantism was the thousands of holders of church lands. They realised that their possession of these lands could only be guaranteed by a wide diffusion of Protestantism among the masses and that its growth might enable them to secure the still considerable wealth remaining to the church. In London and the Eastern Counties especially, the upper classes became fervent if not disinterested advocates of 'a thorough godly reformation', drawing behind them numbers of their tenants, apprentices and workpeople.



So affairs stood at the death of Henry in 1547. The break with Rome was complete. The appropriation of church property was partially carried out. The revolution in doctrine had hardly begun. The Protestant section of the population was still a definite minority, but a minority vocal and influential out of all proportion to its numbers, a minority whose desires coincided precisely with the natural course of historical development.

## **6 The Counter-Reformation and the Elizabethan Settlement**

When Henry died he left a Council of Regency to govern in the name of his young son Edward VI. This Council was strikingly composed of the 'new' nobility, not one of its sixteen members having a title that dated so far back as the beginning of the century. Its leading figure was the King's uncle, Edward Seymour, afterwards Duke of Somerset, and nearly all its most active members were ardent reformers, men who had profited much by the spoiling of the church and who hoped for more.

Under their rule the extreme Protestant party gained ground rapidly. A new Prayer Book was issued in 1549, differing only in detail from the one in use today. Its chief merit was the extreme vagueness of its formulations which enabled men of all parties to read their own interpretations into it. The property of the chantries and other religious bodies that had been spared in the previous reign were forfeited to the crown and passed rapidly into the hands of the Council and its supporters. The considerable proportion of the endowments of the guilds which were devoted to religious purposes went the same way. Only the London guilds were spared because they were too powerful to be attacked with safety, and throughout the country this confiscation was fatal to the already declining guild organisation. Under the pretext of suppressing idolatrous images and superstition there was a general plunder of the parish churches.

In this plunder their rich plate, ornaments and vestments were taken, much carving and stained glass that could not be removed was destroyed and in many cases even the lead was stripped from the roofs. All pretence of moderation and decency was abandoned, so that even the Protestant Bucer wrote in 1550:

For as yet sacrilegious persons hold and plunder the parishes, and often one, four, or six, or more: and it is said that there are not a few who bestow two or three benefices upon their Stewards or Huntsmen, yet on condition that they themselves retain a good part of their ecclesiastical revenues: and they present to livings vicars, not whom they know to be best fitted for their office but whom they can hire the most cheaply.

The Edwardian Reformation was the work of a predatory minority, watched sullenly by the mass of the people. The identification of Protestantism with a government so manifestly corrupt repelled many who might otherwise have been attracted to it. Only the Protector Somerset managed to escape to some extent the contempt in which the Council was held. He is a curious figure, eager himself to secure church property, often descending to discreditable intrigues, ruthless enough to his enemies, he yet seems to have had a genuine desire to remedy the misery caused by the enclosures and to have been ready to take real risks with this object. He alienated the nobles by appointing a commission to enquire into the evasion of the laws against enclosures and in 1548 introduced three Bills, based on the findings of the commission, all of which were rejected by parliament.

Somerset's hesitation in suppressing the Norfolk rebels in 1549 completed his loss of credit with the nobility and his chief rival Dudley (afterwards Duke of Northumberland) prepared a *coup d'état*. Relying on the popular dislike for the lengths to which the Reformers had gone he carefully disguised his attempt as a movement to restore Catholicism. He remained in the background and used Southampton, Arundel and other Catholic lords as his instruments. When Somerset had been overthrown Northumberland disowned these dupes and allied himself with the extreme Protestant party. With these he planned an attack on the still untouched revenues of the bishoprics. Northumberland himself was determined to secure the immense wealth of the See of Durham, and much of his attention in the following years was taken up with a series of complicated intrigues having this as their object. Doctrinaire Protestants like Hooper, who spoke of 'that most faithful and intrepid soldier of Christ, the Earl of Warwick', were quite ready to see the nobles swallow up the episcopal revenues in return for support in imposing Calvinism upon England.

All these schemes depended for success upon the life of the king, and it soon became obvious that Edward was dying. The next heir was Mary, daughter of Catherine of Aragon, a Catholic and a bitter enemy of Northumberland. If she succeeded Northumberland was finished, so he prepared for a new coup. He married his son to Lady Jane Grey, a granddaughter of Henry VII, and forced the Council to declare her the lawful heir to the throne. When Edward died in July 1553 Northumberland proclaimed Jane Grey queen in London. Mary took refuge in Norfolk and received support from all over the country, since most people were hostile either to Northumberland or to the Reformation or to both. Northumberland's men refused to fight and he was arrested and brought to London to be executed.

'And after he came onsse to Shordych,' says a writer of the time, 'alle the pepulle revyled hym and callyd hym traytor and herytycke, and would not seyse for all they were spokyn unto for it,' a passage which shows that even London was far from being wholly Protestant at this time. Northumberland's last act was a cringing recantation of a Protestantism that had never been more than a mask for his greed. His career is of some significance since he sums up both the ignoble side of Protestantism and the unresting cupidity of a class. Yet we shall fail to understand Protestantism if we look only at the greed of Northumberland and forget the courage and single-mindedness of Latimer. This yeoman's son become bishop, with his contempt for compromise and passion for social justice, carried the radicalism of More into the Protestant Reformation and remains as the true voice of the nameless weavers and peasants who formed its genuinely revolutionary wing.

Though Northumberland's conspiracy had collapsed at the first touch Mary was still a hostage in the hands of the landowning class. She could restore the Mass and burn heretical weavers but she could not force a single squire to disgorge a single acre of church land. Short of this, her position was a strong one and her first actions in bringing the Reformation back to the point reached at the death of Henry VIII were generally popular. Such a compromise could hardly have been permanent, and in any case Mary was unique among the Tudors in possessing both genuine religious convictions

and a complete lack of political judgement. The rest of her reign was filled with blunders which destroyed whatever slight chance there was of a restoration of Catholicism in England.

The first of these was the announcement of her intention of marrying Philip of Spain. In the existing European situation this meant the complete subordination of England. In spite of strong opposition, including a rebellion that was put down without much difficulty, the marriage actually took place in 1554. It was especially unpopular as an offence against what was now just becoming a constant if unformulated principle of English foreign politics – that the most dangerous commercial rival should also be the main political enemy. This principle, applied in turn to Spain, Holland and France, was one which for centuries ahead no Government could ignore without disaster.

The next step was a reconciliation with Rome, taking the form of a 'supplication' from parliament entreating for pardon and the admission of a Papal Legate. The old laws for the burning of heretics were revived and plans were made for the execution of the most prominent Protestant churchmen. The persecution which followed, and which was begun in spite of the advice of the more realistic Spanish, proved fatal because of its ill directed character. After a group of leading clergy, Latimer, Hooper, Ferrar and Archbishop Cranmere, its victims were all obscure men, mainly artisans and small farmers. About 300 were burned, chosen apparently at random but probably for the most part Calvinists and Anabaptists. Five out of six came from London, East Anglia and Kent.

Not a single layman of the upper classes suffered, for they were prepared without exception to profess any faith so long as their property was untouched. Nevertheless the persecution was alarming to them, leaving them in doubt as to what Mary and her advisers might do next. Nobody in the sixteenth century objected to a moderate amount of persecution, but the wholesale burnings of the last four years of Mary's reign were generally felt to be excessive and led to a belief that the Inquisition, with whose workings in Flanders people were fairly familiar, was to be introduced into England.

In 1557 the Spanish connection led to a war with France, in which Calais was lost after being in English hands for three

hundred years. The wool staple that had once made it important had now dwindled to small proportions, but its loss was bitterly resented, especially by the merchant class who were in any case strongly opposed to any alliance with Spain. Only the knowledge that Mary was dying prevented a rising that would have probably been followed by the invasion of England by a Spanish army.

It fell to the government of Elizabeth to make a religious compromise characteristic of the Reformation movement in England. Elizabeth herself had no particular religious interests and the only concern was to arrive at a settlement that would be accepted by as many people as possible. The authority of the pope was once more abolished, and a slightly modified form of royal supremacy, that is of the subordination of the church to the state, was substituted. At the same time, the form of organisation existing in the Catholic church, government by bishops and an elaborate ecclesiastical hierarchy was preserved. The more uncompromising and democratic forms of Protestantism were avoided. Both in organisation and doctrine the Church of England claimed to be 'Catholic', that is, to maintain the tradition of the universal church, but also 'reformed', that is, to have shed a number of corrupt practices and beliefs that had crept in during the Middle Ages. So far as possible the formulation of doctrine was kept vague, and, as in 1549, the services of the church were carefully drawn up so as to be capable of alternative interpretations.

'The Church of England as by law established' owed its form to the political needs of the time. It was regarded by many as a temporary arrangement, few were enthusiastically in its favour. But even fewer found it so repugnant that they were prepared to take up arms against an otherwise popular government to bring about its destruction. In the Elizabethan settlement Protestantism assumed the form most compatible with the monarchy and with the system of local government created by the Tudors. The parson in the villages became the close ally of the squire and almost as much a part of the state machine as the Justice of the Peace.

The Reformation in Scotland took a different course. There the church was even more corrupt and discredited than in England and the movement against it was of a broader character. It triumphed when it was able to ally itself with

national sentiment and to assume some characteristics of a movement of national liberation. In England the Reformation subordinated the church to the state: in Scotland there were moments when the state seemed likely to be altogether subordinated to the church. Scottish Protestantism drew its inspiration from Geneva, where Calvin did for a time set up a dictatorship of the righteous. The Scottish Kirk was always democratically organised, and it was indeed only inside the kirk that democratic ideas took root in Scotland.

In the time of Henry VIII the irregular warfare in which England and Scotland were engaged after the battle of Flodden prevented the Reformation from making much headway, since it was everywhere identified with the cause of the English enemy. Somerset wished to bring the quarrel to an end by marrying Edward VI to Mary, daughter of James V, who had died in 1542 when she was only a week old. To hasten the negotiations he marched an army into Scotland, won a battle at Pinkie and burnt Edinburgh. This made an Anglo-Scottish alliance unthinkable and Mary was hurried off to France where she married the Dauphin.

From this time the situation began to change. The queen's mother, Mary of Guise, ruled Scotland with the help of a French army. Scotland was treated as a French province and gradually the Protestants assumed the role of patriots while the Catholics were forced into appearing as supporters of the French occupation. Many of the nobles, who had had the opportunity of observing how profitable Protestantism in England had been for their class, joined the party of the reformers. In 1559 open war broke out and in the following year, with the help of an English army and fleet, the French were expelled and Protestantism was established.

In 1561 Mary Stuart returned to Scotland, a widow of nineteen and a Catholic, ruling over a country now fanatically Calvinist. The story of her misadventures has been told often enough and it is not necessary to repeat it here. Eight years after her arrival she was deposed and only with difficulty made her escape to England where she appealed to Elizabeth for protection. Her presence in England was extremely unwelcome, since she was not only the heir to the English throne, but, as all Catholics considered Elizabeth illegitimate, was regarded by many people as the rightful monarch. Elizabeth shut her up

in a castle and, as was her way, began to put off as long as possible any decisive action. From this point Mary's career belongs not to Scottish history but to the history of the struggle just beginning between England and Spain.

## VII ORIGIN OF THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

### 1 The Struggle with Spain

In the struggle between England and Spain which occupied the last third of the sixteenth century both sides were on the offensive though both were anxious to avoid an open war if they could accomplish their ends by any other means. England, that is to say the English merchant class backed by the government, was determined to break through the colonial monopoly that Spain had established in the West. This ambition was shared by other North European sea-powers, especially the Dutch. The fortunes of English and Dutch were inseparably linked during this period, and the revolt of the Netherlands played a decisive part in the general struggle. It was only at the expense of Spain and Portugal that English and Dutch commerce could grow, since in Spanish and Portuguese hands lay all the areas outside Europe which seemed at that time to offer any possibility of profitable trading. And for both England and Holland, small countries with no hope of expanding by land and with prosperous and pushing merchant classes, such colonial expansion was a condition of national development.

On the other side, Philip's marriage to Mary Tudor had seemed for a moment to promise Spain that control over England which was a necessary condition for the success of Spanish plans for world empire. The accident of Mary's death had frustrated these plans and at first Philip hoped to recover the lost ground by a second marriage to Elizabeth. For as long as she dared Elizabeth allowed him to believe this possible, though she and her advisers were far too astute to repeat Mary's blunder. When Philip realised that his marriage plan had failed he began very slowly and dubiously to try other



methods, diplomacy, intrigue and finally war.

Closely allied with Spain was the papacy. The church had reorganised its forces at the Council of Trent (1545-63), had created in the Jesuits a body of highly trained and disciplined storm troops, had perfected the Inquisition as an instrument of repression and was working steadily and with apparently good prospects of success towards a counter-reformation which would stamp out heresy and restore the supremacy of the pope throughout Europe. In the main the interest of the papacy and the Spanish monarchy coincided, since the heretics were also the most determined opponents of Spanish power, and, although the allies quarrelled sometimes about the expenses of the campaign and the division of the spoils, they managed to work fairly closely together. Consequently, the struggle had also a religious character, was a struggle between Protestantism and the Counter-Reformation.

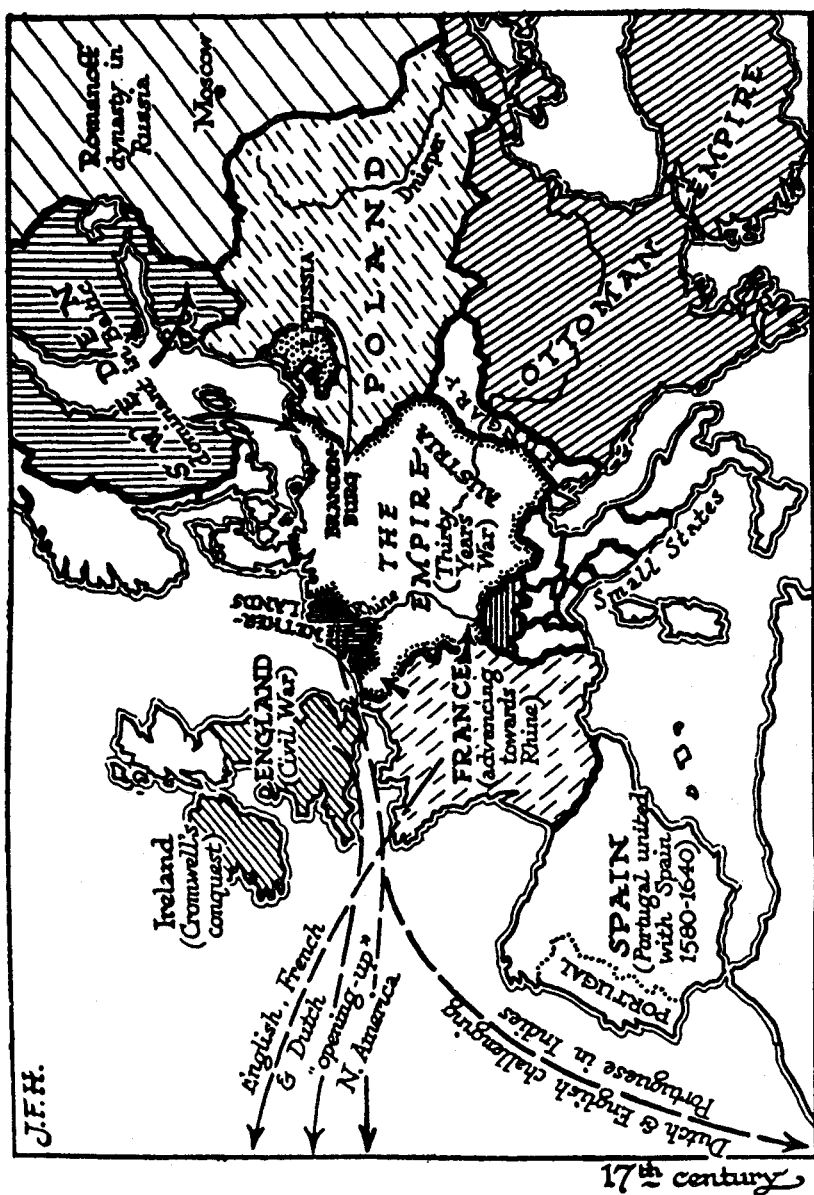
This struggle was complicated in every country by a minority problem. England contained a large number of Catholics who were always thought likely to rise in revolt. Spain had an interminable and never suppressed rising of her Protestant subjects in the Netherlands to deal with. France was even more unfortunate and a bitterly contested civil war between Catholics and the Protestant Huguenots, intensified by a dynastic conflict, made her a negligible factor in European politics during the whole of this period and completely upset the balance of power. A superficial observer looking at Europe in 1570 would have seen no possible rival to Spain, which controlled not only Southern Italy, Austria, Hungary and the Netherlands but also a vast colonial empire.

But in the Channel and the North Sea, with its headquarters at Dover, where it was unofficially encouraged by the English authorities, was a nondescript fleet, part Dutch, part English with a sprinkling of Huguenots, which dominated the Straits and made raids in all directions upon Spanish and French shipping. Other raiders put out from the ports of Devon and Cornwall and from the Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle, seizing Spanish merchant ships and even threatening the West Indies. In theory England and Spain were at peace but the English government shared the plunder taken by these privateers and even at times lent them ships from the Royal Navy. When at last, in 1572, Philip demanded that the Channel

fleet should be expelled from English harbours it was given time to gather its full strength for a sudden and brilliantly successful attack on the Dutch town of Brill. The capture of Brill was the signal for a general rising along the coast of Holland and the revival by the Netherlands of a war which the Spanish thought had been ended some years before. In this war the best generals and the best troops in Europe failed to overcome the resistance of the Dutch burghers and peasants so long as these were able to keep open a sea way by which trade and help from abroad could reach them.

In England meanwhile, Elizabeth and her ministers were facing the situation created by the unwelcome arrival of Mary Stuart in 1568. Almost at once the Catholic Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland had started a revolt in the North to free Mary, marry her to the Duke of Norfolk and place her on the throne. The rising was partly spontaneous and partly provoked deliberately by the Council. It collapsed at the first approach of a strong royal army and the ease with which it was suppressed is an index of the striking decline of the power of the semi-feudal nobility of the North since the superficially similar Pilgrimage of Grace only thirty years before.

For eighteen years Mary was the centre of a whole series of plots, all involving the assassination of Elizabeth. Just as the English government encouraged the activities of the privateers on Spanish shipping and towns, the Spanish ambassador and the Jesuit priests who were sent in large numbers to reconvert England encouraged these plots. Elizabeth was, as often during her reign, in a position where every possible course of action was full of danger. Neither she nor Cecil, her chief minister, believed that it was possible as yet to challenge Spain in an open conflict, though such a conflict was clearly inevitable sooner or later. So long as Mary lived there would be plots, one of which would probably succeed. The assassination of Elizabeth would be almost certain to precipitate a civil war and give Philip the chance for which he was waiting. On the other hand, so long as both Mary and Elizabeth remained alive war was improbable. Philip was not anxious to go to war to make Mary queen since she was half French by blood and more than half French in outlook and would be more likely to govern England in the interests of France than of Spain. Also, so long as there was a possibility of removing Elizabeth by assassination, Philip preferred to wait.



17<sup>th</sup> century

Year after year passed, with each side looking for an opening. Philip sent help to the rebel Irish. Drake, Hawkins and other privateers grew bolder in their exploits. Jesuit priests preached sedition among the Catholic nobles and gentry and were hunted down and hanged. In 1577 Drake set out on his voyage round the world, to return with an immense cargo of booty. In 1580 a Spanish force landed in Ireland and was captured and massacred at Smerwick. Elizabeth sent just enough men and money to the Dutch to keep their revolt stirring but not so much as to commit herself beyond possibility of drawing back.

In 1584 Elizabeth had to face a new dilemma. William of Orange, the leader of the revolt in the Netherlands, was assassinated and the Dutch sent ambassadors asking for their country to be incorporated with England. To agree meant open war. To refuse meant that in all probability the Dutch would submit to Spain and England would be left without an ally. As usual, Elizabeth delayed giving a definite answer as long as she could. When she finally decided to refuse she sent a stronger force of 'volunteers' than ever before, under the command of her favourite, the Earl of Leicester, to ensure the continuance of the war. In the autumn of the same year Drake harried the West Indies with a fleet of twenty-five ships.

As war became more and more certain the reasons for keeping Mary Stuart alive were correspondingly weakened. Walsingham, who represented the extreme Protestant section on Elizabeth's Council, advocating an alliance of all the Protestant forces of Europe, with England at their head, for open war on Spain, set to work to trap Mary into complicity in one of the plots to kill Elizabeth. As usual, Walsingham had a spy among the conspirators and their whole correspondence to and from Mary passed through his hands. By September 1586 he had all the evidence he needed. The plot was exploded prematurely and in February 1587 Mary was beheaded.

Mary bequeathed her claims to the English throne to Philip who had now every reason for embarking on a war from which he alone would benefit. It was fought, however, under political conditions less favourable to Philip than if Mary had still been alive, since, while a large number of moderate Catholics would have been prepared to fight to place Mary on the throne, only the small minority under Jesuit influence were likely to do as

much for Philip. Another reason for war was the continued failure of Spain to subdue the Netherlands. The original plan had been to do this as the prelude to an attack on England: it had now become obvious that the Netherlands never would be conquered as long as they received English help.

The summer of 1587 was spent by Philip in gathering and fitting out a great fleet – the Armada – for the conquest of England. The plan of campaign was for the Armada to sail up the Channel to Dunkirk, where the Duke of Parma, Spanish commander in the Netherlands, had assembled an army. This army was to be convoyed across the Straits for a landing in the mouth of the Thames. It was an excellent plan on the assumption that no serious resistance was likely. The sailing of the Armada was delayed by a raid in which Drake destroyed a mass of shipping and stores in Cadiz, by the death of its commander and by the poor quality of its equipment which made it necessary to put in at Corunna to refit, but by the end of July 1588 it had reached English waters.

The defeat of the Armada has often been regarded as something of a miracle: in fact, it would have been a veritable miracle if it had succeeded. From the time when the Persians were beaten at Salamis till the beginning of the sixteenth century naval warfare had not changed in principle. Ships were treated primarily as carriers of troops and the aim was always to grapple and board the ships of the enemy. This conception of naval war still dominated the Spanish, whose soldiers were then the best in the world. But in the generation before the Armada the English and Dutch had evolved a totally new method of war. They treated ships as floating batteries and their objective was to out-sail their opponents and disable them from a distance by artillery fire. They built more manoeuvrable faster ships, capable of sailing into the wind and they mounted guns at the portholes instead of only on deck. Their ships were superior both in the volume and the direction of fire. The mere bulk of the Spanish galleons, packed as they were with troops, only made them the better targets for broadsides to which they had no power to make effective reply. Their superior numbers and tonnage meant exactly nothing in the conditions under which they were forced to fight. The English superiority in technique can only be fully understood when seen as a result of the striking industrial development which had taken place in the preceding generation.

After a running battle lasting about a fortnight the Armada was hustled up the Channel, stampeded out of Calais by fire ships, driven past Dunkirk and out into the North Sea. The damage done was limited only by the shortage of ammunition in the English fleet, and once in the North Sea the Armada could not work back down the Channel against the wind but was forced to sail round Scotland and Ireland, on whose coasts scores of ships were wrecked. The English lost no more than 100 men killed in the whole action.

After 1588 the offensive passed into the hands of the English who continued to raid the coast towns both of Spain and the West Indies and to attack enemy shipping. Two contending strategical theories arose. The first advocated the seeking out and destruction of the enemy's battle fleet, the second, and this view mainly prevailed, urged the plunder of his colonies and the cutting of his trade routes. This method of war, followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, laid the foundation of the British empire in a series of wars whose burden was thrown chiefly upon England's Continental allies. In 1589 Corunna was taken and sacked but an attempt on Lisbon failed. Fleets were sent to raid the West Indies in 1590, 1591 and 1595 while in 1596 a fresh raid on Cadiz did immense damage. At the same time the Spanish were beginning to adopt the new technique of shipbuilding and naval tactics and the struggle developed into a prolonged skirmishing in which neither side could secure any decisive success.

The war with Spain, especially in its earlier stages, was not only a national war but also the struggle of a class against its class enemies at home and abroad. It was carried on mainly by the English merchant class and its allies among the gentry, both against Spain as the centre of the reactionary and feudal forces in Europe and against their allies in England, the Catholic section of the nobility. Nothing is more surprising than the depth and sincerity of the religious convictions of many of the English seamen of the sixteenth century. Their Protestantism was the religion of a class in arms. Out of the memories of the Marian persecution, kept alive by Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, published in 1563 and the most popular book of its time, out of the activities of the Jesuits and the cruelties of the Inquisition the English bourgeoisie concocted a picture of Catholicism as the fountain of all evil and the enemy with which they were

committed to grapple in a life and death struggle. Religious fanaticism reinforced commercial interest to give them an enemy who was not only fought but sincerely hated, and it was in fighting Spain that they came to a consciousness of their own strength.

Up to 1588 the English bourgeoisie were fighting for existence: after that they fought for power. For this reason the defeat of the Armada is a turning point in the internal history of England as well as in foreign affairs. It was the merchants, with their own ships and their own money, who had won the victory and they had won it almost in spite of the half-heartedness and ineptitude of the crown and council, whose enthusiasm diminished as the war assumed a more revolutionary character. The victory transformed the whole character of the class relations that had existed for a century. The bourgeoisie became aware of their strength and with the coming of this awareness the long alliance between them and the monarchy began to dissolve. It might still need their support but they no longer needed its protection. Even before the death of Elizabeth, parliament began to show an independence previously unknown.

The war with Spain, therefore, can best be understood as the first phase in the English revolution. First, because it was a defeat for feudal reaction in Europe and consolidated the victory of the Reformation in those areas where it had already triumphed. And, second, because the classes inside England which defeated Philip were exactly those which afterwards led the opposition to Charles. It was a striking fact that at the opening of the Civil War the whole navy and every important seaport was found to be on the side of Parliament. It was in the war with Spain that these classes had been tempered and mobilised and had developed that sense of being a special people, 'the elect', which made their Puritanism so formidable as a political creed.

## **2 The Chartered Companies**

Between piracy and honest trade no very clear line was drawn in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The merchant was always prepared to fight for his market or for the right to

buy goods in places where his rivals had established a monopoly: the privateer was always ready to dabble in trade if his proper occupation languished. In the dubious territory through which the line meandered lived and thrived such men as Hawkins, founder of the great trade of supplying the Americas with negro slaves from West Africa.

In a little over a generation the native population of the West Indies, showing a perverse disinclination to labour in the mines and plantations of their Spanish conquerors, had been exterminated. The settlers found themselves so short of labourers that they were ready to buy from anyone in spite of the prohibitions of their home government. In 1562 Hawkins carried his first cargo of slaves to San Domingo, beginning a lively and profitable connection in which Spanish settlers and English traders combined to evade government warships and customs officers. The slave trade remained on a small scale till after the middle of the seventeenth century,<sup>1</sup> when negro labour began to provide the basis for the vast fortunes made from sugar and tobacco plantations, but the right to supply slaves to Spain's American colonies was always one of the most desired objects of English traders. For some time trade with these colonies was regarded as of greater importance than independent colonising.

The first English settlements in America were primarily political in object, the idea being to establish bases for the struggle against Spain and to prospect for gold and silver. The colonists were mostly adventurous and impoverished gentlemen, anxious to make quick fortunes but incapable of working the land or of any sustained effort. When cut off for any length of time from England they usually starved to death. Colonies planted in Virginia in 1585 and 1587 were complete failures. The first colony to survive was one established at Jamestown in 1607 and after this settlements of two new kinds were made in considerable numbers and developed rapidly. The first kind were in New England, where groups of Puritan farmers and artisans, driven abroad by the religious troubles of Stuart times, brought with them the qualities of industry and thrift that had marked them at home. Further south in Virginia settlers with larger capital established considerable plantations

<sup>1</sup> England was unable to establish herself in the slave trade till the second decade of the seventeenth century.



for the growth of tobacco, worked by indentured labour, partly convict, partly unemployed, from England, and, in far larger numbers, drawn from the Irish peasants who had been evicted from their land and replaced by newcomers from England and Scotland. Early in the seventeenth century the Bermudas and Barbados were occupied and used for sugar growing with labour similarly obtained. After 1660 all these colonies, and others established later, began to replace their white indentured labour with negro slaves.

But it was Ireland which was the first important English colony, the place where they learnt all the tricks of governing subject races. In Ulster especially, where the tribal structure persisted longest, the complete conquest of the country was followed by the wholesale confiscation of the land which was sold to English and Scottish merchants and landowners at nominal prices. The native cultivators were driven out or became labourers and were replaced by immigrants from England and Scotland whose condition soon became little better than that of the Irish they had superseded. The whole county of Derry was taken over by an association of London merchants and divided into twelve estates one of which was assigned to each of the twelve great companies. It proved easier, however, to ruin Ireland than to enrich England by such means, and in general the colonies of the seventeenth century were small affairs. There was neither the surplus capital nor population to permit of large-scale ventures, and what spare capital there was tended to be attracted into trade which promised a far higher return.

Consequently, the most significant economic development of the late Tudor and early Stuart period was the birth and consolidation of a number of chartered companies, each engaged in the promotion of trade in some specific area. Such companies were not new. The merchant adventurers of London had been formed in the fifteenth century to export cloth to North Europe and continued to do so all through the period, moving their headquarters from Antwerp to Hamburg or Emden as the political situation altered. In 1598 their long struggle with the Hanse merchants ended with the withdrawal of the latter from London and the closing of their factory, the Steelyard. But toward the end of the sixteenth century chartered companies began to spring up in all directions. The

Eastland Company (1579) traded in the Baltic and Scandinavia, the Levant Company was established in 1581 and in 1588 an African Company was formed to organise the slave trade.

These companies were, with few exceptions, London companies and had to meet the competition not only of foreign rivals but of merchants from other English ports. The Newcastle traders, for example, fought a long and partly successful battle with the merchant adventurers, claiming prior rights granted to their own merchant guild in the Middle Ages, and the merchants of Bristol and the West Country ports strongly opposed the attempt of London to monopolise Spanish and French trade, which, in 1604, was declared open to all Englishmen. Though London was never able to eliminate the competition of the 'outports', there is no doubt that the formation of the chartered companies, with their special privileges and their power of protecting their members, helped to concentrate the foreign trade of the country into one centre and so increase the political weight of the great London merchants.

One of the most important of the chartered companies was the Levant Company. Individuals trading to Constantinople and the Levant ran great risks from the ships of the pirate states of the Barbary coast of northern Africa, whose ravages appear to have increased considerably with the decline of Spanish sea power and who even began to appear off the English coast early in the reign of Charles I. There was also the organised opposition of the Venetians and of a French company which had established itself in the Levant as early as 1535. The eastern Mediterranean, one of the main spheres of French activity from the time of the Crusades, witnessed the first stages of a colonial conflict that was to reach far greater dimensions a century later in Canada and India. The Levant Company had the great advantage over the private trader that it could send out a powerful fleet each year, capable of resisting all attacks. In 1601 it was reconstituted and from this date regular trade relations with Turkey really began. The company preserved a virtual monopoly till 1753, exporting cloth and importing silk, drugs and other Eastern produce.

None of these companies had such a long life as, or ever reached anything like the dimensions of, the East India Company, the real founder of British rule in India. From the

start it was a company of a new kind, better adapted for large-scale trade and making a more flexible use of its capital. Such a body as the merchant adventurers was not a company at all in the modern sense. It was rather an association of merchants doing a similar trade in a particular area and combining for mutual aid and protection. Inside the association each merchant traded with his own capital, making his own profit and bearing his own losses. It was, in fact, somewhat the commercial counterpart of the simple association of labour that marked the manufacturing stage of industry. The East India Company was the first important joint stock company, its members investing so much capital to be pooled and used jointly and receiving a proportionate share of the common profit. At first the shares were taken only for a single voyage, after which the whole proceeds were divided out and fresh shares subscribed for a new voyage. Very soon they were left in from one voyage to another, forming a permanent capital.

This gave the company obvious advantages over the older kinds, allowing a continuous development and making possible large-scale enterprises. The company could afford to wait for a return on its activities where the private trader could not.

The Portuguese had early been followed to the spice islands of the East by the Dutch, whose superior ships and more efficient business methods had soon driven their predecessors out of the East Indies and forced them to confine themselves to India proper. By the close of the sixteenth century Holland had replaced Portugal as the great importer of spices. How important spices, and especially pepper, were to Europe at this time will only be understood when we remember that the whole population had to live on salted meat during the greater part of the winter months. Turnips and artificial grasses were little used and shortage of fodder made it necessary every autumn to kill off and salt all the animals not needed for breeding. Salt being dear and scarce, and, in England, imported from abroad, the salting was often indifferently carried out so that a liberal amount of seasoning was needed to make the meat even palatable. Spices accordingly fetched high prices, and a monopoly such as the Dutch established was extremely profitable to themselves and extremely vexatious to their customers and rivals.

The first English seaman to reach the Indies by the Cape

route was Sir James Lancaster in 1592. In 1600 the Dutch took advantage of their monopoly to set up a kind of pepper pool, raising the price at one sweep from 3s. a pound to 6s. and 8s. It was as a direct reply to this move that the East India Company was set up at the end of the year, and in 1601 Lancaster again visited the East Indies with a fleet of five ships, returning with a rich cargo of spices and earning a substantial profit for the company. The Dutch soon proved to be too strongly established in the Islands for the new company to secure a permanent foothold there. A Dutch fleet of twelve ships, permanently stationed in the Indies, made trading hazardous and after a naval struggle lasting some twenty years they were able to wipe out a factory that the English had set up at Amboyna in the Moluccas. It was as a result of this struggle in the Far East that Holland began to replace Spain as England's chief rival at sea.

Driven from the islands by the Dutch, the East India Company found the opposition of the Portuguese in India less formidable. Four large ships under Captain Thomas Best visited Surat in 1612 and defeated a Portuguese squadron which tried to bar their way. After this they had little difficulty in getting permission from the Mogul to establish a permanent depot or factory at Surat. A second naval victory in 1614 confirmed the superiority of the English in Indian waters. Factories were set up at Madras in 1620 and at Hoogli near Calcutta in 1633. Later, when Charles II married a Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza, he received the island of Bombay as part of her dowry. This was leased to the company in 1680 and gave them a large and easily defended base from which to trade. It was not till the eighteenth century that the company became an important political force in India, but long before this it had established a large and immensely profitable trading connection. Its activities were not confined to India but extended as far afield as Persia and even Japan, where it had a factory from 1613 to 1623.

Elizabeth, like all the Tudors, appreciated the importance of trade, and of securing the support of the merchant class, at a time when that class had no thought of challenging the power of the crown. James I, coming from Scotland with its undeveloped industry and negligible foreign trade, at a time when their economic successes were beginning to give the

London merchants a new sense of their political importance, quickly alienated them by his cautious and finally pro-Spanish policy. James on occasion expressed the view that all European monarchs should stand together against the dangers of 'rebellion': he had no desire to see the Spanish monarchy humiliated to the greater glory of English trade.

In 1604 the war with Spain was ended with a peace treaty that was criticised because it did not specifically secure the right of trade with the Spanish colonies. Though it was unpopular its terms were probably as good as could be obtained and the alternative, a continuance of the long and indecisive war, would have been costly and could have produced little result. After the death of Cecil, peace with Spain passed over into a policy of actual alliance which infuriated the merchants and Protestants in general and brought no compensating gain. The navy was allowed to decay, old ships being laid up and no new ones built. Traders complained of the attacks of pirates even in the English Channel. In 1616 Sir Walter Raleigh, the leader of the party pressing for war against Spain, was allowed to go to South America at the head of an expedition in search of gold. He returned unsuccessful and was beheaded at the demand of the Spanish ambassador to the great disgust of the trading classes who regarded his activities as natural and praiseworthy.

This change in foreign policy led to a complete reversal of the situation at home. Under Elizabeth and up to the time of the Gunpowder Plot (1605) the Catholics had been in active and often treasonable opposition to the crown. After 1605 there was a short period of persecution, chiefly aimed at the extreme or Jesuit wing of the Catholics. But with the development of friendly relations with Spain and, later, following the marriage of Charles I to the French Henrietta Maria, the Catholics enjoyed a period of toleration and even of court favour. Henceforward they became the most constant and active supporters of the monarchy, and the only large section of the population on whom the Stuarts could always rely.

The Puritans, drawn from the classes which had been the main supporters of the Tudors, were correspondingly driven into opposition to a regime which they believed, not altogether correctly, was working to restore Catholicism to England and which was certainly coming into ever greater conflict with their

interests. In this way opposition to the crown became identified with patriotism and the monarchy with the section of the population widely believed to be in league with foreign enemies. By their foreign policy the Stuarts abandoned what had been the main source of the crown's strength – its alliance with the most historically progressive class in the country.

### **3 Crown and Parliament**

Six years before the death of Elizabeth the long working agreement between crown and parliament was disturbed by an attack on the practice of granting monopolies. The subject of dispute is highly significant. Monopolies were grants to individuals or companies of the exclusive right to manufacture or sell some particular article, paper, for example, or soap. Sometimes they were given to reward or encourage invention but more often were sold to raise additional revenue or used as a cheap way of rewarding courtiers or servants who had a claim on the royal purse. So, the Earl of Essex was given the monopoly of the sale of sweet wines for ten years, and the refusal of the queen to renew this monopoly in 1600 was more responsible than anything else for his crazy rebellion early in the next year. At this time of great and rapid technical advance, a whole class was eager to use and profit by the new methods. The effect of monopolies was to prevent this, to secure the cream of the profits for a clique of courtiers and hangers-on, and, in the long run, to arrest the whole development of industry. The struggle against monopolies was therefore part of the struggle for free capitalist development which was being strangled by an obsolete political regime.

These grants were defended on the ground of the crown's right to make ordinances for the regulation of trade. The attack on them was in essence an affirmation of a new principle of the highest importance to the bourgeoisie, the principle of their freedom to buy and sell to their best advantage without interference. It was a claim totally at variance with the whole medieval conception of the national and local organisation of trade. The question was raised in 1597 and an inquiry promised. When nothing was done a new and sharper attack was made in 1601. The government at once saw that it would be

wise to give way and the reign closed with the friendly relations between crown and parliament apparently undisturbed.

When James I came to the throne in 1603 the whole atmosphere seemed to change with a dramatic suddenness. While the change was at bottom the reflection of changed class relations,<sup>1</sup> its sharpness can partly be attributed to personal causes. First, James was a foreigner, half Scottish, half French, brought up in a country filled with bitterly hostile factions and accustomed to maintain himself among them by the policy of complicated trickery he called *kingcraft*.

Scotland had no parliament in the English sense and James had learnt to regard its one democratic institution, the kirk, as the chief enemy of royal power.

Second, the atmosphere of theological pedantry in which he had been reared made him over apt to theorise about his position, to demand explicitly as a divine right what the Tudors had been content to take quietly in the absence of explicit opposition. And he made these demands in the most tactless and blundering way at a moment when even the Tudors would probably have had to make concessions.

Third, and perhaps most important, James came from a very poor country to one moderately rich and regarded the resources of his new kingdom as unbounded. In fact, they were far from it, since the national finances had remained medieval in character and were increasingly inadequate to the complexity of national organisation. Elizabeth had been able to make ends meet on a revenue rarely higher than £400,000 a year only by the most extreme parsimony and by using the upper classes as an unpaid civil service. In the sixteenth century prices were still rising and James found a revenue of about £450,000 inadequate even in time of peace. Of this sum perhaps £300,000 came from the estate of the crown and the recognised customs dues. The rest had to be cajoled from the merchants and landowners in the form of a parliamentary grant. In relation to the wealth of these classes taxation was very light, but the mere fact of their increasing wealth made them more and more reluctant to vote increased taxes except in exchange for substantial increases in political power. The situation created by the rise in prices was not generally understood and

<sup>1</sup> See section 5, this chapter.

the inability of the Stuarts to balance their budgets was put down entirely to what were only contributory causes – their extravagance and bad management.

James' first parliament set the tone that was to prevail for the next forty years. Only part of the money he demanded was voted and the Commons spent much time discussing his domestic and foreign policy. James ordered them to leave affairs of state to the king and Council who alone were qualified to understand them. 'As to dispute what God may do is blasphemy,' he declared, 'so it is sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in height of his power. I will not be content that my power be disputed on.' Parliament replied by affirming its right 'to debate freely all matters which properly concern the subject and his right or state', and was dissolved in 1611.

From 1611 to 1621 only one parliament was called, the 'Addled Parliament' of 1614. It at once began to criticise the policy of the government and was dismissed before any business had been transacted. During this period James tried a variety of expedients to balance his budget. They included forced loans, new customs duties and sale of titles. So long as peace was maintained these sources of revenue were just sufficient to stave off a crisis. After the death of Cecil, son of Elizabeth's chief minister, in 1612, James began to fall more and more under the influence of Spain and for some years the Spanish ambassador, Gondomar, was the real power behind the government. In 1620 the Thirty Years' War in Germany created new difficulties. The Elector of the Rhenish Palatinate, one of the leading Protestant princes and son-in-law to James, had accepted the crown of Bohemia, whose people were in revolt against the Emperor. The Elector was quickly driven out of Bohemia and his own Palatinate and appealed to his father-in-law. James was anxious to help and the Puritan City of London was eager for war. James, however, preferred to attempt to restore his son-in-law to his dominions by negotiation with Spain, proposing a Spanish marriage for his son Charles and the toleration of the English Catholics as a return for the evacuation of the Rhineland by the Emperor's troops.

Such negotiations could only succeed if backed by a show of force and James was compelled to summon a parliament in 1621. He asked for £500,000. Parliament voted about



£150,000, demanded war against Spain and impeached the Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon, on a charge of corruption. In the next session James asked for £900,000 and was voted only £70,000 while the Commons openly attacked the proposed Spanish marriage. In January 1622 Parliament was dissolved.

At this time the Council was completely dominated by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, whose only qualifications for governing were his immense vanity and his personal attractiveness to James. Completely ignorant of European politics he did not realise that the Spanish were bluffing and had no intention of making any real concessions. When he did come to realise this after a visit to Madrid, he swung violently towards a war policy, regardless of the fact that the navy was completely decayed and that there was no army or any means of creating one. The Commons were equally ill informed, and when a new parliament met in 1624 it was enthusiastic for war and voted the large sum of £300,000 – nearly half of what was demanded.

The war that followed was a fiasco and Buckingham quickly lost his sudden and temporary popularity. Wretched armies of untrained conscripts, drawn from the slum population or the rural unemployed, were sent abroad to be butchered or to die of fever. The decayed and ill appointed ships failed repeatedly to reproduce the naval exploits of the previous generation. Out of sheer incapacity Buckingham soon involved the country in a second and even more pointless war with France. When he was stabbed in 1628 by a dismissed officer the people of London celebrated his death in the streets like a victory, and, after a final defeat at La Rochelle, Charles made peace with Spain, France and the Emperor as speedily and unostentatiously as possible.

Meanwhile the struggle with parliament had continued after the death of James in 1625. The first parliament of the new reign, meeting in June 1625, refused to vote money for the war they had demanded a year earlier unless Buckingham was removed from control. The baronial opposition of the Middle Ages had sometimes enforced the removal of ministers they disliked, but no such attempt had been made for over a hundred years and from the Commons such a demand was quite new. Parliament was dissolved in August but Charles still needed money and had to call a new parliament in February of the next year.

In spite of attempts to pack it, the new parliament was as

stubborn as the old one had been and began at once to prepare for the impeachment of Buckingham. In a few months it too was dissolved. In place of the unvoted taxes the government raised a forced loan, systematically levied like a regular subsidy. Those who refused to pay were imprisoned or pressed into the army. War was still going on and detachments of untrained and undisciplined soldiers were scattered over the country. Often unpaid and billeted in private houses for the sake of economy, they became a terror to their unwilling hosts who found that complaints of robbery and violence often went unheeded at military tribunals to which troops were answerable.

The forced loan was not a success and in 1628 Charles was compelled for the third time to call a parliament. It met in an even more uncompromising mood than its predecessors and with a clearer idea of the political demands it intended to make. A contemporary noted of this parliament, probably justly, that the House of Commons was able to buy up the Lords three times over. In the fifteenth century the Commons had been content to follow the lead of the upper house but their wealth and social standing and that of the classes they represented were now such that it was they who took the leading role. The Lords at this time hardly existed as an independent force, acting only as an intermediate body inclining by turns towards king and Commons.

Under the leadership of a Cornish squire, Sir John Eliot, the Commons at once formulated their demands in the document known as the Petition of Right. It avoided all attempt to theorise, confining itself to four specific points. Two, the billeting of soldiers and the abuse of martial law, were of mainly immediate importance. The others were wider in scope. The petition demanded that the practice of keeping arrested persons in prison 'without being charged with anything to which they might make answer to the law' should cease and that 'no man hereafter be compelled to make or yield any gift, loan, benevolence, tax, or such like charge, without common consent by Act of Parliament'.

Most of the things complained of in the petition had been done without question by the crown for many generations. The important point was that they had been formulated and forbidden just at the time when the crown was claiming to do them by absolute, sovereign right. The petition was in fact if

not in form an answer to the royal attempt to establish a theoretical basis for a practical absolutism.

Diplomatically, the Commons had sweetened the pill with the promise of the large vote of five subsidies – about £350,000. After some characteristic haggling Charles assented to the petition but when parliament went on to demand the removal of Buckingham it was prorogued. In the interval before the next session Buckingham was murdered. Parliament met again in January 1629, and followed up the Petition of Right by granting Tunnage and Poundage for one year only instead of, as always before, for life. Indirect taxes at recognised customary and traditional rates had always been regarded as part of the ordinary revenue of the crown. This new move meant a far more strict interpretation of the Petition of Right than Charles had anticipated and he indignantly rejected a claim that would have given the Commons complete financial control. He refused to accept the vote for one year and continued to collect the customs as before. In a tumultuous last session, with the Speaker held down in his chair by force, the Commons passed three resolutions, declaring that anyone who attempted to introduce popery, who advised the levy of any tax not authorised by parliament or who should ‘voluntarily yield to pay’ any such tax was an enemy of the kingdom and commonwealth and of the liberty of England.

Parliament was then dissolved, not to meet again for eleven years. Eliot and other leaders were thrown into prison, where Eliot died in 1632. The hatred of the king pursued him even after death, for when his son asked to be allowed to take away the body for burial he was met with the reply: ‘Let Sir John Eliot be buried in the church of that parish where he died.’

After the dissolution of parliament the wars with France and Spain were quickly brought to an end and Charles and his advisers set to work to devise means of raising sufficient revenue to meet necessary expenses. In accordance with the final resolution passed by the Commons the London merchants at first refused to pay the unvoted customs duties. Such resistance could not be kept up indefinitely; and after business in London had been brought almost to a standstill for six months it died down. Perhaps the most unwise of all the financial expedients employed by the Council at this time was the revival of claims to land that had anciently been royal

forest. Much of this land had been in private hands for generations but the occupiers were forced to pay heavy fines before their ownership was confirmed. Much of this land was held by powerful nobles and by offending them Charles left himself for a time without supporters except for the Catholics, the court clique and a handful of High Church clergy.

Money was also raised by the sale of monopolies, by increasing the customs which, in any case, were rising with the expansion of trade, and, last of all, by the levy of ship money. It had long been a recognised obligation of the seaports to provide ships for the navy. Now the development of naval war had made most ordinary merchant ships unsuitable for this purpose and a sum of money was demanded in place of actual tonnage. In 1634 ship money was collected from the coast towns and was actually used for the repair of the navy. So far there had been no opposition. In the next two years the levy was extended to inland places as well and it became obvious that it was intended to treat ship money as a regular tax bringing in about £200,000 a year. This would have made the government permanently independent of parliament and it was on these grounds that Hampden refused to pay in 1636. The trial that followed was important as a focus of opposition but Hampden's example was not widely followed and the levy was collected in each of the following years.

Apart from the protests of individuals there had been little open opposition to the government during this period of arbitrary rule. During the whole time there was hardly so much as a riot throughout the whole country. The feudal conditions which had made armed rebellion a common resort in the Middle Ages had passed. The nobles were no longer served by bands of armed men. The former peasants had developed into separate classes – yeomen, tenant farmers and wage labourers – with different interests. Most of these had little direct concern in the political struggle and with the slowing down of enclosures there was less agrarian unrest of the kind that had led to Kett's rebellion.<sup>1</sup> The merchants and landed gentry who led the opposition to the crown were weak as individuals and needed the focus of parliament and of a political party to unite them into concerted action. As yet, no such party existed, but

<sup>1</sup> The last peasant rising on a serious scale was in 1607 in the Midlands.

there was already the nucleus of it, forced to work and organise in secret, and making preparations to take the fullest advantage of the day when the king would be obliged to summon a new parliament.

The impetus for a renewal of the struggle had to come from the outside, from Scotland, where medieval conditions had persisted to a much greater extent and the prerequisites for a successful armed rising still existed.<sup>1</sup> The dispute that blazed up in Scotland at the close of 1637 was religious in character, the result of an attempt by Laud and the Anglicans to remodel the Scottish kirk. To understand this dispute it is necessary to know something about the nature of Puritanism and about its relation to the political struggle of the seventeenth century.

#### **4 The Puritans**

The word Puritan, when James I came to the throne, had not acquired any very exact meaning but was applied loosely to a variety of things and people. It was, first, a tendency within the established church. Most Puritans were still inside this church, from which they had few important theological differences and only wanted minor changes of ritual and discipline to enable them to stay there. To the left of these and far less numerous, was a group that wished to replace the Anglican state church by a Presbyterian state church on the model of the Scottish Kirk. Finally, there was a fringe of small sects who were the anarchists of religion, wishing to leave every congregation free to settle its own affairs, the fathers of the Quakers, Congregationalists and Baptists of later times.

In the main Puritanism was not so much a matter of theological dissent as of a peculiar attitude towards morals and behaviour, a different conception of church discipline and of civil government. The political radicalism of the Puritan grew naturally from his relation to god and to society. He was one of the lord's chosen people, the elect. In all his activities he was encompassed by the grace of god, so that every event from the greatest to the most trivial could be classed as a trial or a

<sup>1</sup> This is a striking example of the way in which the *uneven* development of capitalism creates the conditions leading to revolutions.

leading, a mercy or a judgement. A lively faith in the doctrine of predestination divided him and his fellows from the vessels of wrath who composed the world. As god's chosen people the Puritans felt their triumph inevitable and their enemies to be god's enemies. Against any man, be he king or priest, who ventured to lay burdens or chains upon them they felt entitled to fight with any weapon that the lord put into their hands – and sometimes the lord gave them very curious weapons indeed. All of which is really saying, in the Biblical language of the seventeenth century, that they were conscious of their mission as a historically progressive class engaged in a revolutionary struggle.

When such a temper was allied, as it often was, to considerable wealth, or when it became the common property of a large organised group like the citizens of London or the artisans of the East Anglian clothing towns, it was formidable indeed. Butler's malicious picture of the Puritans, drawn to amuse the victorious Cavaliers after the Restoration of 1660, is true to at least this extent that the Puritans who:

Build their faith upon  
The holy text of pike and gun

were the possessors of a fighting religion.

Butler in this does not contradict Milton, whose 'true warfaring Christian' had no use for a fugitive and cloistered virtue.

It is perhaps worth remarking here that the Puritan did not as a rule (there was, of course, a small eccentric minority) speak through his nose or crop his hair. He did, however, tend to wear clothes of a sober colour and homely cut and to despise the vanities of the flesh. A description of Cromwell, making his first speech before the Long Parliament, sets the well-to-do provincial Puritan vividly before us.

'I came one morning into the House well clad,' writes Sir Philip Warwick,

and perceived a Gentleman speaking (whom I knew not) very ordinarily apparelled; for it was a plain cloth-sute, which seemed to have bin made by an ill country-taylor; his linen was plain and not very clean; and I remembre a speck or two of blood upon his little

band, which was not much larger than his collar; his stature was of a good size, his sword stuck close to his side, his countenance swoln and reddish, his voice sharp and untunable, and his eloquence full of fervor ... And yet I lived to see this very gentleman (having a good taylor and more converse among good company) appeared of a great and majestick deportment and comely presence.

Cromwell was in many ways typical of the best kind of Puritan squire. Related to Henry VIII's minister, he belonged to a family that had grown rich on church lands, yet he had a good reputation in his own country of Huntingdon as a defender of the rights of his poorer neighbours. Later, when many members of the Long Parliament, including the Speaker Lenthall, were involved in ugly scandals arising from the sale of the lands of expelled royalists, he was among those whom even their enemies never even suspected of personal corruption. It is also interesting to remember that the speech described above was in defence of the republican Lilburne, later one of his stoutest opponents.

At the beginning of his reign James was presented with a petition from some hundreds of Puritan clergy of the church of England asking for a moderate liberty to accept or reject certain minor points of ritual such as the wearing of the surplice and the use of the sign of the cross in baptism, for the encouragement of preaching and of the stricter observance of Sunday and the non-observance of saints' days. In 1604 a conference at Hampton Court, at which James presided in person, discussed the petition. Here the reason for James' opposition to Puritanism became plain; it was not theological – James himself was a Calvinist – but political. 'A Scottish Presbytery agreeth as well with monarchy as God and the Devil,' and 'No Bishop no King', was his crystallisation of the issue. His bitter experience with the kirk in Scotland had taught him to welcome a church governed from above and subordinated to the state. The Scottish kirk, organised from the bottom through a series of representative bodies, rising to an Assembly composed of ministers and delegates from congregations, was indeed the logical embodiment of the democratic spirit inherent in Puritanism and James was right in thinking that this was incompatible with royal absolutism.

His next step was to institute a purge of the church, in which

300 clergy who refused to conform were deprived of their livings. It had the effect of weakening the church by depriving it of a large proportion of that minority of its ministers who cared more for truth than for tithes and leaving it in the hands of place-seekers and of the small and isolated but influential group of High Anglican enthusiasts who gathered around Laud. Some cleavage was no doubt inevitable, but James and his advisers drew the line so far to the right that for a half a century the established church lost much of its popular appeal and the crown forfeited the support of many who might otherwise have rallied to it when actual war arrived.

Laud, honest but quite out of touch with reality, tried to dragoon the church into what to many people looked like papistry at a time when papistry was wildly unpopular. A rigorous censorship embracing both press and pulpit and backed by the Court of High Commission, a sort of ecclesiastical Star Chamber, was imposed. The claim of the clergy to regulate morals and behaviour, which had lapsed with the Reformation, was revived. The use of parish churches as places of meeting and business was prohibited and a strict uniformity of ritual was imposed. Between 1628 and 1640 some 20,000 Puritans emigrated to New England to escape from a land that seemed to them doomed to revert to Catholicism. Others were driven to form secret groups for private worship, groups that became centres of political disaffection. Others conformed outwardly, waiting for better times.

By 1637 Laud, apparently feeling that the situation in England was well in hand, began to turn his attention to Scotland. James would have known that to attempt to create in Scotland a counterpart of the Anglican church was futile and dangerous but Charles shared the blank ignorance of Scotland and things Scottish then general in England. A new prayer book, based on the English one, was compiled and sent over the border but every attempt to use it met with riotous resistance. There was a real fear, which spread south of the border, that the king intended to resume church lands – first in Scotland, then perhaps in England. The signing of the National Covenant for the defence of religion soon raised this resistance to the level of a national revolt and Charles was faced in the spring of 1638, with the necessity of reconquering Scotland by force of arms.

His financial position made it quite impossible to raise an



adequate army. His one capable minister, Sir Thomas Wentworth, afterwards Earl of Strafford, could only advise the calling of a parliament. Strafford had been out of England during most of the eleven years, acting as Governor of Ireland where he had put into practice on a smaller scale the system of absolute government at which Charles was aiming in England. By a combination of ruthless repression and the encouragement of trade and industry he had solved the problem of finance and managed to raise an efficient army. Now he had returned to England determined to apply his system there also.

In April 1640 the Short Parliament met, to sit for just a fortnight. Instead of voting supplies it began under the leadership of Pym to organise a petition against the Scottish war and was at once dissolved. An army of sorts was collected and marched north to find the Scots already in occupation of all Northumberland and far too strong to be attacked. Their army was stiffened by many old soldiers who had fought as volunteers in the Thirty Years' War and even Charles realised that his half-trained and half-mutinous troops could not attack it without certain disaster. A truce was made by which Charles promised to respect all Scottish political and religious liberties and to pay a large indemnity for the withdrawal of the army from Northumberland. Pending its payment the Scots remained at Newcastle.

The discomfiture of Charles was completed by the exhaustion of his credit in the city. Without calling a parliament to vote taxes that could be used as security he could borrow no more. The last serious attempt of the crown to govern in opposition to the monied classes was ended. Once more the writs went out for the summoning of a parliament, in an atmosphere of extreme tension with Stafford planning the arrest of leading figures in the Commons and the occupation of London by an armed force, and some of the parliamentary leaders engaged in secret negotiations with the Scots.

The meeting of the Long Parliament in November 1640 was the signal for a renewal of the struggle between King and Commons on a higher plane than before. Events moved rapidly toward an armed conflict and the parliament, though summoned with due legal form, soon became in fact a revolutionary tribunal. For two years the opposing forces faced each other, waiting for the inevitable break and manoeuvring

to force each other into a false position. The English revolution may be said to begin in November 1640 with the impeachment of Strafford. In this and the preceding sections the events leading up to this, one of the decisive events in European history, have been traced in outline: it is time to pause and consider briefly the nature of the issues involved.

## **5 Fundamental Issues in the English Revolution**

The Tudor absolutism had been one of a most peculiar kind – an absolutism by consent. The Tudors had never possessed a standing army, a police force or more than the barest skeleton of a bureaucracy. They had never commanded a revenue that was more than sufficient for the most pressing immediate needs. Their rule was therefore of necessity based upon a temporary balance of class forces which gave them the consistent support of powerful and progressive classes, above all of the merchants and a decisive section of the landed gentry. The squires as Justices of the Peace were content to perform the work of a civil service. The monied interests were able to tide the government over its most pressing financial crises. In particular the relations of Elizabeth's government to the London goldsmiths, who were already beginning to do business as bankers, were friendly and intimate.

Such a balance was in its nature precarious, arising from the fact that in the sixteenth century the monarchy had a positive historical role to play in the destruction of the remnants of military feudalism. So long as it continued to do this, to put down disorder and establish stable government, there was no need for the middle class and the progressive gentry to raise the question of power; they could prosper within the framework of the old regime. In alliance with these classes the Tudors had destroyed the independent power of the church and the nobility, and created the preconditions for the development of a capitalist economy.

But the monarchy was itself too much the product of feudalism and contained within itself too many feudal survivals to be able to carry the revolution to its completion. Once a certain point had been reached, and with a startling suddenness, its objective character underwent a complete

transformation, and it appeared as the main obstacle to the bourgeois revolution and the centre around which the forces of reaction gathered for the decisive struggle. In this connection the reversal of the attitude of the Catholics and Puritans to the crown in the first decades of the seventeenth century becomes full of significance. It is now apparent that the bourgeoisie could no longer go forward in alliance with the crown but only in opposition to it. To the men of the seventeenth century that was not, of course, obvious in so simple a way, but the necessity forced itself upon them in countless apparently unrelated dilemmas, driving them to decisions that in their totality constituted the forward movement of a whole class.

When, about 1600, the conditions creating the Tudor equilibrium came to an end, history offered, or seemed to offer, alternative paths and the one ultimately followed was not that which would have seemed most likely to a contemporary observer. The state machine which had served for the last century was growing increasingly inadequate to the complexity of national life. The question was, who would create and control the new kind of state apparatus that was needed? All over Europe feudalism was giving way to bureaucratic despotisms, of which France offered the most perfect example. The independent power of the feudal nobility had there been undermined without the rise of any other class capable of stepping into its place, whole continuous wars had given the kings powerful standing armies.

The Stuarts, fully aware of this tendency abroad, were consciously determined to follow the example of the French kings. Parliament, also, if less fully aware of this danger, was determined to avert it. And certain peculiarities in the situation in England worked powerfully in their favour.

First, England was less continuously involved in foreign wars and her wars had been more often fought at sea so that the creation of a standing army, without which a true absolutism could not exist, had never been possible. Second, the fact that the Tudor monarchy was actually founded upon a genuine alliance in which each partner needed the support of the other had preserved and adapted the parliamentary forms which had been created in the Middle Ages under different conditions and had left the revenues of the crown largely feudal in character and inadequate in amount. The middle classes had

been prepared to do almost anything for the Tudors except pay heavy taxes. Parliament which had begun as a check on the theoretically absolute power of the feudal king to dispose of the property of his subjects had become in time the guardian of the absolute right of the individual to the enjoyment of his private property.

The belief in the sanctity of private property had grown in strength as the bourgeoisie grew tall in the sixteenth century. Only by a direct attack on it could the Stuarts create the new state apparatus needed for a thorough despotism and any such attack could not be lead directly to a decisive class battle. Here is the kernel of the whole conflict and the reason why the Stuarts and their parliaments were always at odds over the question of taxation. The crown claimed the right to levy such taxes as it thought necessary for the administration of the state. The Commons claimed the right to pay no more than they thought necessary for the same purpose. Essentially this was a demand for direct political power, since in practice they were only prepared to allow the crown enough to govern in the way they wanted, and, if it refused, to allow it nothing at all.

The case for the king was clearly stated by Justice Finch during the trial of Hampden for his refusal to pay ship-money:

Acts of Parliament to take away his Royal power in the defence of his kingdom are void. They are void Acts of Parliament to bind the King not to command his subjects, their persons and goods and I say their money too, for no Acts of Parliament make any difference.

The divine right of kings was squarely opposed to, and finally broken upon, the divine right of private property.

While the Stuarts were fighting with a clearly envisaged objective and a fully developed theoretical position, the bourgeoisie were guided largely by instinct. Theoretical clarity came only, if at all, in the process of struggle but at first they were content with vague affirmations of the liberty of the subject and the conception of a fundamental law which stood above the crown, a law which could not be set aside without doing violence to the constitution. No one in 1640 foresaw or could foresee the parliamentary monarchy which emerged finally from the compromises of 1660 and 1688.

Nor was it apparent that a minor revolution had been accomplished when the Long Parliament abolished the Star Chamber, the Court of High Commission and the other prerogative courts. All that was intended was to destroy bodies that had become instruments of royal tyranny. Yet what was done was to cut the main artery of the old state apparatus. Crown, Council, prerogative courts, Justice of the Peace had formed a living chain. Now the link between the central organ and the extremities was removed and neither Council nor Justices ever recovered anything like their old importance. A new state apparatus had to be created, not around a Council responsible to the king but around a Cabinet responsible to the bourgeoisie in parliament and having a new and more adaptable system of finance and local government.

Again, few of the members of the Long Parliament in 1640 were republicans or dreamed of doing more than limiting the power of the crown. Such republicans as there were at this time probably anticipated not a democratic republic but a plutocratic republic on the model of Holland, whose commercial prosperity made her the ideal state in the eyes of many of the merchant class. The radicalism that emerged at the close of the Civil War was still hidden among obscure and persecuted sects, spiritual heirs of the German Anabaptists, apocalyptic dreamers awaiting the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

The practical men, the Pym, Vanes, Fairfaxes and Cromwells, were content to defend their earthly possessions and, at first, to see no more than one step ahead at a time. Their profound religious convictions were important here because they helped to give them confidence in the divine justice of their cause and the courage necessary to take each step as it appeared. In their own desires they saw the hand of the lord of battles, leading them as certainly as he led the Israelites through the wilderness. It was perhaps largely the absence of theory and of clear objectives which cast the political movement and thought of the seventeenth century so often into religious forms.

In spite of all that has been said to the contrary it cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the civil war *was* a class struggle, *was* revolutionary and *was* progressive. A royalist victory would have meant a dead hand imposed upon the development of the country, feudal forms devoid of real content ossified into a

monarchical tyranny, the persistence of a less advanced form of social and political organisation. We do not need to idealise the bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century, who had most of the faults common to their class in all ages, but it is possible to say that just because they were the historically progressive class of their time, they could not fight for their own rights and liberties without also fighting for the rights and liberties of all Englishmen and of humanity as a whole.

## VIII THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

### 1 The Long Parliament: Classes and Parties

The Commons in the Long Parliament had a cohesion and a conscious purpose new in English history. In earlier parliaments members were elected as individuals, for their standing in their own shires and boroughs rather than for their political alignment. But in the interval since the parliament of 1628 the first political party had begun to take shape. It was the work of a group of Puritan squires and nobles, of Pym, a leader of the last parliament, of Hampden, whose stand against ship-money had made him a nationally known figure, of the Earl of Bedford, the grandfather of all the Whigs, of the Earl of Essex who had, like his father, an unbounded influence among the London citizens.

During the elections, in the autumn of 1640, Pym, Hampden and others toured the country, urging the return of known Puritans and strengthening their claim to leadership of the opposition. The result was an overwhelming electoral victory for the party of the big bourgeoisie, the landowners and merchants, not republican but determined for the most part to make the crown subordinate to a parliament of which they were complete masters.

In the first session of the Long Parliament the new party met with no real opposition. Charles had alienated almost all classes and there was as yet no royalist party. Men like Hyde and Falkland, who were not Puritans and later fought for the King in the civil war, went with the majority in attacking royal absolutism and demanding the removal of Strafford. In November 1640 it appeared as if the battle was won without a blow being struck. Strafford and Laud were arrested, other unpopular ministers escaped abroad and the Commons, protected on one side by the Scottish army encamped at

Newcastle and on the other by the London masses, appeared irresistible. London became the great centre of revolutionary ferment and discussion. The Laudian censorship once removed, pamphlets and preachers began to debate openly the fundamental questions of church and state government, and scores of sects, hitherto unknown or obscure, grew rapidly in numbers and influence. Popular demonstrations to Westminster often exercised decisive political effect, coercing the king and driving the parliamentary party into more aggressive action. Pym and his fellows were at times terrified by the violence of the forces they had set in motion but were too much in need of popular support against the crown to venture to restrain it.

In March Strafford was impeached for high treason. Since treason had in the past always been a crime against the king, and since Strafford had acted throughout on the king's behalf, a new conception of treason had to be put forward, treason against the state and the liberty of the subject. It was a crime unknown to law, but Pym and his followers knew that as long as Strafford was alive there was danger of a counter-revolution in which they would be lucky to escape with their lives. When the Lords seemed unlikely to find Strafford guilty, the procedure was suddenly changed and a Bill of Attainder introduced. It was significant of the state of opinion at this time that only fifty-nine votes were cast against the Bill in the Commons, and many of these were given because of disapproval of the procedure rather than from a feeling that Strafford ought not to die.

A crisis had been precipitated by the discovery of a plot among the officers of the army at York to march on London, release Strafford and dissolve parliament. It was encouraged by Charles and the queen and organised by the most unscrupulous and irresponsible courtiers and adventurers, men like Goring, a seventeenth century Roehm, of whom the royalist historian Clarendon wrote later that he

would without hesitation have broken any trust or done any act of treachery, to have satisfied an ordinary passion or appetite, and in truth wanted nothing but industry ... to have bene as eminent and successful in the highest attempt in wickedness of any man in the age he lyved in.



The discovery of the plot produced a panic in London. The *Attainder* was rushed through the two houses early in May and presented to the king for his signature. With it went a Bill to prevent the dissolution of parliament without its own consent. For some days huge demonstrations surrounded Westminster and threatened to storm and sack the royal palace of Whitehall. Charles gave way and on 12 May Strafford was beheaded on Tower Hill before a crowd which contemporary writers have estimated at 200,000. From this time two things were clear. First, that a decisive conflict had opened in which both sides were fighting for absolute supremacy, and, second, that the parliamentary party must triumph or perish because Charles would never be satisfied with less than their complete destruction.

After the death of Strafford began a process of differentiation in which the moderates, those who had believed in the possibility of a divided sovereignty, passed one by one into the royalist camp. This differentiation, however, did not become marked till the next session, and before it separated parliament passed a series of measures in which the various forms of extra-parliamentary taxation were declared illegal and the Star Chamber and other prerogative courts were abolished. Charles dared not oppose these measures openly but continued to intrigue with the officers and the Catholics, at the same time collecting the nucleus of a party within parliament itself.

In August the Commons were really divided for the first time over the Root and Branch Bill to abolish bishops and to organise the church under a commission of laymen appointed by parliament. The question was a political one because the bishops sitting in the House of Lords formed a block appointed by, and attached to the interests of, the crown. The Root and Branch Bill was therefore an attempt to check the formation of a royalist party inside parliament.

When the Houses reassembled in the autumn a new external crisis raised directly the question of power, of armed force, and divided the Commons into two nearly equal camps. This crisis was the rebellion of the Irish, driven from their lands and coerced by Strafford and now freed from the restraint imposed by his autocratic government. Horrible and exaggerated tales came over the Irish Sea of the wholesale massacre of Protestant settlers. To Puritans and royalists alike the Irish Catholics were

savages to be harried and crushed without mercy, but to crush them would require a considerable army. Who was to control this army? The Puritans knew that Charles would be at least as likely to turn it against parliament as against the Irish. The royalists were as afraid to trust the Puritan leaders of the Commons with an army, and in any case, the raising and control of any armed force had always been the right and duty of the crown.

In November the Puritans drew up the Grand Remonstrance, a frankly party document, designed as an appeal to Protestant prejudices and an assertion of the unfitness of the king to be trusted with an army. So even were the parties at this time that the Remonstrance was passed by only eleven votes. If Charles had been content to stand on his ancient rights and the letter of the law he would perhaps have been successful at this point. He preferred to trust to his gentleman bravos, who formed armed bands which swaggered about the London streets provoking brawls with the citizens and apprentices. The latter, at any rate, were only too ready to retaliate. Finally, Charles threw away the advantage of his legal position by his attempt to arrest Pym, Hampden and three other parliamentary leaders. On 4 January he entered the House of Commons with some hundreds of armed followers to demand the arrest of the five members. They had been warned and had taken refuge in the City. Pym, always a master of political tactics, was quick to grasp the advantage. The alarm was sounded, the London train bands were called out to protect parliament from massacre and it transferred its session to the Guildhall in the heart of the City. On 10 January Charles fled to York, whither about one-third of the Commons and two-thirds of the Lords drifted in twos and threes during the winter. Both sides began at once to raise the forces necessary for an armed struggle.

Yet it is important to notice how the terms of the struggle had been dictated by the work of the Long Parliament. Charles was no longer able to take his stand on divine right or to fight openly for his real objects. Instead he was forced to talk the language of his opponents, using the talents of the constitutional royalist, Hyde, to draft proclamations in which he declared:

I desire to govern by the known laws of the land and that the liberty and property of the subject may by them be preserved with the

same care as his just rights. And ... I do solemnly and faithfully promise, in the sight of God, to maintain the just privileges and freedom of Parliament ... and particularly to observe inviolably the laws consented to by me this Parliament.

While there is no reason to suppose that this was more than a pretence it is worth comparing the language used with that of Justice Finch, a few years earlier.<sup>1</sup>

This moderation of language certainly attracted to the king many who would not otherwise have supported him, so that when war came his supporters were no longer confined to the Gorings but included such men as Falkland, a passionate enemy of both tyranny and war, or Sir Edmund Verney, contrained by a sense of loyalty 'to preserve and defend those things which are against my conscience to preserve and defend', men in every way as honest and disinterested as Hampden or Lilburne. And on the side of parliament, to offset the Gorings, there were plenty of hypocrites, corrupt self-seekers, oppressive squires and land-enclosing noblemen, like the Earls of Bedford and Manchester, both of whom Cromwell had opposed in the interests of the East Anglian yeomen. So much is self-evident: what is sometimes forgotten is that in a revolutionary struggle what counts is not the noble or ignoble motives of individuals but the alignments of classes and the objects for which these classes are struggling. Nevertheless it is important to remember that while the Falklands were the least wholehearted on the side of the king, were constantly tortured by a divided loyalty, it was the best and most progressive of the parliamentarians who were most determined to bring the war to a victorious conclusion and most fully conscious of what they were fighting about.

On the side of parliament was first of all London, then relatively larger and more decisive politically than today. With some 300,000 inhabitants it was at least ten times the size of the next biggest cities – Bristol and Norwich. London was the stronghold of the right wing of the parliamentary forces, the Presbyterians, as the party of the landowners and rich merchants came almost accidentally to be called. The masses in London were politically under the leadership of the merchants.

<sup>1</sup> See page 192.

Organised in their trained bands of militia, the best infantry at the command of parliament, the Londoners were fanatically attached to the moderate leader, the Earl of Essex, until, and to some extent even after, his blundering incompetence had led them to disaster in the humiliating surrender of Lostwithiel. With them were the bulk of the smaller, but still rich, prosperous and commercially minded gentry of the East, South and Midlands. The connections between gentry and merchants were always close; merchants often bought estates and set up as country squires, while the younger sons of the gentry constantly entered the ranks of the merchants. Lilburne, for example, was the son of a Durham squire who was apprenticed to a London draper, and it was perhaps through the apprentices, many of whom came from well-to-do families, that the merchants were able to influence the London masses as a whole.

Over against these stood the independents, the left wing, drawn mainly from the yeomen farmers and the tradesmen and artisans of the country towns. They were the most democratic and revolutionary section and from them came the splendid fighting material out of which the New Model Army was later created. They were unable, however, to throw up a leadership of their own class, and had to rely, to their own ultimate undoing, upon a group of the most active and intelligent gentlemen.

In the main, parliament was strong in the towns and in the East and South, the richest and most economically developed parts of the country. It had also the support of the navy and controlled almost all the seaports and therefore the foreign trade. Here lay its greatest advantage, in that it was able to raise heavy and continuous taxation and to finance the war in an organised way, whereas the king had to rely on the generosity of individual supporters and was cut off from the possibility of any help from abroad. In a long war such an advantage was almost certain to be decisive, though at first parliament, while having the money to raise and equip armies, found it difficult to secure soldiers with military experience.

The king's forces were such that his best chance lay in a speedy victory. He was strong in the West and North, the poorest but most warlike parts of the kingdom. With him were the Catholics who remained strong in those parts and the great,

half-feudal nobles of the borders who could still, with the backing of the royal name, call out strong levies of their tenants and dependents. Among these were the Earl of Newcastle who formed a splendid body of infantry, the 'Whitecoats', out of the wild fighters of the Scottish border, the immensely wealthy Catholic Earl of Worcester and the Earl of Derby, owner of vast domains in Lancashire.

While the country gentry were divided, the supporters of the king were in the main those with military traditions, volunteers in the Thirty Years' War, swordsmen and dashing riders to hounds, men from whom excellent cavalry could be, and, under the able leadership of the king's nephew Rupert, quickly was formed.

Whether we look at the division by classes or by geographical area it adds up to the same thing, a struggle between the most advanced classes and areas, using parliament as their instrument, and the most conservative gathered round the crown. There were, of course, countless exceptions, every county and town having its minority, and in many areas the first stage of the war was a struggle for local supremacy between the rival parties. Only in the East and the Home Counties on the one side and in the far North and West on the other was there a heavy disproportion of forces. In Lancashire the local struggle developed into a particularly bitter feud between the Puritans of the clothing towns and the Catholics of the villages.

Finally, this war was one waged between two minorities. Whole classes, the tenant farmers and wage earners especially, stood outside and only fought if conscripted, while in all classes many individuals remained neutral or gave only passive support to one side or the other. This is proved by the fact that there were at no time more than about 150,000 men under arms on both sides and that a high proportion of these were pressed men. Desertion was common throughout the war. The neutral classes had grievances of their own, high rents and prices and low wages, but the war did not seem to them to be, and in fact was not, waged about these grievances. It was essentially a war between two would-be ruling classes and the lowest strata of the population took little or no part in it. Only in 1647-48, after the war was won, did the revolutionary democracy of the army attempt to draw the masses into political activity.

## **2 The Civil War**

From January to August 1642 the king at York and the Commons in London were engaged in gathering their forces and securing the castles, arsenals and other strong points in the areas under their control. Open war was preceded in most parts by local conflicts. In August Charles moved south to Nottingham and made a formal declaration of war. His forces were still small and ill-disciplined, while parliament, with the ample resources of London at its disposal, was able to equip a considerable army, strong in infantry, to which the London train bands contributed the best elements. A determined thrust in the last weeks of August would probably have finished the war at a single blow.

But the Earl of Essex, commanding the parliamentary army, a quiet, honest, slow-witted nobleman, failed to move. He was an essentially moderate man, believing implicitly that the war must end in a speedy compromise and as much afraid of decisive victory as of defeat. His attitude was an exact reflection of the temper of the Presbyterians who controlled affairs in the first years of the war, a temper that had disastrous military consequences and brought the parliamentary cause to the verge of ruin.

Charles found recruiting poor in the Midlands and moved west into the Severn Valley where he soon gathered an army composed largely of Welsh infantry and cavalry drawn from the landowners of the western shires and their dependents. With this army he began a march on London, and on 23 October encountered Essex at Edgehill. The drawn battle that followed revealed both the superiority of the royal horse and the steadiness of the London infantry. Charles was able to continue his advance on London, but was too weak to attack it in the face of the strong and well-equipped train bands which met him at Turnham Green. He retired to Oxford and there fixed the headquarters of his main army. The possession of London was clearly of decisive importance, and in the spring of 1643 a concerted advance was begun by three Royalist armies.

In the North the Earl of Newcastle drove Fairfax out of Yorkshire, laid siege to Hull and advanced into Lincoln. In the West, Hopton, perhaps the king's most capable all-round soldier, defeated parliamentary armies at Lansdown Hill and

Roundway Down, Bristol was captured in July and in August Charles began the siege of Gloucester. This converging advance on London was sound enough strategically: it failed because the royalist armies were not disciplined enough to carry out such a movement. Both the northern and western royalist forces were essentially local, ready to fight in their own shires but unwilling to engage in a long campaign far from home. Their uneasiness was increased by the existence of the unconquered strongholds of Hull, Plymouth and Gloucester, whose garrisons threatened their communications and might attack their estates. The farther the royalist armies advanced the more frequent desertions became. Moreover, it was in Lincolnshire that they first came upon cavalry that could stand up to their own in open battle. They were the men of Cromwell's regiment, the germ of the New Model Army, yeomen farmers from the Eastern Counties who were the equals of Charles' gentlemen riders in courage and infinitely their superiors in discipline.

Nevertheless the situation seemed desperate in London during the summer of 1643 and a strong party in parliament and in the City began to demand peace on almost any terms. The turning point of the whole war was, perhaps, the resistance and relief of Gloucester. A fiery crusade was preached in the City and a great force of militia, such as had never taken the field before except for a few days at Turnham Green, marched out across England, fought their way to Gloucester in the teeth of Rupert's cavalry and raised the siege. On their return journey they had rather the better of a fierce fight at Newbury and returned in triumph to London after a five-week campaign that had altered the whole face of the war. Such an episode was in its nature exceptional. The war was not yet won and could not be won except by the creation of a regular army of a new kind, and above all of a body of first rate horse.

Cavalry was the decisive arm in all seventeenth century wars. Cavalry tactics had been revolutionised by the Swedes during the Thirty Years' War, so that horsemen no longer charged in column, halting when within pistol range to exchange shots with their opponents and then, perhaps, drawing away, but in lines three or four deep, closing at top speed and holding their fire till they were actually engaged in the *mêlée*. Such were the tactics of Rupert's cavaliers and at first they carried all before

them. But these tactics had their own disadvantages. Once a charge had been carried through the victors scattered in pursuit or rode for the enemy's camp to 'kill the baggage'. They could not carry out an order in the field and rarely were available for more than one charge. Cromwell mounted his men on slower but heavier horses and taught them to advance at a fair pace in line knee to knee, relying rather on the weight of their charge than upon mere impetus. They were trained to halt at command, to wheel, to fight either as a mass or in separate troops, forming a force at once solid and flexible. And they were well paid so that it was possible to prohibit looting without danger of mutiny or desertions.

Drawn from, and in many cases officered by, the yeomen farmers and more prosperous artisans, this cavalry set the tone for the whole army. Under their influence the infantry, who were at first, except for some London regiments, mainly unwilling conscripts or unprincipled mercenaries, gradually acquired a determination and purpose which welded the whole of the New Model Army into a first-rate fighting machine and a formidable political instrument. The New Model was more than an army, it became a political party, the party of the Independents, the revolutionary lower middle class, just as the Presbyterians were the party of the upper middle class.

Soon the New Model created its own political machinery. Delegates, known as 'agitators', were appointed by the rank and file to present their grievances and look after their interests. These delegates came to form regular soldiers' councils, and in the prayer meetings which were held at frequent intervals political and religious discussion were inextricably tangled. In these meetings, as was so usual in the seventeenth century, politics in fact took the form of religion and they were in practice extremely democratic institutions, the private being as free to speak his mind as the colonel since both were considered equally likely to be vehicles of divine inspiration. In these meetings and in more intimate discussion the army worked out its theories of church and state. The majority of the cavalry, and, in time, of the infantry as well, were Independents, wishing for each religious group or congregation to settle for itself the form of worship and discipline it preferred. For the first time the idea of religious toleration was powerfully voiced,



toleration, that is, for all forms of worship except those of the Catholics and High Anglicans, which were excepted as politically irreconcilable with the revolution, and those of the Freethinkers and Unitarians, whose speculations threatened the ideological foundations of the new no less than the old order.

Such an army Cromwell and the Earl of Manchester were commissioned, on the strength of the former's successes in the spring, to raise in the Eastern Counties during the late summer of 1643. In October they cleared Lincolnshire, relieved Hull and joined hands with the Northern Army of Fairfax. The immediate threat to London was now removed and at the same time by the English Presbyterians secured powerful new allies by a treaty with the Scots. In return for a promise to establish Presbyterianism in England and to pay the expenses of the campaign, a Scottish army 20,000 strong crossed the border early in 1644 and began to clear the Royalists from the northern shires. The Earl of Newcastle found himself caught between the Scots and Fairfax and Cromwell advancing from the South, and was closely besieged in York.

The fall of York would have meant the passing of the whole of the North into parliamentary hands, and Rupert was sent from Oxford with a picked force to raise the siege. He swung through Lancashire, reducing some minor strongholds on the way, crossed the Pennines by the Aire Gap and succeeded in joining forces with Newcastle. In the battle that followed on Marston Moor Cromwell's new cavalry regiments met and routed the pick of the royalist horse and then wheeled to surround the infantry in the centre. Newcastle's Whitecoats were annihilated and the victory was complete. For the first time in the war the parliamentary army had been successful in a pitched battle. Two royalist armies had been destroyed, but the moral effect of the victory of Marston Moor was even more important: up to that time it had seemed that the king must win, now his ultimate defeat seemed probable. And, above all, Marston Moor was a victory for the left, and for Cromwell and his 'Ironsides' of the Eastern Association.

The immediate military effect was somewhat offset by a disaster in the West. Essex had led the main Puritan Army on a blundering campaign into Devon and Cornwall. Every day's march carried him farther into the heart of the enemy's

territory and in September he found himself cornered at Lostwithiel. The cavalry cut their way out, Essex abandoned his army and escaped by sea, but the whole of the foot had to surrender with their arms and stores.

The defeat was less serious for parliament than Marston Moor had been for Charles for two reasons. First, their resources were so much greater that they had little difficulty in raising fresh forces. One of the permanent effects of the civil war was the complete overhaul and modernisation of the system of national finance. The bourgeoisie were prepared to tax themselves through parliament at a rate they would never have dreamed of under the monarchy, though they took care to pass as much as possible of the new taxation on to the lower classes. A far-reaching excise duty was placed upon most articles of consumption and the old property tax, that had ossified into the payment of so many 'subsidies' of £70,000, raised on a traditional and now quite arbitrary assessment, was revised and new and more equitable assessments made. These taxes became the mainstay of the national budget, giving the state apparatus a new stability even in the heat of the struggle. Charles, with only the poorest parts of the country under his control, was unable to raise any regular taxes at all. The result was that as the war went on his armies became less and less disciplined and in some areas degenerated into a plundering rabble, while the parliamentary forces, paid with fair regularity, grew more disciplined and were brought more directly under central control.

Secondly, the Lostwithiel fiasco discredited the right wing and forced parliament under pressure from the win-the-war party to reorganise its forces in such a way as to put increased power into the hands of the independent leaders who were pressing for the formation of a new, disciplined and centralised army. A fierce attack in parliament on both Essex and Manchester led to the Self-Denying Ordinance, by which all members of both Houses gave up their army commands and the whole army was centralised under the command of Fairfax. In this attack Cromwell played a leading part and secured from it the greatest advantage. As a member of parliament he should have resigned but Fairfax – probably acting at Cromwell's suggestion – insisted that he was indispensable and must be allowed to remain as general of the horse and second in

command of the whole army. This gave him a unique position. Speaking in the Commons for the army and in the army for the Commons he was in a position to dominate both. Fairfax, who was a capable officer but no politician and quite unambitious, soon became no more than a figurehead. Cromwell's position as virtual commander of the army was strengthened because the New Model was built around the nucleus of his own Army of the Eastern Counties and took its political complexion, rapidly in the cavalry and more slowly in the infantry.

With the change in leadership came a change in strategy. Cromwell had justly accused Manchester of being afraid of victory:

I showed him evidently how this could be done ... but he obstinately refused; saying only, that if we were entirely to overthrow the King's army, he would still be King, and always have another army to keep up the war; while we, if we were beaten, should no longer be anything but rebels and traitors, executed and forfeited by the law.

The fact that this view was held by the parliamentary leaders was the reason for the planlessness of their movements, since they had no clearly defined objective before them.

Cromwell altered all that, determined to meet and destroy the king's principal army. In the spring of 1645 the investment of Oxford began. To avoid being trapped in his headquarters Charles slipped out, intending either to attack the Scottish army in the North and join hands with Montrose who was creating a diversion in their rear, or to meet reinforcements which were expected from Ireland. But the pressure on Oxford forced him to abandon his northward march and return through the Eastern Midlands. On the way he was met by Fairfax and Cromwell who had moved suddenly from Oxford. The two armies met at Naseby, near Northampton, on 14 June. The course of the battle was very like that of Marston Moor. Rupert's cavalry on one wing swept away the force opposed to them but scattered wildly and played no further part in the day's fighting. Cromwell on the other wing, after a successful charge, wheeled round and caught the royalist infantry in the rear. Charles escaped but his army was

destroyed and the victors captured a mass of papers proving that the king was negotiating to secure the help of various foreign armies, besides the Irish, to defeat parliament.

Though fighting went on for another year the issue was now certain. The operations that remained amounted to little more than the rounding up of isolated detachments of royalists and capturing a series of castles and fortified towns held by the king's supporters. The New Model Army proved adept at siege warfare and met with little resistance except in the West where Goring still commanded a large body of irregular troops.

It was in the West and South-west that the one mass organisation that arose out of the war flourished. This was what was known as the 'Clubmen', peasant defence forces banded together for the sole purpose of defending their property against raiders of either party. In the spring of 1645 the Clubmen became an organised force, thousands strong, entering into negotiation with both king and parliament as an independent body. Essentially neutral, they were called into action most often against the royalists, since these, unpaid and under the leadership of the ruffianly Goring, were most given to looting. When they found that the parliamentary forces were prepared to pay their way and appeared able to restore peace and security, the Clubmen helped them, in the last months of 1645 and the first of 1646, to make an end of the royalist bands.

In April Charles fled from Oxford and surrendered to the Scots at Newcastle. So ended the first phase of the revolution, the phase of armed struggle with the forces of reaction. In the next phase the differences in the ranks of the parliamentarians, which had centred upon the mode of conducting the revolution, developed into an open struggle to control its direction, in which the Presbyterians, the conservative bourgeoisie and the big landlords, were pitted against the Independents, the radical bourgeoisie, small gentry and petty producers with their organisation, the New Model Army. This struggle centred around, and gave significance to, the struggle for the possession of the king.

### **3 Regicide**

Though Charles had been defeated he was still a king and remained a problem. Few men of any influence were

republicans, yet few believed that the king could be trusted. The problem therefore was to find means of restoring him to his throne under conditions which would make it impossible for him to renew the war or to enjoy any measure of real power. Charles had no intention of submitting to any such conditions. He explained his policy frankly enough to Digby, a member of his Council: 'I do not despair of inducing the Presbyterians or the Independents to join me in exterminating the other; and then I shall be King again.' For three years he faithfully followed this line of action, playing off army against Commons and Scots against both till he had destroyed his credit and ruined his friends and made his execution both a political necessity and an act of justice.

For the first few months after the ending of hostilities the Commons appeared to be supreme. They took it for granted that the army was in practice as well as in theory the mere instrument of a victorious parliament. To the Presbyterian majority in the Commons the revolution was over and nothing was left to do but consolidate its gains. The estates of the church, crown and of royalists all over the country were requisitioned, but they had not been sold and the possibility of their restoration to their owners still existed as a bargaining weapon in working for a compromise settlement. Presbyterianism was established as the state religion and repressive laws were passed against the Independent sects. Finally, with an almost inconceivable disregard for political reality, the Commons proposed to disband the New Model Army without paying the considerable arrears of wages due to it. At one stroke the conversion of the army to the tenets of the Independents was completed.

Simultaneously, negotiations had been carried on with the Scots, who had presented a bill of £700,000 for their services, 'without mentioning the enormous losses which Scotland had suffered in consequence of her alliance with England and of which they left the valuation to the equity of Parliament'. This was altogether too much for their brethren the English Presbyterians, who, after some haggling, offered them £200,000 down and as much again in two years' time. For this they agreed to leave England and to hand over Charles, which later they were quite ready to do as they had found him completely intractable.

The Commons now planned to use the authority of the king against the New Model Army, to collect a fresh army from the regiments scattered in the South and West of England and not deeply tainted with Independency, to seize the train of artillery lying at Oxford and to coerce the Independents into surrender. But the army was fully aware of the plot and prepared its own counter measures. In the period since the end of the war the regimental committees of agitators had been welded together, and with the leading officers, had formed a body, 'The Council of the Army', which was qualified to speak for the whole and to act with authority and decision. Cromwell, who had been trying to mediate between the army and the Commons, now decided that this was impossible and flung his influence on the side of action. A body of horse was sent out on 31 May 1647, to secure the artillery and remove Charles from Holmby House, where he had been lodged by parliament, and bring him to the camp at Newmarket. The Council of the Army now opened negotiations with parliament as one equal to another, and, in fact, the army was in every real sense a more democratic and representative body than the House of Commons. After two months of such negotiations the army began to move slowly on London.

The Presbyterians played their last card, their influence over the London masses. A demonstration was staged, a large and unruly mob of apprentices, watermen and disbanded officers who invaded the Commons and 'forced' them to pass the very measures against the army that they were eager but afraid to pass on their own responsibility. After this the army waited no longer, but marched into London, where no one ventured to oppose them, camped in Hyde Park, expelled the leading Presbyterians from parliament and forced the rest to annul the Acts passed under the coercion of the London mob. A second revolution had taken place, and the Independents of the New Model Army were for the moment masters of the situation.

Up to this point the army had acted as a whole, and Cromwell and the group of high officers nearest to him, nicknamed the 'grandees', had been accepted as the spokesmen of the rank and file. As late as 25 March the left leader Lilburne had written to Cromwell: 'I have looked upon you as among the powerful ones of England, as a man with heart perfectly pure, perfectly free from all personal view.' But on 13 August he is writing:

If you despise, as hitherto, my warnings, be sure I will use against you all the power and influence I have, and so as to produce in your fortune changes that shall little please you.

The army, that had acted as the left wing of the revolution, now developed within itself a left wing which soon came into violent conflict with the grandees.

Cromwell's position in the English revolution has often been oversimplified by regarding him either as a man of the left or the right. On the one hand, he was by birth and training a member of the gentry, yet he had to suppress the Presbyterian party. On the other, he began by standing out as the chosen leader of the Independents yet came more and more to resist their radical and democratic demands. In spite of this, he retained, till his death, the support, decreasingly enthusiastic it is true, of the army, and after he had established a stable regime he regained in some measure the support of the landowners and merchants.

The truth appears to be that at a moment of peculiarly delicate class relations Cromwell alone had sufficient political realism to comprehend and master them. He saw that both the Presbyterian policy and that of the Levellers would lead inevitably to a royalist restoration, the first by alienating the revolutionary lower middle class, the second by isolating it. When the Levellers demanded a free parliament and a wide electoral franchise Cromwell resisted them, partly because as a landowner he was sceptical about democracy but more because he knew that in such a parliament the revolutionaries would be in a small minority. To Cromwell abstract principles were always infinitely less important than the practical necessity of maintaining power, whereas the Levellers were committed by their principles to the advocacy of a programme which they had not the means to put through.

After the occupation of London the political programme of the Levellers was embodied in *The Agreement of the People*. This programme, which passed through a number of transformations, and only took final shape after the execution of Charles, will be discussed in the section which follows. The rank and file were deeply suspicious of the negotiations between Charles and the grandees, negotiations which culminated in a treaty, *The Heads of Proposals*, offered to Charles by Cromwell and Ireton

in the late summer. The terms, better than any the Commons had put forward, included the return of the sequestered estates of the royalists, the retention of bishops but the toleration of other forms of religion, guarantees for the control of the crown by parliament and a wider franchise than had hitherto prevailed. Charles refused these terms, and in November escaped from Hampton Court to the Isle of Wight.

A few days later Cromwell was faced with a mutiny among the troops at Ware. Two regiments, one of which was commanded by Lilburne's brother Robert, demonstrated with copies of *The Agreement of the People* stuck in their hats, demanding to be rid of the king and the carrying out of a radical social and political reform. The mutiny was soon suppressed, but the strong feeling in the army, combined with the hopeless dishonesty and unreason of Charles, forced Cromwell into a complete change of policy. He broke with the king and declared in general terms his sympathy with the programme of the *Agreement*. Charles, meanwhile, was preparing to launch a new war, in which Presbyterians and royalists were allied against the army. The conspiracy was aided by a factor which has received too little attention. The five years from 1646 to 1651 were years of famine, high prices and general misery. The withdrawal of labour caused by the war had combined with a run of wet summers to produce an unusually long run of bad harvests. The worst year of all, 1648, was that in which the second civil war actually broke out, and it is perhaps not wholly a coincidence that hostilities actually began in May, the month in which prices in famine years always reached their highest point. There can be no doubt that the general discontent caused by the famine was naïvely turned against the government.

The thoroughly opportunist alliance between royalists and Presbyterians was backed by a Scottish invasion. Two of the counties most affected were Essex and Kent which had previously been parliamentary strongholds but were influenced by the Presbyterianism of London. The rebellion here was crushed by Fairfax. Cromwell, after accounting for a local rising in South Wales, marched swiftly north to meet the Scots. In what was technically perhaps the most brilliant of all his campaigns he completely destroyed an army twice the size of his own. He advanced through Yorkshire and crossed the



Pennines, caught the Scots by surprise while they were straggling slowly south in a long column between Wigan and Preston, rolled them up from the rear, each blow driving them farther from their base in Scotland, and, finally, forced almost the whole army to surrender at Ashborne on 25 August.

The war had temporarily shelved the struggle between Cromwell and the left, and the whole army marched back to London determined to settle accounts both with 'that man of blood, Charles Stuart' and with the parliamentary Presbyterians who were still carrying on interminable and fruitless negotiations with the king. Colonel Pride was sent to Westminster with a strong body of troopers.

A hundred and fifty Presbyterian members were excluded from the Commons or imprisoned, leaving less than one hundred who were no more than an echo of the will of the Army.

On 4 January 1649 the 'Rump', as the Independent remnant in the Commons was called, passed a resolution declaring:

That the people are, under God, the original of all just power: that the Commons of England, in Parliament assembled, being chosen by and representing the people, have the supreme power in this nation; that whatsoever is enacted or declared for law by the Commons in Parliament assembled, hath the force of law, and all the people of this nation are concluded thereby, although the consent of the King or House of Peers be not had thereunto.

Passed by the Commons at its moment of least actual power, this resolution would be meaningless if it were not for the fact that both the tone and language are those of *The Agreement of the People*. Parliament speaks, but the words are those of the Levellers.

In accordance with the spirit underlying this resolution the House of Lords was abolished, crown, church and royalists' lands confiscated and sold outright and a commission set up to try the king. Kings had been deposed before and murdered afterwards, but this time it was the crown itself, the institution of monarchy, that was challenged. The execution of Charles was the work of the Independents alone, acting in opposition to both royalists and Presbyterians. The Presbyterians and Cromwell were both right in a sense, the former thinking that

there was no essential incompatibility between a monarchy and bourgeois democracy, the latter in the knowledge that to ensure the success of the revolution so far as it had then gone a direct attack on the crown was a present necessity.

To the sects of the left, the execution of Charles had a further significance. It was a symbolic act of justice, an apocalyptic deed, ushering in the Fifth Monarchy, the rule of the saints.

This, immediately, meant the rule of the army as the party of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie. The Levellers, already expressing their political ideas in more secular terms, saw it as the prelude to a more democratic system and perhaps to a social revolution.

To Cromwell and the grandees the execution was the culmination of the revolution and the beginning of a period of stabilisation.

#### **4 The Levellers**

Within a few weeks of the execution of Charles, the Levellers' agitation had blazed up to new heights. The crisis of the second civil war had forced Cromwell to make apparent concessions to the left and had given its leaders a status and a freedom to put forward their ideas such as they had not previously enjoyed. In 1648 *The Agreement of the People* was reissued in a somewhat modified form by a committee consisting of Lilburne and three other leaders of the Levellers, four high officers of the army and four Independent members of parliament.

*The Agreement* was a remarkable programme, anticipating in many respects the Charter of two centuries later. It demanded the election every two years of a parliament chosen freely by all males over the age of twenty-one with the exception of those receiving wages. The reservation – perhaps inserted to secure the support of the army officers and Independents – serves as a reminder that the movement was one of the lower middle class, the small independent men, and was in fact less undemocratic than it appears. The wage-earning class, although perhaps numbering nearly half the population, had not yet begun to appear as a political force, and wage earners were regarded as servants of the rich, who would be under their influence and

would vote at their dictation. Their exclusion from the franchise was thus regarded as necessary to prevent the employers from having undue influence, and there is reason to think that this judgement was correct. Complete religious toleration, democratic control of the army, whose regiments were to be raised in appointed districts with officers chosen by the votes of the inhabitants, the abolition of tithes and of all other taxes except a tax on property were the other main points of *The Agreement*.

The acceptance in principle of *The Agreement* by Cromwell and the grandees was the high-water mark of the English revolution. If the Levellers' movement looks forward to the demands of the Chartists in the nineteenth century, it had in the seventeenth no solid backing. It was the movement of a doomed class, the independent farmers, who, with the exception of a fortunate few, were in the next two centuries to be slowly crushed by the growth of a large scale, capitalist agriculture, and, though it stretched out its hand to the town craftsmen, especially in London, it was only beginning to make contact with the wage-earning masses. While we cannot but admire the courage and energy of the Levellers and sympathise with their struggle for a democratic republic, we can now see that their role, like that of the Jacobins in the French Revolution, was to carry the movement to positions which could not be permanently held but whose temporary seizure safeguarded the main advance. There was no social basis for so radical a left-ward extension of the Revolution: this is the historical justification for the growing conservatism of Cromwell and his like, which seemed a betrayal to his more democratic supporters.

So, when we listen in spirit to the historic debates of the Army Council which took place in Putney church during the autumn of 1647, our reason parts company with our sympathies. Yet even our reason, in the long run, is with Rainborough in his defence of *The Agreement* on the broad ground of human rights and social justice rather than with Ireton in his legalistic declaration that:

All the main thing that I speak for, is because I would have an eye to property ... For here is the case of the most fundamental part of the constitution of the kingdom, which if you take away, you take away all by that.

It was the tragedy of the situation, as of all bourgeois

revolutions, that it was the narrow legalism of the defenders of property and not the vision of those whom the revolution had aroused to contend for human liberty and the rights of the exploited which was the immediate, practical reality.

It was soon clear that Cromwell and the parliamentary independents intended to allow *The Agreement* to remain on paper only. The royal figure-head had gone, and there was a new determination and vigour in the government policy as it affected the land, trading interests and foreign policy; but the Rump and the officers had no intention of carrying through a social revolution. A temporary body, the Council of State, was set up to act as an executive. The Levellers withdrew in disgust from the committee which had been at work formulating *The Agreement*. Lilburne, Overton and other leaders were arrested, examined before the Council of State and committed to the Tower. Riots and protests broke out in London where the Levellers now had a strong following. Ten thousand signatures were collected in a few days to a petition demanding the release of Lilburne. This was soon followed by a second petition signed and presented entirely by women.

The army was equally affected by the ferment, and when the Council of State decided to send the most disgruntled regiments to Ireland some refused to move. During April a regiment of dragoons in London mutinied but were surrounded and disarmed by troops still loyal to the government. One of the mutineers, Robert Lockyer, was court martialled and shot and his funeral was the occasion of the greatest mass demonstration of the time. Thousands of citizens followed the coffin, their sober Puritan hats decked with ribbons of sea-green, the colour of the Levellers.

From the Tower Lilburne wrote an open letter declaring 'that it is both treason and murder for any General or Council of War to execute any soldier in time of peace by martial law'. This letter, on top of Lockyer's execution, was followed at once by a mutiny on a far larger scale. Four regiments rose at Salisbury and 200 men of Lockyer's regiment, who had been moved to Oxfordshire, refused orders and put themselves under the leadership of a Captain Thompson, whose brother was one of the leaders of the Salisbury mutineers. The latter marched north to join hands with the Oxford rising, which they probably imagined to be more widespread than was actually the

case. They had to swim the Thames, and the two bodies met at Burford. Here they camped for the night. Troops sent in pursuit by Cromwell, who had covered ninety miles in two days and whom the mutineers supposed to be miles away, caught them by surprise while still asleep. After a short and desperate battle some scattered and others surrendered. A remnant, perhaps 200 strong, broke through under Captain Thompson and finally reached Northampton where they were surrounded and forced to surrender. Out of the destruction of the Levellers, which revealed Cromwell as the protector of property and the friend of order, began a reconciliation between his group and the Presbyterians. This was symbolised by a splendid banquet which the City merchants gave to Cromwell and Fairfax in celebration of their victory in the Burford campaign.

The mutiny was smashed, and with it ended any hope there might have been of the success of the political movement, now confined almost entirely to a section of the London masses. In October Lilburne was brought to trial on a charge of treason. Lilburne, who if he was no politician was a superb agitator and pamphleteer, completely fearless and assured of the justice of his case, browbeat the judges and secured a verdict of 'Not Guilty' from the London jury. In 1652 the Rump Parliament banished him by a special Act. Next year he was back again in England, challenging the legality of the order, and, for a second time, was acquitted amid general rejoicing. But though the agitation seemed formidable it was disarmed and declining.

Disillusion set in and its essential weakness was revealed in its development towards Quaker pacifism and a naïve utopian communism. Overton alone, one of the first of English freethinkers, carried on the struggle to the end, being imprisoned in 1659 and again after the Restoration in 1663.

Lilburne, like many of the former soldiers of the New Model Army, became a Quaker. The Diggers were a small group who preached and attempted to practise a primitive communism, based on the claim that the land belonged to the whole people of England. This claim was supported by the interesting historical argument that William the Conqueror had 'turned the English out of their birthrights; and compelled them for necessity to be servants to him and to his Norman soldiers'. The civil war was thus regarded as the reconquest of England by the

English people. In the theological language of the time Winstanley urged that this political reconquest needed a social revolution to complete it and that otherwise the essential quality of monarchy remained:

For you must either establish Commonwealth's freedom in power, making provision for every one's peace, which is righteousness, or else you must set up Monarchy again. Monarchy is twofold, either for one king to reign or for many to reign by kingly promotion. And if either one king rules or many rule by king's principles, much murmuring, grudges, trouble and quarrels may and will arise among the oppressed people on every gained opportunity,

wrote Winstanley in his pamphlet, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*.

Cromwell's alleged comment on such reasoning is revealing. 'What,' he asks, 'is the purport of the levelling principle but to make the tenant as liberal a fortune as the landlord. I was by birth a gentleman. You must cut these people in pieces or they will cut you in pieces.' For all his flirtations with the left, Cromwell was and remained a landowner with the landowner's outlook and interests.

The Diggers tried to set up a model community on St George's Hill in Surrey in 1649 but were soon ejected. Their movement never became strong in the number of its actual adherents but is important as a diffused influence, representing a considerable if vague aspiration among the mass of the Levellers. Though its practice looks backwards to primitive communism, Winstanley's theory also has glimpses of a future in which a new social order should be based on reason and science.

The suppression of the Levellers left Cromwell and the army officers holding the balance of power between two parties, both of which were hostile to the new regime but which were unable to combine against it. It was a victory for the centre, but a costly victory, since it weakened the Commonwealth's mass backing among the very class whose energy and sacrifices had done most to bring it into being.

From this time on, Cromwell was forced to balance and manoeuvre, to shift his ground constantly so as to find new supporters or to regain old ones. Under the Protectorate there

is a steady swing towards the right of which the Restoration is the highest point. Yet it is worth noting here that the Commonwealth did bring some solid gains to the working classes. Wage assessments for this period, covering both agricultural and town workers, are something like 50 per cent higher than in the preceding reign and somewhat higher than after the Restoration in 1660. Most of the ground gained appears to have been kept, and the drop in wages actually paid after 1660 to have been less than the drop in the assessments. Prices which had risen steadily up to about 1660, became stationary in the latter part of the seventeenth century and even tended to fall, mainly as a result of the great improvement in agricultural technique.

So far as the army was concerned the Levellers were unable to make any headway after the defeat at Burford, and Cromwell's departure in August 1649 to reconquer Ireland gave their movement its death blow. All the most disaffected regiments were sent to Ireland where a large proportion of the mutineers perished or remained as settlers. The war in Ireland was indeed one of Cromwell's most effective strokes, since it not only removed one set of opponents to a safe distance but gave him the means to conciliate a second, the merchants and landowners, who profited by the huge confiscations of land which followed the defeat of the royalists in Ireland.

## IX COMMONWEALTH AND COMPROMISE

### 1 Ireland: Scotland

During the fifteenth century English authority in Ireland reached its lowest point and the English Pale shrunk to a small tract immediately around Dublin. Outside the Pale a measure of order and unity began to take form out of the hegemony of the Norman-Irish family of the Fitzgeralds, Earls of Kildare, and when under Henry VII the second conquest of Ireland was projected it was only found possible to establish a nominal rule by giving to the Earl of Kildare the additional title of Deputy.

After some thirty years of Fitzgerald supremacy new tactics were adopted. The Fitzgeralds were provoked into rebellion in 1534 and their power destroyed. The basis of the new English policy was the utter destruction of the chiefs who showed any signs of independence and the systematic corruption of the rest by transforming them from Irish tribal leaders into English landlords. They were given titles, encouraged to speak English, to dress in English clothes and to send their sons to be educated at the English court. In return they were recognised by English law as sole proprietors of the lands which under Irish law belonged to the whole tribe. To abolish Irish law, with its conception of communal property, out of the very memory of the people became one of the prime objects of the conquerors. If the clansmen revolted against the new authority of the chief-turned-landlord all the power of the government stood behind him, while if he should revolt the whole clan was deprived of its land as punishment.

This policy met with fair success, but it was slow and it left few opportunities for the English ruling class to profit by the exploitation of the Irish peasantry. About the middle of the century it was abandoned for a more forward policy of direct confiscation, the forced sale of Irish land to English speculators



and, in some cases, the establishment of colonies or plantations of English settlers. Fifty years of ferocious and almost continuous war, accompanied by famine and massacre and followed by confiscation, reduced large tracts of Ireland to an empty wilderness. Out of a total of just under £5,000,000 spent on foreign wars in Elizabeth's reign nearly half went for the Irish wars. Shane O'Neill (1559-1567), Desmond (1579-1583) and Hugh O'Neill (1598-1603) headed rebellions which stand out among a welter of lesser conflicts.

The situation was complicated by the Reformation, which reached Ireland only as part of the English attempt to destroy native customs and institutions. When Spain and the papacy were in alliance against England and attempted to exploit the grievances of the Irish for their own ends, the priests were welcomed not because the Irish had any particular affection for the popes but because the Catholic church appeared as the avowed enemy of the invading English.

In the first years of the seventeenth century the conquest was completed by Lord Mountjoy, who followed the practice of the Romans, and later of Edward I in Wales, in building lines of forts from which the countryside could be systematically devastated and any rebellion threatened from the rear. There followed the series of wholesale confiscations of land already referred to,<sup>1</sup> and the establishment of plantations, especially in Ulster. The economic resources of Ireland were recklessly plundered. Mrs J. R. Green writes:

Enormous profits fell to the planters, who could get three times as much gain from an Irish as from an English estate by a fierce exploiting of the natural resources of the island and its cheap outlawed labour. Forests of oak were hastily destroyed for quick profits: woods were cut down for charcoal to smelt the iron which was carried down the rivers in cunning Irish boats, and what had cost £10 in labour and transport sold at £17 in London. The last furnace was put out in Kerry when the last wood had been destroyed.<sup>2</sup> Where the English adventurer passed he left the land as naked as if a forest fire had swept over the country.

The object of Strafford, who became Deputy under Charles

<sup>1</sup> See page 173.

<sup>2</sup> This destruction of the forests took place mainly in the later seventeenth century.

I, was to organise this exploitation while at the same time creating a model despotism which could later be extended to England. His establishment of the linen industry was an attempt to counter the efforts of English clothiers who had begun to transfer their industry to Ireland attracted by the cheapness of labour there. In the interests of the English wool industry as a whole this was prohibited and linen weaving, which did not threaten any established English interest, was substituted. The linen industry was temporarily destroyed by the rising of 1641 and the wars which followed and when it was resumed was confined to Ulster.

The rising, resulting from the weakening of the government after a period of intolerable oppression was marked by savage massacres of the new settlers and even more savage reprisals by the English and Scottish troops brought over to suppress it. While the civil war was proceeding in England an independent war waged in Ireland. The Deputy Ormond was engaged in suppressing the native Irish in the king's name, while Charles was carrying on secret negotiations with the rebels. After the end of the war in England both sides combined against the victorious Commonwealth.

As early as 1641 the financial magnates in the City had begun to buy up the yet unconquered lands of the rebels as a speculation, estates being sold at the rate of £100 for 1,000 acres in Ulster and 600 acres in Munster. Cromwell therefore landed in Ireland in August, 1649, not only to reconquer the country for the Commonwealth but also for the speculators of the City of London.

After Drogheda and Wexford had been stormed and their garrisons slaughtered the invaders met with little resistance except at Clonmel, where Irish tribalism gathered under Hugh O'Neill for its last desperate battle, a combat between the past and the future. The Levellers and democrats who formed the bulk of Cromwell's army can have had no idea that they were meeting men whose belief held unexpected parallels with their own or that in destroying them they were helping to place England as well as Ireland in the hands of the money lords, but they did perhaps recognise and respect the stubborn courage that drove them back after a hard day's fighting with the loss of some 2,500 men.<sup>1</sup> It was Cromwell's only serious military

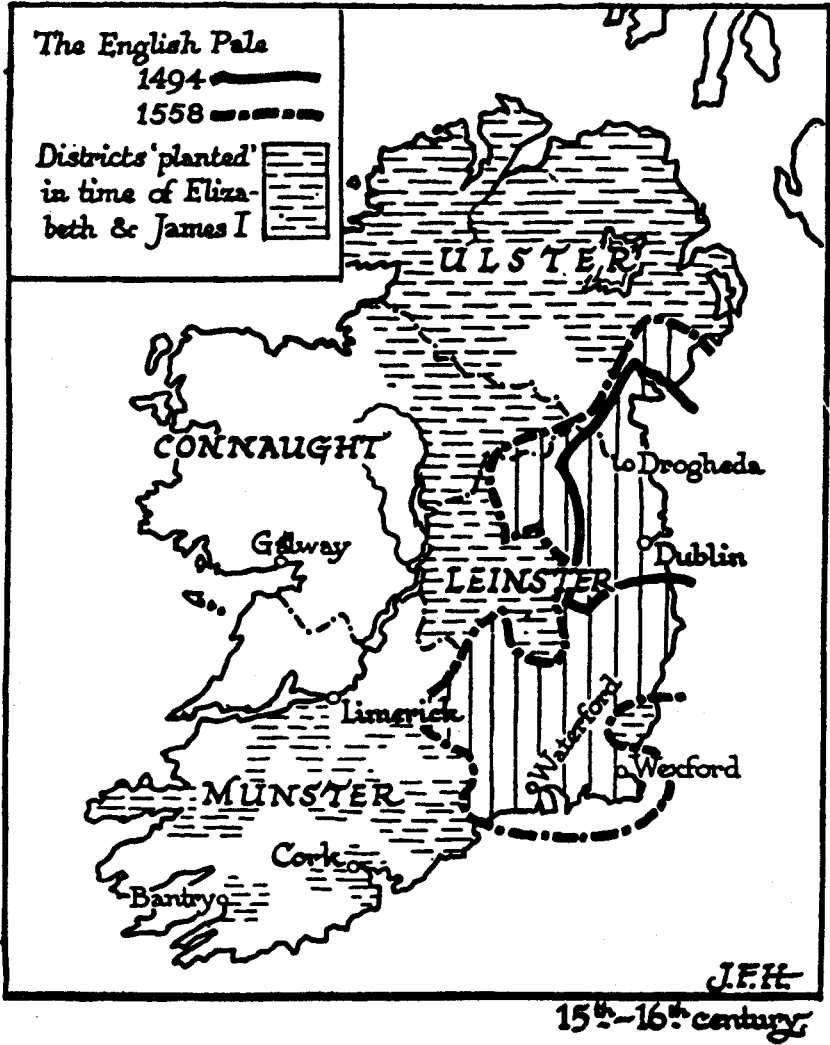
<sup>1</sup> The Levellers had, however, strongly opposed the invasion and reconquest of Ireland.

reverse, partly atoned for by the abandonment of the defence later upon honourable terms.

The Cromwellian conquest was followed by the Cromwellian settlement. The bulk of the land in the three provinces of Ulster, Leinster and Munster passed to English landowners. Some were London speculators, others were officers in Cromwell's army. Much land was allotted to the soldiers for arrears in their pay, and it was intended to replace the native Irish with English settlers throughout the three provinces. But the majority of the privates were too poor to take up their holdings which were bought at low prices by officers and others, who thus became possessed of large estates. The Irish peasants remained as labourers or as rackrented smallholders. Many died in the war, many were shipped to virtual slavery in the American plantations – 20,000 in the one year 1653 alone – and many of the upper classes went to Europe to become soldiers of fortune. The population of Ireland, which was about 1,500,000 in 1641 had decreased by 1652 to 850,000. Of this total about 150,000 were English or Scottish settlers. Many of these settlers were smallholders who sank within a generation or two to the common level of misery of the Irish around them.

Ireland now became, what it has since of necessity remained, a source of cheap food and raw materials for England. At first cattle were reared, and by 1660, some 500,000 head were being exported annually to England. When these exports were found to be causing a fall in agricultural prices and rents, an Act was passed in 1666 forbidding the export of cattle, meat or dairy products. This Act crippled the Irish cattle industry and when cattle began to be replaced by sheep a further Act forbade both the export of wool to any other country and the export of anything but the raw wool to England. Later still, the Irish cloth industry was deliberately destroyed when it became a dangerous competitor.

By May 1650 Cromwell had reduced Ireland except for the West, and returned to England leaving Ireton to finish his work. The Commonwealth government was still threatened both from Scotland and from the sea, where a part of the Navy had gone over to the royalists and was attacking English shipping in the Channel. On his father's death Charles II was proclaimed king in Edinburgh, and in the spring of 1650



landed in Scotland at the invitation of the Presbyterians, taking the Covenant and going through all the motions of Protestant piety. The army that was collected to support him was carefully purged of all Cavalier elements and, indeed, of all but the most orthodox Covenanters. Officered by 'ministers' sons, clerks, and other such sanctified creatures, who hardly ever saw or heard of any other sword than that of the Spirit', it was a poor military instrument with which to oppose Cromwell's veterans.

Marching north in July Cromwell broke the patience of the Covenanters by a series of flanking marches, each calculated to force it to give battle at a tactical disadvantage. For a time the caution of the Scottish general, Leslie, prevailed against the instinctive desire of the Covenanters to fall headlong upon the Amalekites, but at Dunbar on 3 September they could be restrained no longer and Cromwell secured a crushing victory. During the winter a second army, collected largely from the elements that had previously been excluded, took up the struggle. Taking up its position at Stirling it drew its supplies from the fertile North-eastern coast plain. Not strong enough for a frontal attack, and fearing a long campaign that would have given his enemies at home an opportunity to grow strong again, Cromwell slipped past his opponents to Perth, in one stroke cutting them off from their base and leaving the way open into England. They had no alternative but to take this way.

As they marched south, with dwindling forces and Cromwell in pursuit, converging armies edged them into the Severn valley away from the direct road to London, and at Worcester, on the anniversary of Dunbar, they were surrounded and defeated.

At the same time, the Commonwealth admiral, Blake, was rounding up the royalist privateers and reducing their last strongholds in the Channel and Scilly Islands. With the success of these operations all possibility of internal resistance to the Commonwealth regime came to an end for the time being. The problem now was to consolidate and stabilize, to find a class basis broad enough to ensure its permanency and to allow the military dictatorship to transform itself into a genuinely popular government. Viewed from this angle the story of the nine years between 1651 and 1660 is one of persistent and heroic effort and of unrelieved failure.

## **2 The Commonwealth**

The army, returning victorious from Worcester in the autumn of 1651, found England and Holland on the verge of war. For over a generation English and Dutch traders had been at odds in the East Indies and the merchants of London had looked enviously at the vast trade of their rivals. In 1651 the Rump passed the Navigation Act, ordering all goods imported into England to be brought in English ships or the ships of the country where they were actually produced. This was an attempt to deprive the Dutch of some of their carrying trade, which they had obtained because of the number, size and efficiency of their ships and the perfection of their commercial organisation and which had made Holland a centre for the redistribution of commodities brought from all over the world. In itself the Navigation Act did not lead necessarily to war. Similar Acts had been passed before from the fourteenth century onwards, and neither then nor afterwards, apart from short occasional periods, had they been strenuously enforced.

The Rump was, however, determined on war and followed the Navigation Act by a series of provocations. When war came it was a trade war, the work of the merchants alone, and was disliked both by Cromwell and the army as a whole. As it dragged on it became more and more unpopular in spite of some naval successes. It proved costly, making necessary increased taxation and seriously interfering with foreign trade which was just beginning to recover from the chaos of the civil war and the ravages of the royalist privateers.

For Holland the war was disastrous, as any war with England was bound to be, for the simple geographical reason that England lay right across all the trade routes upon whose maintenance the majority of the Dutch people depended for their livelihood. Starvation rather than the naval victories of Blake forced Holland to conclude a peace in 1654, a peace in which England gained nothing tangible which had not been obtainable before the war began.

In spite of some military successes, inevitable in view of the superiority of the new army over its European contemporaries, the foreign policy of the Commonwealth was not as a whole either well conceived or well executed. In part at least this was the result of certain contradictions in which England was

involved. On the one hand, Cromwell envisaged a policy based on the solidarity of the Protestant, that is, broadly, the progressive powers in the Europe of his time. But this was invalidated by the inescapable fact that Holland, the most important of these, was becoming England's most dangerous trade rival. And, secondly, the traditional policy of hostility towards the old colonial rival, Spain, in itself partly an inheritance from the past of Puritanism, helped to strengthen the position of France, which was now becoming a much more dangerous rival and the leading Catholic state in Europe.

So long as England maintained a great standing army, with a strong garrison in Dunkirk, France as well as Spain could be held in check. The problem was, for how long could the English bourgeoisie as a whole be persuaded that this very expensive policy really served their interests? They were pleased, no doubt, to see the full power of the State placed behind the established merchant companies, to see Blake terrorising the Mediterranean, to welcome the conquest of Jamaica: yet every penny spent in taxation for foreign policy and the maintenance of the army delayed the expansion of capitalism at home. This was certainly one consideration in preparing the bourgeoisie to accept the Restoration, the disbandment of the army and a reduction of foreign commitments. It may well be that English capitalism, after its struggle to establish its position at home, needed a generation of recuperation before it could afford an expansionist foreign policy.

The foreign policy of the Commonwealth reacted unfavourably upon the stability of its position at home. With a revenue far larger than any English government had ever had before, it was constantly in financial difficulties and was forced to impose special taxes and to levy fines upon the estates of the royalists which had not been confiscated. Since these included both the Cavalier royalists of the first civil war and the Presbyterian royalists of the second, the bulk of the landowning class was alienated, a fact which accounts in part for the violence of the reaction of 1660. The bitterness aroused by the first of these levies, made in 1652 to finance the Dutch war, was intensified by the corruption with which it was carried out. The Rump soon became notorious for taking bribes and for the place-hunting of its members, and its unpopularity became a danger to the whole regime.

The Army demanded its dissolution: Cromwell, as often before, occupied a middle position and attempted to secure a compromise so long as this was possible. When the Rump proposed to extend its life indefinitely by co-opting only such new members as it approved. Cromwell could compromise no longer and the Rump was forcibly dissolved on 20 April 1653. Its departure was the signal for a new turn towards the left.

Under the influence, temporarily, of General Harrison and the Fifth Monarchy men, and disgusted by the war policy of the merchants, Cromwell agreed to the calling of an Assembly of Nominees (known later as Barebone's Parliament) consisting of 140 men chosen by the Independent ministers and congregations. It was a frankly party assembly, the rule of the saints, of that sober and respectable Independent middle and lower middle class which, in the country districts, had not been deeply influenced by the Levellers and remained to the end the most constant force behind the Commonwealth. The assembly soon proved too revolutionary and radical in its measures for Cromwell and the Council, preferring to discuss such questions as the abolition of the Court of Chancery and of Tithes to the voting of supplies and the transaction of other immediately pressing government business. After sitting five months it was dissolved in December, 1653, to make way for a new parliament for which the right wing group of officers around Lambert had prepared a brand new paper constitution – the Instrument of Government.

This constitution aimed ostensibly at securing a balance of power between Cromwell, now given the title of Lord Protector, the Council and parliament. The latter included for the first time members from Scotland and Ireland and there was a redistribution of seats to give more members to the counties. Against this, the franchise was restricted to those who possessed the very high property qualification of £200 and by the disqualification of all who had taken part in the Civil Wars on the royalist side. The new parliament was thus anything but a popular or representative body, but this did not prevent it from refusing to play the part assigned to it, that of providing a constitutional cover for the group of high officers now controlling the Army. The parliament of the right proved just as intractable as the parliament of the left had been and was dissolved at the earliest possible moment in January 1655.



For nearly two years Cromwell abandoned all pretence of constitutional government as hopeless, all the more readily because of the discovery of a series of royalist plots, one of which culminated in an actual rising at Salisbury. Charles in exile was, as the Commonwealth's spies knew, corresponding not only with the secret royalist organisation, 'The Sealed Knot', but with the Presbyterians and even with the now demoralised remnant of the Levellers. The country was divided into eleven districts, each under the control of a major-general. Strong measures were taken against the royalists, and it is from this period that much of the repressive legislation traditionally associated with Puritan rule dates. It should, however, be noted that the major-generals were often merely enforcing legislation of the preceding decade or even earlier. What the gentry most resented was forcible interference with the JPs in running local government as best pleased them. Their experiences during the Commonwealth help to explain the deep hostility which the country gentry in England long felt towards standing armies. Cromwell's open military dictatorship was efficient but increasingly unpopular, especially when the war with Spain at the end of 1655 led to new taxation. In spite of this taxation, imposed as arbitrarily as in the time of Charles, a deficit of £800,000 and the poor credit of the government made it necessary to call a new Parliament in September 1656.

A quarter of the members elected including both royalists and republicans were prevented from taking their seats, but this Parliament was even more markedly a body of the right than its predecessor. A revised constitution, the Humble Petition and Advice, was drawn up which increased the powers both of parliament and the protector at the expense of that of the Council of State where the generals were strongly entrenched. A new second chamber was created and Cromwell was offered the title of king. He refused, mainly because of the strong disapproval of the generals who, on this occasion at least, certainly reflected the feelings of the rank and file of the army. However inclined Cromwell may have been to go with parliament at that moment he knew that it was upon the army that his authority ultimately rested.

This move to the right was not a success, although it gave the government a temporary increase of stability. The old opponents of the Commonwealth were not conciliated by this

apparent return to traditional institutions, while these very innovations, and above all the talk of a return to monarchy, alarmed and disgusted the left, which, though it might differ from Cromwell on many points had yet supported him in the main as the alternative to a Stuart restoration. The Commonwealth rested on the uneasy support of two antagonistic groups, the merchants and the lower middle class, both of which together still formed only a small minority of the total population. Its efforts to find a basis acceptable to both consistently failed and both were in turn alienated by efforts to seek a backing in other classes. The last years of the Commonwealth were marked by a steady loss of mass support, an increasingly precarious balance of the generals and the Army, only held together by the prestige of Cromwell. The solid mass of gentry was closing its ranks again, first to support Cromwell against the left and after his death turning more and more towards Charles II.

The end of the Commonwealth, like its beginning, coincided with a prolonged period of famine, lasting from 1658 to 1661. In addition, the Spanish war was proving both costly and ruinous to trade. Shipping was seriously interfered with, the export of cloth declined and there was much unemployment among the weavers. The collection of taxes became more difficult and as a consequence the credit of the government fell so that loans had to be negotiated on increasingly unfavourable terms. However popular the Spanish war may have been among the merchants at the beginning its effects soon turned them against both it and the government. Neither Blake's victory at Santa Cruz nor the capture of Dunkirk were able to outweigh the losses and discomfort of a prolonged war.

This unrest was reflected in the second session of parliament, where Cromwell's influence had been weakened by the transfer of many of his supporters to the newly constituted House of Lords. After a few weeks it was dissolved and for the last seven months of his life Cromwell returned once more to an open military rule. Yet he was unable to solve any of his problems, and, above all, that of finance. Although the national finances had been modernised by the Long Parliament they were still quite inadequate to maintain a large standing army. Yet without such an army the Commonwealth could not exist. Here lay the technically insoluble dilemma which made its fall ultimately inevitable.

Cromwell's death on 3 September 1658 exposed the whole weakness of the regime and brought it to an abrupt conclusion, but it was the economic stresses and political contradictions which have been outlined that gave his death its instantaneous and decisive effect. The urban middle classes had proved too weak by themselves to afford a permanent basis for a government and the Restoration of 1660 was in effect a re-combination of class forces to establish a government more in harmony with the real distribution of strength. It was less a restoration of the monarchy than a new compromise between the landowners and the upper classes in the towns.

### **3 The Compromise of 1660**

On the death of Cromwell, his son Richard – ‘Tumbledown Dick’ – was declared Protector with no better recommendation than his great name and the support of a group of discredited politicians who saw in him a convenient instrument. The army under Lambert and Fleetwood refused to recognise him and he resigned. To give their rule a semblance of legality the generals reassembled what was left of the Long Parliament. Within a few months it had been dismissed and recalled once again. The army itself began to split into fragments, each general playing for his own hand. The Commonwealth disappeared in a welter of conflicting factions. In this situation there was a marked revival of the forces of the left which alarmed all the propertied classes and united them in favour of a restoration of the monarchy.

Finally, Monk, commander of the garrison in Scotland, marched south in the beginning of 1660, joined Fairfax at York, entered London and persuaded or coerced the Rump into dissolving itself after making the arrangements for a new election. At the same time he began negotiations with the exiled Charles who made his recall virtually certain by the issue on 4 April 1660 of the Declaration of Breda, a document drafted by Hyde on the basis of suggestions from Monk. In it Charles promised a general pardon except for those directly concerned in the execution of Charles I and undertook to allow religious toleration and to respect existing property relations.

The new Parliament which met on 25 April was predomina-

antly royalist and Presbyterian, and one of its first acts was to invite Charles to return. When the excitement had died away and the loyal addresses had been forgotten, the French ambassador in London wrote shrewdly to Louis XIV: 'This government has a monarchical appearance because there is a king, but at bottom it is very far from being a monarchy.' Charles I had claimed to be king by divine right: Charles II knew that he was king by permission of the landlords and merchants in parliament and could be dismissed as easily as he had been summoned. The only way in which the Crown could secure any measure of real power was by exploiting the antagonisms between the various sections of the ruling class. Charles was quite ready to do this, but, for the moment, he kept his intentions to himself.

The character of the Restoration is most clearly shown in the land settlement which followed it. The church and crown lands that had been confiscated during the Commonwealth were restored. As a set-off the landowners freed themselves from all the remaining feudal dues owed by them to the crown, giving Charles as an equivalent an excise duty and thus shifting their obligations on to the rest of the nation. By this action, Marx says, they 'vindicated for themselves the rights of modern private property in estates to which they had only a feudal title'. In this respect the Restoration was a completion rather than a reversal of the revolution.

The settlement of private claims was more difficult. The landowners were not united but divided roughly into two sections, the old or Cavalier royalists and the new or Presbyterian royalists, who had transferred their allegiance from parliament to king any time after 1647. The Cavalier royalists in 1660 got back most of their estates which had been confiscated and sold, but they did not recover the far more numerous properties which had had to be sold privately to meet the heavy fines and taxation imposed upon them. The purchasers of these estates must be added to the Presbyterian royalists who had transferred their loyalty to the king during the domination of the Independents. The land settlement of the Restoration, by confirming the purchasers in possession, was thus unsatisfactory to most of the Cavaliers, but had the effect of uniting the landowners in support of the crown, at any rate for the time being.

In May 1661 a new parliament met. The royalist gentry had now re-emerged to dominate local politics in all but a few of the large towns, while the people who had been politically most active under the Commonwealth found it wiser to withdraw from public notice. The 'Cavalier Parliament' of 1661 saw the eclipse of the Presbyterians as a political party. It was 'a parliament of lewd young men, chosen by a furious people in spite to the Puritans', and all the more eager for revenge because of their dissatisfaction with the land settlement.

The work of its first sessions, known later as the *Clarendon Code* after Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, who had returned from exile to become Chancellor, was in form a religious settlement. In substance it was a series of Acts designed to drive the Puritan party into illegality. Since the towns were the centre of Puritan strength the first step, in the Corporation Act of 1661, was to restrict their governing bodies to those who were prepared to accept the dogma and discipline of the Anglican church. Next year, by the Act of Uniformity, some 2,000 Puritan clergy who would not declare their complete agreement with the Prayer Book were expelled from their livings. A similar conformity was demanded from all teachers. In this way the Puritans were ousted from the apparatus of the state and the state church. The Conventicle Act of 1665 was intended to prevent them from reforming outside, prohibiting all public worship save that of the state church. Finally the Five Mile Act (1665) prohibited the expelled ministers and teachers from coming within five miles of any corporate town, thus cutting them off from the mass of their supporters.

The Clarendon Code destroyed Presbyterianism, which was an organised national church or nothing. The Independent sects, since they were purely local and since their adherents were generally less conspicuous, were able to survive as semi-secret organisations of the lower middle class. The well-to-do Presbyterians soon found their way into the Church of England where they later formed one wing of the Whig Party. In the country districts the decline of the yeomen farmers and the growing stratification of the rural population into the groups of squires, tenant farmers and landless labourers deprived Puritanism of its social basis, and led to the complete predominance of the squirearchy, first royalist, then Tory, and always strongly Anglican. In the late seventeenth

and the eighteenth centuries the struggle between Whig and Tory became to a considerable extent a struggle between town and country.

In one respect the royalist parliaments of Charles II were as unaccommodating as those of his father had been. At the opening of the reign excise and land taxes estimated to bring in £1,200,000 a year were voted. Actually they realised little more than £500,000 and additional votes were made grudgingly and only after delays. The question of finance was soon complicated by quarrels between Charles and parliament over foreign policy. In 1665 a war with Holland developed out of trade disputes and unofficial conflicts in North America and the East. As before, the fighting was indecisive but it resulted in the capture of what afterwards became New York. Both parliament and City, however, were coming to regard the rising power of France as the most serious enemy, while Charles was anxious to develop friendly relations with the French king, Louis XIV, from whom he hoped to get the financial help that would make him independent of Parliament.

The strength of the anti-French party forced the government to conclude a Triple Alliance with Holland and Sweden in 1668, but two years later Charles was able to neutralise the effect of this by a secret treaty in which he promised to join Louis in a war for the partition of Holland and to declare himself a Catholic when he could do so with safety. In return Louis was to give him an annual subsidy which would make him financially independent of Parliament. A third Dutch war, in which England and France were in alliance, was begun in 1672. Charles was unable to intervene very effectively because the parliamentary dislike of the war was expressed in an extreme reluctance to vote supplies. The government at this time was accustomed to borrow from the London goldsmiths on the security of future taxes. Its difficulties in 1672 had become so great that it was forced to repudiate the whole of its outstanding debt, which then amounted to £1,328,526. This caused a real panic in the City. In 1677 payment of interest at the rate of 6 per cent instead of the usual 8 per cent was resumed for a few years, but it was not till much later that the capital sum was incorporated in the National Debt. By this, more than perhaps by any other action, the government of Charles lost the support and confidence of the London financiers.

It is at about this time, at any rate, that we can place the ending of the alliance between the squirearchy and the upper classes of the towns, an alliance that had given strength to the Tudor monarchy and to the opposition to the early Stuarts, whose dissolution had weakened the Commonwealth and whose temporary revival had produced the Restoration. It was now passing for good except for a moment when an overmastering panic blotted out customary hostilities in 1688.

The long life – 1661 to 1678 – enjoyed by the Cavalier Parliament gave full opportunity for the professionalising of politics, for the growth of the beginnings of organised political parties acting under recognised leaders and for the beginning of that undisguised corruption that developed into a system in the eighteenth century and makes many of the detailed changes of policy and alignment so complicated, and, on the long view, so insignificant. On the one hand stood the Tory squires, restored to political influence by the restoration of the monarchy and seeing in the preservation and strengthening of the monarchy the best way of maintaining that influence. Behind them stood the Anglican church and the yet unawakened masses of the rural population. Against them the Whigs, a more curious combination of the merchants and rising finance capitalists with a section of the most powerful of the landed aristocracy, magnates like the Dukes of Bedford and Devonshire who were sufficiently conscious of their own strength not to feel the need their lesser neighbours had to lean on the crown. Many of these families, like the Pettys, had originally made their fortunes in trade: others, like the Russells, had their estates in areas producing grain and wool for the London market. These two sections formed the 'respectable' face of Whiggery. Behind them, and far more radical, stood the largely Puritan lower middle class of the towns, still strongly influenced by the republican and Leveller sentiments of the days of the Commonwealth. The political objectives of these two sections were obviously very different and the task of securing their combined action correspondingly hard.

It was the peculiar ability of Shaftesbury, occupying as he did a centre position similar to that held by Cromwell a generation earlier, which was able to create a united front of all the opponents of the crown. This was for a time so successful that

hopes of a new republic began to revive. The court party, on the other hand, began to see it as their objective to eliminate Shaftesbury and his group and so cripple the opposition by dividing it into two parts too sharply conflicting to allow joint action.

The last years of the Cavalier parliament passed in indecisive struggles in which Shaftesbury and Whigs and then Danby and the Tories gained small advantages.<sup>1</sup> But its final session was held in the midst of the panic created by the exposure of the alleged Popish Plot. An ex-Jesuit, Titus Oates, declared that the Jesuit Congregation of England had met in the White Horse Tavern, London, on 24 April 1678, and had there plotted the murder of the King and the restoration of Catholicism in England. Actually the Congregation *had* met on that day, in the rooms of Charles' brother James. Oates did not know this, and though Charles did, he had the very best of reasons for keeping this knowledge to himself.

The story was instantly believed and a reign of terror began in which a number of Catholics were executed and many more imprisoned. The intense popular feeling against Catholicism at this time is inexplicable unless it is remembered that it was largely political and social. 'Popery and wooden shoes' was a current phrase to describe the conditions existing in France, and by it men meant that with Catholicism went political absolutism and a low standard of living. The fact that James was known to be a Catholic, that Oates was able by accident to implicate his secretary in genuinely treasonable activities and that considerable Court favour had been shown to Catholics during the previous decade made it all the easier for any crazy story to gain credence, even one so absurd as that the Catholics were plotting the death of Charles, their most influential patron.

Charles, Danby and the Tories knew that the story was absurd but were afraid to say so. Shaftesbury and his friends who also knew it to be absurd, seized it with delight as a weapon with which to destroy their political enemies. The great

<sup>1</sup> The names Whig and Tory were not actually used till a few years later in the great crisis of 1680 but the parties they denoted had then existed some years. They were not political parties in the modern sense, but they represented clearly defined interests in a very restricted electorate. Nor was there yet anything like the modern system of cabinet government.



majority of the population believed it absolutely, and so probably did a majority of members of parliament. Under these conditions even the Cavalier parliament whose composition had been greatly modified in a series of by-elections, demanded the disbandment of the army which was believed to be permeated with Catholics and which the Whigs thought, not altogether unjustly, that Charles intended to use to establish an absolutism like that of Louis XIV. The last act of the Cavalier parliament was the impeachment of the Tory minister Danby.

Elections held in February 1679 resulted in the return of a Parliament overwhelmingly Whig. It was the first of three short-lived parliaments (March to July 1679, October 1680 to January 1681 and 21 to 28 March 1681) in which the efforts of the Whigs were centred upon preventing James from succeeding his brother as king. These efforts failed, partly because Charles disclosed extraordinary tactical ability, playing for time while slowly rebuilding the shattered Tory party, and partly because the Whigs were unable to agree among themselves whether they wanted to replace James by his Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch husband William of Orange, or by the Duke of Monmouth, the son of Charles by the first of his numerous mistresses. Since Monmouth was the nominee of what we may call the 'Levelling' section of the opposition, as William was of the Whigs, this issue was bound up with the question of the whole future and direction of the movement. The decision that was reached in favour of Monmouth represents a definite step to the left by the Shaftesbury group. His selection was extremely popular among the masses, but had the effect of alienating many of the Whigs, as well as the temporary supporters from the classes upon which the Tories normally relied but who had been stampeded by the Popish Plot. From this point the rift in the opposition grew steadily.

For all these reasons, and because the absurdities and hysteria of the Popish Plot had produced their inevitable reaction, the parties were much more nearly even in the Parliament that met on 2 March 1681. Charles seemed at the end of his resources, the Treasury empty, his credit exhausted, the army unpaid and almost mutinous. He summoned parliament to meet at Oxford, away from the fiercely Whig masses of London, and offered a compromise by which James

should succeed but William and Mary act as joint regents and govern in his name. Confident of success the Whigs, as Charles expected, refused this offer which had in fact only been made to impress moderate men with the king's reasonableness. His opponents did not know that he had just concluded a new alliance with Louis which guaranteed him an income sufficient to make him financially independent of parliament.

Without warning, and so suddenly that the Whig leaders had no opportunity to assemble their followers or to make any plans, parliament was dissolved. Away from London no resistance was possible and a contagion of alarm scattered them in hopeless and confused flight to their homes in all parts of the country. Freed from immediate danger, Charles passed over to the offensive. In the Tory gentry, the church and the army, he had a force too formidable to be directly challenged, and, for the last four years of his life, he ruled with a more absolute power than any of his family had enjoyed before him.

#### **4 The Compromise of 1688**

The events of 1681 appeared at first sight as a complete and successful counter-revolution, undoing at one stroke the work of the Long Parliament, the civil war and the Commonwealth, and their sequel seemed to confirm this view. Charles followed his victory with a reorganisation of the machinery of local government. Whig Justices of the Peace were everywhere replaced by Tories, and the *Clarendon Code*, which had fallen into some disuse during the Whig supremacy, was once more vigorously enforced. Tories were elected to the key posts of sheriff in London, and, since the sheriffs chose the juries, this made it possible for the government to be certain of securing convictions against any Whig leaders who might be brought to trial.

Shaftesbury, Russell, Algernon Sidney and other Whigs began to plan armed resistance, and a parallel scheme for the assassination of Charles and James was prepared by a group of old Cromwellian soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Hopeless of success and fearing

<sup>1</sup> There is considerable reason to think that this, the so-called 'Rye House Plot', was from the start engineered by provocateurs.

arrest, Shaftesbury fled to Holland in November 1682. In the following June both plots were betrayed to the government and their leaders, including Russell and Sidney, were captured and executed. The Whig supporters were driven to silence and even in London the streets were dominated for a time by the church and king mob. The elimination of the Shaftesbury group, and, with it, the last possibility of any united action against the crown, was now complete.

During 1683 and 1684 the Tories attacked the last stronghold of the Whigs, the corporate towns. The charter of the City of London was declared to have been infringed, was forfeited and only restored on conditions that put the control of the Common Council in the hands of the crown. Many provincial towns hurried to surrender their charters before worse befell: others were revoked on a variety of pretexts. That employed at York, where it was declared that 'The Lord Mayor had refused a mountebank, that had the King's own recommendation, to erect his stage there' was perhaps as good as most of the rest. Since the borough corporations in most cases chose the members of parliament, Charles was now assured of a Tory House of Commons if ever he should need to call one together. The Whig party was dispersed and appeared to be destroyed.

Yet the counter-revolution was neither so complete nor so secure as it appeared. The social basis of the Whigs in the class of prosperous merchants was in fact stronger than ever before. The period between 1660 and 1688 had been one of rapid commercial expansion. The alliance with Portugal and the establishment of closer trade relations with Spain and her colonies had opened new markets for English goods. The plantations in the American colonies and the West Indies grew steadily and provided both markets and raw materials, while the East India Company became not only an important trading concern but a force in English internal politics. The exploitation of the colonial areas was already placing a great accumulation of capital in the hands of the Whig merchants.

Considerable as were the social forces Charles had been able to rally behind him in his bid for absolutism, they were not the disposers of decisive masses of capital. The crown was temporarily and accidentally independent owing to the subsidies that Louis was prepared to grant Charles for political

reasons of his own: but these subsidies could not be counted on indefinitely and the most Tory of parliaments would not have been prepared to grant the crown a revenue adequate to maintain the large standing army which a despotism demanded. In practice, the country gentry almost always proved especially tight-fisted because their conservatism and limited outlook made it impossible for them to appreciate the increasing needs of the complicated state organisation that was developing in this era. Sooner or later the government would have been forced to come cap in hand to the financial interests of the City for help that would have only been given on terms.

Things did not actually happen in this way because James played into the hands of the Whigs by trying to push the counter-revolution farther and faster than his Tory supporters were prepared to go. By his attempt to restore Catholicism in England he was thrown back upon the support of the most reactionary elements in the country, the Jesuits and the more reckless and short-sighted of the Catholic gentry. His attempt was unwelcome even to a large proportion of the Catholics who foresaw a failure which would leave them in a worse position than before.

It was all the less likely to succeed because it coincided with the revocation, in 1685, of the Edict of Nantes, under which the French Huguenots had enjoyed a limited toleration. The revocation was followed by an intense persecution and the desperate flight of hundreds of thousands of Huguenots who dispersed all over Western Europe. Fifty or sixty thousand settled in England, almost all of them skilled artisans. Silk weavers and hatters, paper-makers and glass-blowers, they brought with them both their industrial skill and tales of Catholic atrocities that lost nothing in the telling. A general conviction was soon abroad that a concerted plot was being hatched to destroy Protestantism throughout Europe. The width as well as the intensity of the opposition to James was to a large extent the result of contemporary events in France.

Yet the reign opened favourably enough with generous votes of supplies from a parliament packed with Tories by the earlier manipulations of the borough corporations. The first blow came from the left. Plans were made both in England and in Holland for a rising to be headed by the Duke of Monmouth, with a simultaneous landing in Scotland. Upon the success of

this rising were centred the hopes of those classes who had supported the Levellers and those who had learnt in the last generation to regard the crown as the instrument of popery and social reaction.

When Monmouth landed at Lyme Regis in June he was greeted with such a burst of enthusiasm by the labourers, smallholders and, above all, the weavers of the West Country as had not been seen anywhere in England since the days of Kett. It is possible that the spontaneous nature of this support may have been connected with the fact that the West Country clothing industry was then in a period of depression owing to the competition of Ireland with its low wages and cheap wool, but it seems clear that there was also a political mass movement of a new kind. Monmouth, under a banner that was symbolically of the old Leveller green, moved inland, gathering supporters as he went.

It was soon apparent, however, that these supporters were of one kind only. Not one of the great Whig lords declared in his favour, and very few of the gentry, and indeed this lack of enthusiasm was a direct result of the popular nature of the rising. The final act of Whig betrayal came when their representative, William of Orange, was sent to England to suppress the rising English troops who had been stationed in Holland. In the face of this sabotage Monmouth's rebellion was doomed. The great centre of potential support was the semi-circle round London, in relation to which the Taunton area was an outlying pocket surrounded by hostile or indifferent territory. And the failure of the Whigs to lend support left the government firmly in control of London and the surrounding counties.

The rebels marched towards Bristol, were headed off by a powerful Government army and retired to Bridgwater. Here they attempted a surprise attack by night on the enemy camp on Sedgemoor. The attempt failed, and, once the advantage of surprise was lost, the untrained and ill armed peasants and weavers had no real chance against an army that included among its leaders two such distinguished soldiers as John Churchill and Patrick Sarsfield. They fought with great courage but finally broke and were ridden or shot down by the royalist cavalry. In the manhunt that followed hundreds were executed, and many more transported to the West Indian

plantations, in the 'Bloody Assizes'. Monmouth himself was captured and beheaded.

The government even turned the rebellion to advantage by making it the excuse to increase the standing army.

At the Restoration Cromwell's army had been quickly disbanded, except for a few regiments of guards. Other regiments were afterwards raised for garrison duty at Tangiers, and in Scotland a force of 20,000 men was permanently maintained. But every attempt made by Charles to keep a large standing army in England was strongly resisted. Now James brought the strength of the army up to about 30,000 and stationed 13,000 men at Hounslow Heath to overawe London.

So far as was possible this army was, contrary to law, officered by Catholics. The rank and file remained overwhelmingly non-Catholic and the rather clumsy efforts that were made to convert them only aroused resentment. In Ireland James' Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Tyrconnel, was able to form a considerable Catholic army.

James now began to replace his Tory but Anglican ministers with Catholics, re-established the Court of High Commission abolished by the Long Parliament, appointed Catholics as magistrates and even as bishops. Realising that even his Tory parliament would never agree to remove the legal disabilities under which the Catholics still suffered he determined to attempt to remove them by a special exercise of the royal prerogative. In 1687 and again in April 1688 a Declaration of Indulgence was issued, suspending all laws by which Catholics were barred from military and civil office. In an attempt to win new allies, the Dissenters were also included in this dispensation, but the old Puritan fear and hatred of popery was so strong, and it was so obvious that religious toleration was being used as an instrument for creating a political absolutism, that they remained unmoved.

The Anglican clergy refused to carry out the royal order to read the Indulgence in their churches and they were supported by the bishops. When seven bishops were arrested, tried and acquitted, they found themselves, as no members of the episcopal bench had ever been before, the heroes of a Puritan London crowd. In breaking with the Church of England James was also breaking with the Tory squirearchy, whom Charles with his greater political acumen had seized on as the one class

upon whose support an absolute monarchy might possibly still be based. This made failure absolutely certain.

In the end it was the Whigs and not the government who profited by Monmouth's defeat. This defeat, by crushing the left wing, made it possible to stage in safety a revolution that could afterwards be hailed as 'glorious' precisely because the masses had no part in it. It was safe to overthrow James and the Stuarts without the remotest chance that his departure would open the way for a republic under which the poor might make inconvenient demands upon the rich.

Whigs and Tories joined to open negotiations with William of Orange, and, on 30 June a definite invitation was sent by a group of leading peers promising active support in a rebellion against James. All the summer William gathered a fleet and an army, waiting anxiously in case Louis should make it impossible for him to sail by a direct attack on the Netherlands. James and his ministers hesitated between advance and retreat, and in the end, William was able to land unopposed at Torbay on 5 November. One by one James' supporters escaped abroad or deserted to William. The decisive desertion was perhaps that of a certain John Churchill, already the most influential of the officers of the Army and soon to be better known as the Duke of Marlborough. Without the army James was helpless and his flight in December left William, gathering strength day by day as he moved towards London, as the only possible remaining authority.

A convention met, and in February offered the throne jointly to William and Mary. The convention declared itself a Parliament and proceeded, in the Bill of Rights, to lay down the conditions upon which the Whig magnates and bourgeoisie were pleased to allow the monarchy to continue to exist. The king was no longer, in effect, allowed to control either the army or the judges. He was specifically forbidden either to dispense with the laws or to suspend them. The control of finance passed once and for all to parliament which must be called at least once in every three years and must not be kept in existence for longer than that time.<sup>1</sup> On these terms the Whigs became loyal

<sup>1</sup> In 1716 the Whigs extended the life of parliament to seven years because an election at that time would have probably produced a Tory majority. In 1911 the duration of parliament was fixed at five years but nothing can prevent any parliament prolonging its own life indefinitely as happened during both the First and Second World Wars.

and enthusiastic monarchists, since the monarchy was now their monarchy and depended upon them for its existence. In this they differed from the Tories, who had felt that their existence depended on that of the monarchy and who were consequently far less exacting in the terms upon which their support was given.

'The "Glorious Revolution",' as Marx said,

brought into power, along with William of Orange, the landlord and capitalist appropriators of surplus value. They inaugurated the new era by practising on a colossal scale thefts of Statelands, thefts that had hitherto been managed more modestly. These estates were given away, sold at a ridiculous figure or even annexed to private estates by direct seizure. All this happened without the slightest observation of legal etiquette. The Crown Lands thus fraudulently appropriated, together with the Church estates, so far as these had not been lost again during the republican revolution, form the basis of the today princely domains of the English oligarchy. The bourgeois capitalists favoured the operation with the view, among others, to promoting free trade in land, to extending the domain of modern agriculture on the large farm system, and to increasing their supply of agricultural proletarians ready to hand. Besides, the new landed aristocracy was the natural ally of the new bankocracy, of the new-hatched *haute finance* and of the large manufacturer, then depending on protective duties.

The 'revolution' of 1688, placed in the hands of the Whigs for the next century, apart from short intervals, the control of the central state apparatus. For the exercise of this control they quickly evolved the necessary financial machinery and the appropriate political methods. Yet their victory was not complete. They were forced to leave in the possession of the Tory squirearchy the control of local government in the country districts, thus creating a kind of dualism round which much of the political conflict of the eighteenth century turned.

William himself was prepared to accept any conditions providing that he could secure the wealth and manpower of England for use against France, with which Holland was then entering a period of prolonged wars. But before these resources were available he had to secure his hold, not only upon England but upon Scotland and Ireland. In 1689 James landed in Ireland, where he had an army ready to hand, and



was easily able to stir up a national rising of the native Catholics against the Protestant 'garrison'.

In July 1690 William defeated the Jacobite army at the Battle of the Boyne, and in October 1691 the last Irish general, Sarsfield, surrendered at Limerick after a brilliant but hopeless struggle. As a condition of surrender William promised religious toleration for the Irish Catholics, a promise that was immediately broken by the passing of severe penal laws which deprived them of all civil and religious rights. The new conquest of Ireland was followed by fresh confiscations of land, the greatest beneficiary being William's Dutch favourite Lord Bentinck, and henceforward the country was ruled more brutally and openly than ever before as a colony which existed for the exclusive benefit of the English bourgeoisie.

In Scotland the new regime was accepted without much opposition, a rising in the Highlands fading out after an initial success at Killiecrankie. The Covenanting lowlands were only too ready to welcome the expulsion of James, and by 1692 William's sovereignty was undisputed throughout the British Isles.

In the coming period the centre of interest shifts from internal politics to the struggle with France and the economic changes leading to the Industrial Revolution.

## X WHIG ENGLAND

### I War Finance

The wars with France, to which England was now committed almost as a part of the Whig settlement and the connection with Holland, were fought under conditions created by two factors, the rising power of France and the rapid decomposition of the Spanish empire. After almost dominating Europe in the sixteenth century Spain had been sinking during the Seventeenth into a position in which she could no longer defend her vast possessions, strung out half across Europe and occupying more than half America. In Europe these possessions included a great part of Italy and an area corresponding roughly with the modern Belgium. Both France and Austria were beginning to look on Italy as lawful prey while the seizure of the Spanish Netherlands, lying between France and Holland, was a necessary preliminary to any attack on the latter country. Holland itself, which was just passing the peak point of its commercial greatness, would hardly have been able to defend its frontiers without the accession of strength obtained by William's accession to the English crown.

The decline of Spain had in fact created a kind of vacuum in Europe, and France, which had now become a highly centralised bureaucratic and military state, seemed destined to fill this vacuum and to seize and exploit the domains that Spain was now incapable of exploiting for herself.

Apart from the connection with Holland, the English ruling class had a considerable direct interest in this conflict. First because the conquest by France would upset the balance of power in Europe. Second because a French victory would reverse the whole work of the Revolution of 1688, would destroy the power of the Whigs, and, in all probability, involve the restoration of the Stuarts and the substitution of a military

despotism for the rule of 'a commercially minded aristocracy and an aristocratic mercantile class'.

In the third place, the Spanish colonies in America were fast becoming one of the choicest fields for English traders. Spain was too weak to enforce the regulations prohibiting foreigners from trading with these colonies but it was most unlikely that this happy state of affairs would continue if they fell into French hands. Consequently, the two great wars of this period, the War of the League of Augsburg (1689-1697) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) were also trading and colonial wars, though not to the same extent as the wars of the middle and end of the eighteenth century. As yet, the establishment of colonies was left to the private enterprise of the chartered companies and the state only intervened to protect them from foreign attacks when necessary and to ensure that the full benefit derived from them came to the English merchant class. The period in which wars were waged with the deliberate intention of building a colonial empire still lay some fifty years ahead.

The technical character of war had been revolutionised since the time of Cromwell, chiefly by the invention of the bayonet and the improvement of the musket. The bayonet had the effect of almost exactly doubling the efficiency of the infantry, since each soldier now did the work of a pikeman as well as a musketeer. The pike disappeared from the battlefield, and with the introduction of the ring bayonet, which made it possible to fire without unfixing, the cavalry once more lost their supremacy and battles were now decided mainly by the fire power and steadiness of the foot regiments.

At the same time artillery was greatly improved and fortifications and siege operations played a more important part in war. Armies now tended to be slow moving, to cling closely to carefully prepared lines and to require more elaborate equipment and vast baggage trains. The secret of Marlborough's success as a general lay in his ability to break through the paralysis that seemed to have overtaken strategy. While the Dutch were masters of slow-motion warfare, defending their positions stubbornly but unwilling to move a foot outside them, Marlborough could take half Europe for his field of manoeuvre and draw his reluctant allies into combinations and movements which alone they would never have dared to dream about.

Yet the most important fact about the changed mode of warfare was that it was so costly that no nation which was not rich and industrially well developed could wage a long war with good hope of success. Here lay the advantage of the combination of England and Holland and the disadvantage of France whose financial organisation was weak and whose industry had been wilfully undermined by the expulsion of the Huguenots. Further, the wars were immensely profitable to the English financiers and contractors, and by adding to their wealth, consolidated the triumph of Whiggery.

The Bank of England and the national debt were thus both the necessary financial means for carrying on the wars of the eighteenth century and the natural harvest reaped by the City for its labours in bringing about the revolution.

From the later sixteenth century the London goldsmiths had performed some of the functions of bankers. They accepted deposits, made and arranged loans and issued notes on the backing of their assets. Under the Stuarts they made frequent loans to the crown on the security of forthcoming taxes. These loans, however, were short term loans, repaid at the first possible date. We have seen already how Charles II, by the repudiation of 1672, ruined the credit of his government.

After 1688 government credit remained poor. The new regime was by no means secure, its fall would almost certainly be followed by a repudiation of its debts, and consequently, it could only borrow at very high rates of interest. In 1694, to raise a loan of £1,200,000, special concessions were offered to the lenders, who were allowed to incorporate themselves as the Bank of England with a monopoly of the power to issue notes.

The Bank of England began with lending its money to the Government at 8 per cent; at the same time it was empowered by Parliament to raise money out of the same capital, by lending it to the public in the form of bank-notes. It was allowed to use these notes for discounting bills, making advances on commodities, and for buying precious metals. It was not long before this credit-money, made by the bank itself, became the coin in which the Bank of England made its loans to the State, and paid on account of the State the interest on the public debt. It was not enough that the bank gave with one hand and took back more with the other; it remained, even whilst receiving, the eternal creditor of the nation down to the last shilling advanced. Gradually it became

inevitably the receptacle of the metallic hoard of the country, and the centre of gravity of all commercial credit. (Marx, *Capital*, I)

Recognised from the start as the instrument of the dominant Whig financial clique, the Bank of England met with considerable opposition. The goldsmiths, finding their business threatened, selected a date in 1697, when recoinage operations had produced a temporary shortage of currency, to present for payment a quantity of banknotes, carefully collected, far exceeding the reserves of the bank. A year earlier the Tory squires had attempted to launch a rival Land Bank.

The resources of the state mobilised behind the Bank of England enabled it to defeat all these attacks, to become increasingly powerful and more and more closely connected with the government.

Politically its effect was not unlike that of the confiscation of the church lands during the Reformation, in that it created a great vested interest whose safety and profit lay in supporting the existing regime. The steady backing which the City gave to William and afterwards to the Hanoverians was due not so much to the preference for one dynasty over another as to fears of repudiation which would follow the restoration of the Stuarts. Economically the growth of banking meant a vast extension of credit, the possibility of employing masses of capital easily and quickly where its employment was most profitable, and the growth, alongside of ordinary trade, of a system of speculation both in stocks and commodities. The import of saltpetre, for example, important in time of war as an essential ingredient of gunpowder, was made the foundation of large fortunes at this period.

The growth of banking and speculation was paralleled by the growth of the national debt, which began so modestly with the loan of £1,200,000 already mentioned. The War of the League of Augsburg cost the then unprecedented sum of £18,000,000 (compare the total war expenditure of £5,000,000 for the whole reign of Elizabeth). The War of the Spanish Succession cost £50,000,000 of which nearly half was added to the National Debt. By 1717 this stood at £54,000,000 and in 1739, after twenty years of peace and ceaseless efforts to liquidate it by means of a sinking fund, it was still £47,000,000. The Seven Years' War (1756-1763) cost £82,000,000 of which £60,000,000

was raised by loans. On the eve of the American war the national debt stood at £126,000,000 and at its ending in 1782 had risen to £230,000,00. The wars against Napoleon brought it from £237,000,000 to £819,000,000.

These figures speak for themselves, but it is necessary to remember that they involved a rapidly increasing taxation, transferring wealth continuously from the masses to the minority who profited by these wars. And, even more important, they formed an immense concentration of capital, one of the many streams flowing from various sources to constitute the vast pool which made the Industrial Revolution possible. The holders of the bonds issued by the Government for these loans were the possessors of capital resources on the strength of which they could, while still enjoying the income from them, obtain credit to undertake new enterprises. The growth of the national debt, therefore, meant the growth of fluid capital.

Some of it was used rashly, as in the South Sea Company of 1720 or its less unsavoury Scottish precursor the Darien Scheme. The crisis of 1720, which was closely paralleled by a similar crisis in France arising from the failure of Law's Mississippi Scheme, was the result of wild speculation typical of a period when trade rather than industry offered the richest possibilities for the investment of capital. Under these circumstances crises were not usually due so much to over-production as to over-speculation.

The South Sea Company began as a quite legitimate venture in slave trading and whale fishery, but its directors held out the wildest expectations and even promised to take over the whole National Debt. Shares rose from £120 to £1,020, the whole affair becoming more fraudulent as the fever of speculation rose. All sorts of bogus subsidiary companies were formed and leading members of the Whig government as well as the Prince of Wales were criminally involved. When the crash came thousands of investors were ruined and popular fury reached such a pitch that it was solemnly proposed in the House of Lords that the directors should be sewn up in sacks and thrown into the river Thames, a revival of the old Roman punishment for parricides.

Similar financial crises on a smaller scale took place in 1763, 1772 and 1793 but in all cases it was the weaker concerns that

were involved. The Bank of England and the great commercial houses stood firm and even profited, and these crises were, in fact, only the inevitable accompaniment of the rapid increase in trade that marked the whole century.

The first of the great European wars of this period, the War of the League of Augsburg, was indecisive, notable only for the successful defence of the Spanish Netherlands by the Dutch and the penetration of the Mediterranean by the British navy which now secured a permanent superiority over that of the French. It proved, too, the efficiency of the financial apparatus which William's Chancellor, Montague, had built up. It ended in 1697 with the Treaty of Ryswick, a treaty that left all the major issues in dispute undecided.

Soon after, the King of Spain died without direct heir, and a grandson of Louis XIV succeeded him. Holland and England, which were unwilling to allow France to control the Spanish Empire, and Austria which had a rival candidate in the field, at once declared war. French armies overran the Spanish Netherlands and Italy and a French alliance with Bavaria threatened Vienna.

On the death of William in 1702 Marlborough took his place at the head of the Anglo-Dutch armies. For two years his Dutch colleagues kept him on the defensive. Then, in 1704, when a French army was actually on the Danube, Marlborough made his famous march up the Rhine and across country into Bavaria. The French, taken by surprise, were checked in their advance on Vienna and the conquest of Bavaria was followed by their defeat at Blenheim, a battle that proved the turning point of the war. From this time it was mainly a question of how long both sides were prepared to hang on till they could agree on terms. Marlborough cleared the Spanish Netherlands in a series of campaigns lasting till 1708. The Austrians occupied Italy. In Spain a small British army, skilfully exploiting the national grievances of the Catalans, met with some success and captured, but was unable to hold, Madrid.

By 1710 both sides had fought themselves almost to a standstill. The Whigs were not anxious to make peace because a continuation of the war seemed the most likely means to keep themselves in power but in the end the Tory squires for whom war meant only a higher land tax were able to use the general war weariness to oust their opponents. The Whigs were

weakened by internal feuds and their fall is interesting as an example of the part court intrigues were still able to play in English politics. At this time a general election usually followed rather than preceded a change of government. Once in office the Tories had no difficulty in using their official command of patronage and corruption to obtain a parliamentary majority.

At the end of 1711 Marlborough was dismissed and the next year the war was ended by the Treaty of Utrecht. The French candidate remained king of Spain, from which country it had proved quite impossible to dislodge him, but Austria took Italy and the Netherlands, thus preserving the balance of power and giving the Dutch a secure southern frontier. The Catalans, to whom the most extravagant promises had been made, were left to the vengeance of the Spanish government.

Britain kept Gibraltar and Minorca, keys to the naval domination of the Mediterranean. In America, Nova Scotia and the Hudson Bay Territory, which had been occupied by the French early in the century, were acquired. The danger to trade that was anticipated from a firmer government of Spanish America was removed by a clause in the treaty which gave Britain the monopoly of supplying the Spanish colonies with slaves, and a virtual though not formally admitted freedom of trade in other goods. The importance of this slave trade can be judged from the estimate that between 1680 and 1786 an average number of 20,000 slaves were shipped from Africa each year.

The Treaty of Utrecht stands at the beginning of a long period of peace. In the thirty years that followed it British exports increased by at least 50 per cent. The American and West Indian plantations grew in wealth and population, producing sugar, timber, tobacco and rice in ever increasing quantities. The plunder of India poured in and the Nabob, the possessor of a great fortune made by trade and graft in the Far East, began to be a familiar figure. Holland declined in wealth and power and in France the recovery from the ravages of war was slow and retarded by the stranglehold of the bureaucracy. England now definitely took the lead in European commerce and the conditions necessary for the establishment of an empire were created. The Treaty of Utrecht was the work of the Tories but it was the last thing they did for half a century, and ironically enough, it ushered in the heyday of the Whigs.



## 2 Party Politics

The victory of the Tories in 1710 had been in part the result of their opposition to a war that had become unpopular, but also of the uncertainty about the future existing in political circles. In 1701 the Act of Settlement had fixed the succession to the throne in the House of Hanover if Anne, who was to follow William, should die without leaving children. Anne's reign thus formed a sort of interregnum. The Tories were prepared, in the main, to accept her as a legitimate monarch and to prepare quietly for future eventualities. Almost all the leading politicians on both sides reinsured themselves by carrying on secret negotiations with the Stuarts while openly accepting the Act of Settlement. Among these political hedgers were Marlborough and Godolphin, the general and the financier of the war party, who occupied a position midway between the Whigs and Tories. The existence of this intermediate group, and the reluctance of politicians to commit themselves irrevocably, created a curious situation in which there was an instantaneous and disproportionate stampede towards whichever side appeared to have an advantage.

Thus the question of the succession became important not so much because of the persons involved as because the fortunes of the political parties – and in all probability the heads of the politicians – depended upon it. Bolingbroke, the Tory leader, a charlatan with a wealth of inflated platitudes which he managed to pass as a political philosophy, began, when he saw that the succession of the Hanoverians would destroy his party, to prepare for a *coup d'état*.

First the moderate Tories were ousted from the control of the party and replaced by Jacobites. Then he began to make similar changes among the army and navy officers, the magistrates and government officials. Before the purge was well begun Anne died suddenly (1 August 1714) and the whole scheme collapsed. Even if circumstances had been more favourable, it is doubtful if Bolingbroke ever possessed either the realism or the resolution to lead a successful counter-revolution.

From 1714 to 1783 the Whigs held office without interruption or serious challenge, and the Tory party that triumphed at the end of that century was very different in

policy and social composition from the Tory party of the reign of Anne. In the intervening period the Tory squires retired to their estates – to grumble, and to squeeze the smaller tenantry in order to recoup themselves for the taxation which the war policy of the Whigs placed upon landed property. A few appeared in Parliament as representatives of the counties but they never became an effective opposition. Round their necks hung a half-hearted Jacobitism, a creed for which they were unwilling to fight or make sacrifices but which prevented them from being possible administrators of the Hanoverian regime. Jacobitism was politically dead in England after 1715 but it long remained as the skeleton in the Tory cupboard.

In Scotland it had greater practical importance, especially in the Highlands where it had deep social roots in the struggle of the clans to preserve their tribal organisation and culture against the bourgeois and partly English culture of the Lowlands. It was also kept alive by the feud between the dominating Campbell clan and the clans which resented its supremacy. Since the Campbells had long been Covenanting and Whig, their opponents naturally adopted Jacobitism. The rest of Scotland was not Jacobite in the real sense but a long-standing hatred of England and things English weighed against Covenanting memories of Stuart persecution to produce a rough neutrality.

Nothing illustrates the anti-English feeling in Scotland better than the events leading up to the Act of Union, secured by the Whigs in 1707 as a piece of military and party strategy. In 1703 the Scottish parliament passed an Act of Security, aimed against the Hanoverian succession. The Whigs were thus faced, in time of war, with the possibility of a complete break with Scotland and of a regime that might be actively hostile. The English parliament countered in 1704 with an Aliens Act banning all imports from Scotland till the Hanoverian settlement had been accepted. This robbed the Scottish cattle breeders of their chief market. Troops were moved north to the border and war seemed possible. The corruption of the Scottish lords and parliament proved more effective and the Act of Union was passed amid rioting and the drilling of irregulars. Scotland gained the right to trade with English colonies: on the other hand her undeveloped industries suffered from English competition. Politically, as has been said,

Scotland became 'one vast rotten borough' which was controlled by the Duke of Argyle, the head of the Campbells.

The Jacobite rising at the accession of George I in 1715 was doomed from the start by half-hearted leadership. In the years that followed military roads were built across the Highlands and throughout a long period of peace revolt was impossible. But in 1745, when England and France were again at war, the 'Young Pretender', grandson of James II, was landed in Scotland to create a diversion. The '45, although far more spectacular, had really less solid support than the '15 and an even slighter hope of success. An army of 5,000 Highlanders marched as far south as Derby without serious opposition, created a panic in London and retired as swiftly as they had come. Pursued by a strong force of regulars they were caught and defeated at Culloden near Inverness.

The defeat of the Highlanders was followed by the total destruction of the clan system. Chiefs who had taken part in the rising were replaced by others and all alike were transformed into landowners. The tribal courts of justice, tribal costume and even bagpipes (classed as 'an instrument of war') were suppressed. Secured in the possession of the tribal lands, the chiefs-turned-lairds began the systematic eviction of the crofters. In the eighteenth century vast tracts were turned into sheep farms; 40,000 Highlanders emigrated to America; more went to Glasgow and the new industrial towns. In the middle of the nineteenth century a final degradation began when the sheep with the shepherds who had remained to look after them gave way to deer which required no labourers at all. When the great influx of Australian wool after about 1870 sent prices down, deer forests actually became more profitable than sheep and the rate of change was greatly increased. In the Highlands, as in Ireland, the extreme suffering of the masses was largely due to the passing of society at a leap from the tribal to the bourgeois stage, concentrating in a few generations what elsewhere was spread over many centuries with feudalism as an intermediate stage.

In England the whole quality of Whiggery was summed up in the commanding person of Robert Walpole. Enterprising Norfolk landowner, financial genius with an understanding of the needs of commerce as keen as any City merchant's, colleague and leader of the great Whig peers, shrewd,

predatory and wholly unidealistic, he symbolised the interests and character of the unique alliance which governed England.

The policy of the Whigs was simple enough. First to avoid foreign wars as being harmful to trade. Then to remove taxes, so far as was possible, from the merchants and manufacturers and place them upon goods consumed by the masses and upon the land. But, as the leading Whigs were themselves landowners and it was considered dangerous to rouse the active hostility of the squirearchy, the land tax was kept fairly low and agriculture stimulated by protection and bounties. By avoiding war Walpole was, indeed, able to reduce the land tax considerably. All the politically active classes were thus satisfied and the masses, in this period between the age of spontaneous armed rising and that of organised political agitation, had no effective means of expressing any discontents that may have existed.

It was in the age of Walpole that the Cabinet system began to take shape. Up to this time Parliament had contented itself with passing laws, voting, or, on occasion, refusing to vote supplies and had left the detailed direction of affairs, the executive power, to the crown. Now the ruling section of the bourgeoisie took over from the crown the actual control of administration through the Cabinet, which is, in actual fact, no more than a committee formed by the leaders of the party representing this ruling section at any given time. Nominally controlled by parliament, it really controls parliament so long as the party has a majority there.

Today a Cabinet must hold a working majority in the House of Commons, must be united by a collective responsibility, that is, all its members must have, in public, a common policy and it must have at its head a Prime Minister who has a controlling voice in its decisions.

In the age of Walpole none of these conditions existed fully. It was still not certain whether the Cabinet was responsible to parliament or to the crown (today in theory the government is still 'Her Majesty's'). A Cabinet was still sometimes composed of openly hostile individuals fighting out their differences in public. And Walpole never took the name of Prime Minister, which was then regarded as something foreign to the English constitution, though he exercised most of the powers of a Prime Minister. Nevertheless we can say that it was at this time

that the decisive steps were taken towards that direct rule of England by the bourgeoisie for which the Cabinet has proved so suitable an instrument. The change was made easier because both George I and II were petty, rather stupid German princes, more interested in Hanover than in England, ignorant of English affairs and of the English language and quite ready to let Walpole and the Whigs govern for them so long as they received their due amount of pickings and flattery.

The question of a parliamentary majority rarely arose, because such a majority could usually be obtained by the government in office. The open rule of the bourgeoisie found its exact and natural expression in a systematic corruption openly practised and freely avowed. Some modern historians object to the word corruption in this connection because votes in parliament were not (often) actually bought for cash down. Instead they were secured by sinecures, jobs, contracts, titles, favours to the family or to friends of members. The vast government patronage was freely used for party purposes.

In the constituencies things were not better. The total number of voters in the middle of the eighteenth century has been estimated at 245,000: 160,000 in the counties and 85,000 in the boroughs. But a Tory historian, L. B. Namier, declares that, 'taking England as a whole, probably not more than one in every twenty voters at county elections could freely exercise his statutory rights.' The counties, the largest and freest of the constituencies, 'constitute the purest type of class representation', returning almost always landowners and usually members of a few county families.

In the boroughs things were even worse. Out of 204 boroughs returning members to parliament only twenty-two had over 1,000 voters. Another thirty-three had from about 500 to nearly 1,000 and of these many were thoroughly and notoriously corrupt. The rest were mainly places where the franchise rested in the hands of the corporation or of a privileged minority of the inhabitants or property owners (rotten boroughs) or places so small as to be completely controlled by some local magnate (pocket boroughs). As far as possible elections were avoided because of their expense, and often a general election would see only three or four contests in the counties. The fact that each constituency returned two members facilitated bargaining between the various interests

concerned. If an actual poll took place votes were freely bought or obtained by fraud or intimidation.

On such a basis party politics became less and less a matter of policies and more one of simple personal acquisitiveness. It came to be normal and respectable for a gentleman 'to get his bread by voting in the House of Commons' and the main concern of such ministers as the Duke of Newcastle was 'to find pasture enough for the beasts that they must feed'.

For over fifty years the Whigs fed and grew fat, and, in absence of any real opposition party, split into warring factions, constantly combining and recombining under this or that distributor of largesse. It was a result of one of these internal feuds that Walpole fell from office in 1742. The groups that combined to oust him were certainly corrupt place-hunters, but they represented the aggressive, war-seeking section of the bourgeoisie, just as Walpole represented its more conservative and peaceful section. The latter saw that their wealth had grown amazingly in twenty-five years of peace. The former saw their strength and the possibilities of an even vaster accession of wealth through a policy of open colonial war.

They focused popular attention on the frequent disputes arising from the trade with the Spanish colonies, and by a combination of appeals to greed and adroit atrocity mongering created a demand for war to which Walpole unwillingly gave way in 1739. The 'War of Jenkin's Ear', soon to be swallowed up in the general European conflict of the Austrian Succession, ended the Walpole age and began the age of Pitt, though it was not till a decade later that Pitt reached the height of his power. Like Walpole, Pitt was an eminently symbolic figure. The grandson of a great Nabob, a bitter, arrogant, thrusting imperialist,<sup>1</sup> he cut through the respectable rottenness of the Whigs to complete the disintegration which the long peace had begun.

In the middle of the eighteenth century England stood on the verge both of the Industrial Revolution and of another round of great wars. In them party distinctions were erased and new lines of demarcation drawn. But for a time it seemed rather as if political parties had vanished in a welter of factions.

<sup>1</sup> The word imperialist is used here and throughout the chapter in its popular sense rather than in the technical sense given it by Lenin and in which it is used in the later chapters of this book.

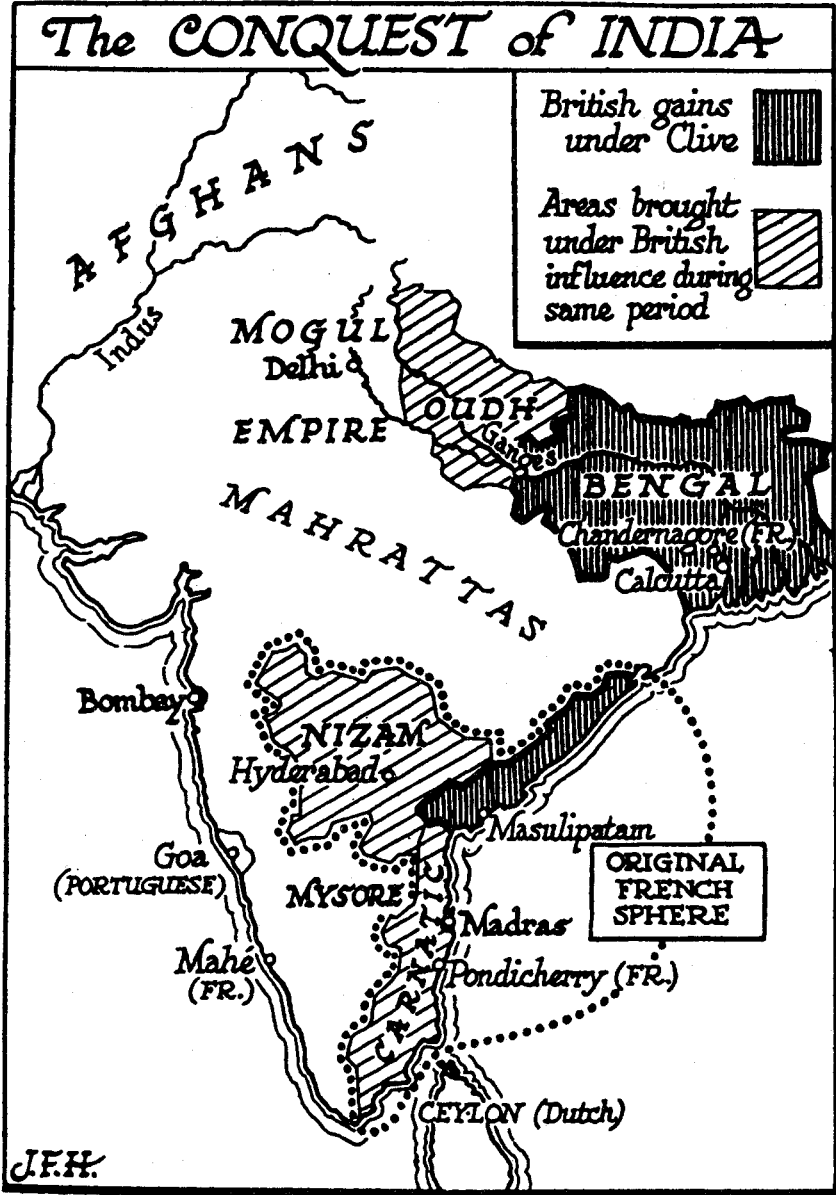
### 3 Colonial War

Pitt is supposed to have stated his intention of conquering Canada on the banks of the Elbe: he might more justly have spoken of conquering it in the Bank in Threadneedle Street. Behind the naval superiority of which so much has been heard, behind the exploits of Wolfe and the victories of Frederick the Great, was the power of British finance, able to supply the best arms and equipment then available and able to buy European allies and to maintain them in the field with vast subsidies. It was British banking which enabled Prussia, an industrially and commercially undeveloped country, to win resounding victories and establish itself as a great European power.

The ground plan of British grand strategy was this: first, a European ally had to be bought, Austria in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), Prussia in the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), as a counterweight to the main European enemy, France. By means of this ally and of small expeditionary forces sent to the Continent, the main attention of France was distracted so that, behind the screen of the navy, Britain was able to concentrate on the more profitable war upon the French colonial possessions.

Although the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War were nominally divided by a period of eight years of peace they form in fact one whole, since the war in the colonies went on without interruption. The details of the progress of these wars in Europe, the seizure of Silesia by Prussia and the extraordinary campaigns in which Frederick defeated vastly superior French, Austrian and Russian armies are important rather for European than for English history. Attention can therefore be concentrated on the colonial struggle.

French and British possessions lay alongside each other in three main areas of European expansion outside South America which remained a Spanish monopoly. These were India, North America and the West Indies. In the last area there was little fighting of importance. The islands held by the rivals were interspersed but it was difficult to carry war from one island to another and the British naval superiority made it possible to seize many of the isolated French possessions without resistance. The main seats of war were therefore India and North America.





The East India Company had grown steadily throughout the century and by 1740 had a capital of £3,000,000 on which a dividend of 7 per cent was paid to the shareholders. But this represented only a small part of the profits taken from India. It was the practice of the company to pay its servants only a nominal wage: their real, and in the higher grades vast, incomes were derived from bribes, extortion and private trade. The company kept a monopoly of the trade between India and Britain but left the internal Indian trade entirely to its servants. Clive once stated that the temptations held out to adventurers in that part of the globe were such as flesh and blood could not withstand. Even the directors of the company were forced to condemn a system which they themselves had created and which finally threatened the profits of the shareholders. They complained of the

deplorable state to which our affairs are on the point of being reduced, from the corruption and rapacity of our servants, and the universal depravity of manners throughout the settlement ... We must add that we think the vast fortunes, acquired in the inland trade, had been obtained by a series of the most tyrannic and oppressive conduct that was ever known in any country.

The French, arriving in India only at the end of the seventeenth century when the company was already powerfully established, were forced from the start to secure their position by armed force. A naval base was established at Mauritius and a small army of native troops, armed and trained in the European manner, was raised. The English company soon followed by creating its own private army. Since the main French depot, Pondicherry, was close to Madras and a second, Chandernagore, close to Calcutta, a clash was almost inevitable.

India in the eighteenth century was in a state of exceptional weakness and confusion. The Mogul empire was breaking up and its local officials were establishing themselves as independent rulers. The general situation was not unlike that of Europe at the beginning of the Middle Ages.

The immense superiority of the weapons possessed by the private armies of the French and English made it possible for them to intervene in the local wars of native rulers with decisive effect. Both began to play at king making, setting up puppet princes whom they could control.

This policy first led to open war around Madras, which the French captured in 1746 but gave up at the treaty which ended the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748. In the next year English and French intervened on opposite sides in a war in the Carnatic, of which province the English became the virtual rulers after the victory of Clive at Arcot and of Coote at Wandiwash. In 1760 Pondicherry was captured.<sup>1</sup>

The battle of Plassey, in 1757, was followed by the conquest of the rich province of Bengal. Plassey was preceded by the incident that gave rise to the most famous of all atrocity stories, that of the 'Black Hole of Calcutta'. The facts are that the 'Black Hole' was merely the ordinary prison of the East India Company and that a number of English, imprisoned because of a dispute between the Nawab of Bengal and the Company, died there owing to the place being overcrowded in the hot season. It was a case of callousness paralleled by the English prison train in which eighty Moplah prisoners were suffocated in 1921.

Hostilities ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris, which left the East India Company rulers of a great part of the country and confined the French to a few trading stations which they were forbidden to fortify. From this time there was no limit to the possibilities of exploitation. From Bengal alone the company and its servants extorted over £6,000,000 in bribes between 1757 and 1766. In Madras and the Carnatic things were much the same. Trading monopolies in important commodities like salt, opium and tobacco yielded immense fortunes. In 1769 and 1770 the English created a famine over wide areas by cornering rice and refusing to sell it except at exorbitant prices. Clive himself amassed one of the largest fortunes known up to that time by taking bribes and 'presents' from native rulers.

In 1767 the British government insisted on taking a direct share of the plunder, and the company was forced to pay £400,000 a year into the Exchequer. The Regulating Act of 1773 took the further step of securing to the Government a partial control over the administration of the conquered provinces. Ostensibly aimed at checking the oppression of the Company's rule the real effect of the Act was to systematise the

<sup>1</sup> Pondicherry was returned to France under the Treaty of Paris, 1763.

exploitation of India, which was now too profitable to be allowed to continue in private hands. It marks the beginning of the transition from the first stage of British penetration, in which India was a source of certain valuable commodities which could not be produced at home, to the second stage in which it became an important market for British manufactured goods, especially cotton textiles.<sup>1</sup>

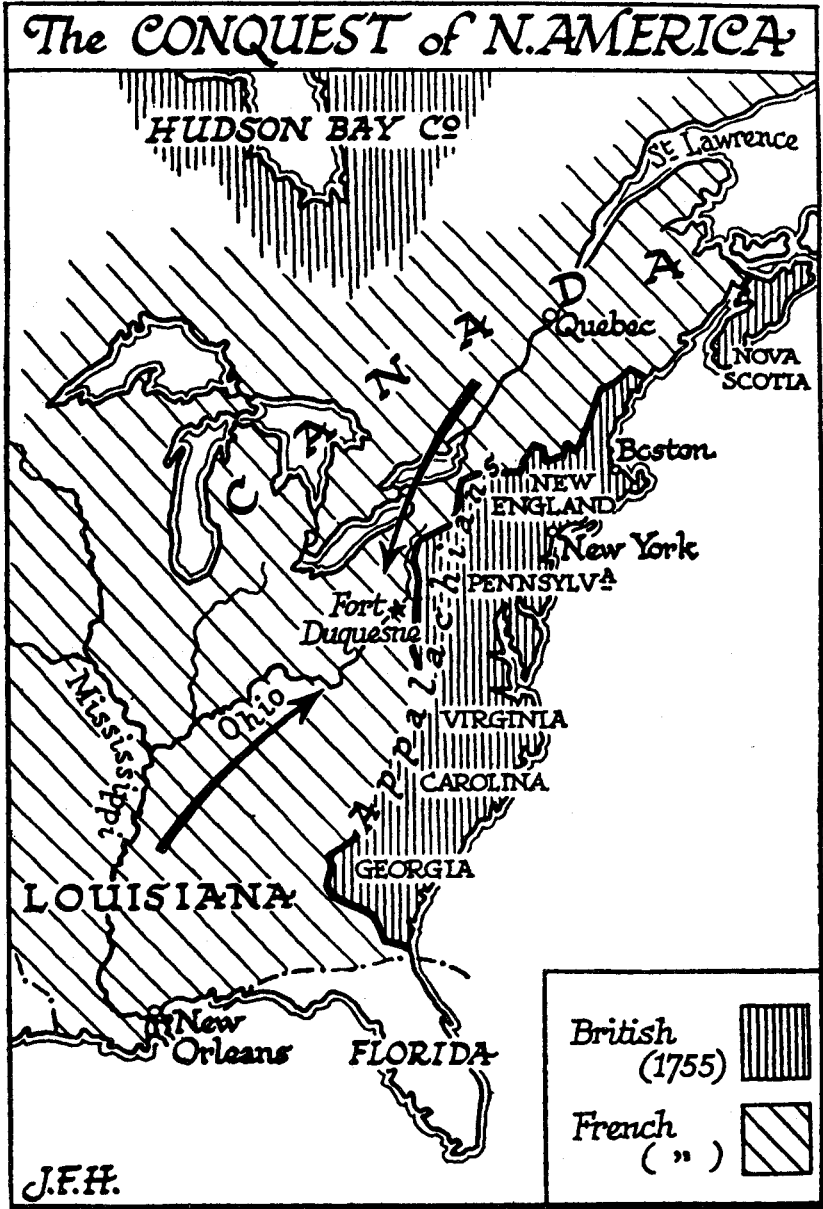
In America as in India the French had considerable success at the opening of the war. Here the British colonies lay in a long line from Maine to Florida, facing the Atlantic with the Appalachian Mountains standing as a barrier between them and the interior. The French had two main settlements, Canada in the North along the St Lawrence and Louisiana around the mouth of the Mississippi. From these they pushed up the Ohio River and down through the Great Lakes, attempting by a pincer movement to occupy the land behind the English colonies and prevent any further westward expansion. In this movement the key point was Fort Duquesne, lying at the western end of the only easy way through the mountains.

Fighting began in earnest with an attack on Fort Duquesne in 1755, defeated with heavy losses. At this time the French, though Canada had only about 150,000 inhabitants against two million in the English colonies, held a considerable advantage because of their centralised, military organisation. The English colonies were many of them far removed from the scene of war and were unaccustomed to act together.

Later the British naval blockade prevented reinforcements from reaching Canada while carrying there a large invading army.

From 1758 to 1760 Wolfe overran Canada in a series of campaigns culminating in the capture of Quebec. Fort Duquesne was taken in 1759 and renamed Pittsburg. Today it is a great railway junction and a centre of American heavy industry. The conquest of Canada involved also the conquest of the huge unsettled area between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. During the same years Senegal in West Africa, Florida and a number of West Indian islands were seized. At the time, these islands with their valuable sugar plantations

<sup>1</sup> See page 397.



were regarded as being more important than Canada. When the preliminaries of the Treaty of Paris were under discussion there was a serious debate as to whether Canada or Guadeloupe should be retained. The Duke of Bedford expressed a widely held opinion when he remarked,

I do not know whether the neighbourhood of the French to our Northern Colonies was not the greatest security of their dependence on the Mother Country who I fear will be slighted by them when their apprehensions of the French are removed.

That Canada was in the end preferred to Guadeloupe was due to strategic rather than economic reasons: the danger from a hostile foreign power in North America was rated higher than that from any possible rebelliousness on the part of the Colonists.

When in 1763 the Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War, England kept her Indian conquests, Canada, Senegal and some but not all of the French West Indian islands. The empire had now attained its greatest dimensions till the Napoleonic wars brought fresh gains. This treaty was negotiated in strict secrecy and concluded without the knowledge of Frederick of Prussia who was left to make what terms he could on his own, an act of treachery that was to prove very expensive before long.

Meanwhile politics in England had undergone a fresh change. The disintegration of the Whigs and the accession in 1760 of George III who, unlike his predecessors, was more interested in English than in German affairs, gave the crown one more opportunity to enter politics as an independent force. George did not, as has sometimes been supposed, attempt, like the Stuarts, to free himself from the control of parliament. The time when that was possible had long passed. Rather he tried to make himself 'the first among the borough-mongering, electioneering gentlemen of England'.

The king had still considerable powers of choosing his ministers, and once George had selected men sufficiently subservient, notably his Scottish tutor, Lord Bute, he was able to swing on to his side the whole machine of official patronage and corruption. To the great Whig families who had created this machine and monopolised it for half a century, this was

shockingly improper and they put up what fight they could. But under Newcastle they had grown soft and demoralised and their followers soon deserted to the side with the longer purse. After some decades of confused groupings in which party distinctions seemed almost to disappear, new parties arose, bearing the old names but standing for different things.

The Tories, free at last from the taint of Jacobitism, gradually became the 'patriotic' party: the Whigs slowly disintegrated and entered into a long period of opposition and weakness. The new Tory party had gathered to itself, in addition to its old core of country squires, many of the great landowners who had formerly supported the Whigs and a large section of the upper classes of the towns, the bankers and army contractors, all those whose profits flowed from their dependence upon the government of the day and flowed fast if that government's policy was one of war. The commercial and financial element, centred around the East India Company, broke away from the main body of the Whig party which remained under the leadership of a group of traditionally dominant families, later the Holland House clique. This was increasingly reinforced by the industrial capitalists, who, concentrated mainly in the new towns which had not secured borough status, had up to now played no very active part in politics.

Two poles of attraction began to appear: the imperialism of the court, government and financiers, drawing to itself all the privileged classes, and a new radicalism, at first bourgeois and slightly cynical but later proletarian and genuinely revolutionary, drawing a mixed following of the dispossessed, the unprivileged, and, in each generation, a host of those who saw in the profession of radicalism a means of entering the ranks of the privileged. The first developments of English radicalism will be best considered in relation to the rebellion of the American colonies, with which it had the closest connections.

#### **4 The American Revolution**

The Seven Years' War ended with vast colonial conquests: it left also a vast national debt and a burden of taxes so heavy that financiers believed the upward limit of taxation had been