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Author(s): E. Lipson

Review by: E. Lipson

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At times the difficulty is not merely one of comprehension. In the physiological part of the Second Report it was "found impossible to reproduce all the results obtained" (p. 9), but instead of average results being presented for each kind of test, typical samples only are vouchsafed us, "the results of a small proportion of the many hundreds of tests carried out" (p. 15). This is hardly scientific. What is the typical case is not decided here by its approximation to a statistical average or mode, but admittedly by a personal judgment. It is to be hoped that in his next report, to which we can all look forward, Professor Kent will find some means of generalising all the separate observations from each type of test.

P. SARGANT FLORENCE

THE BLACK DEATH.

Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History. Vol. V. *The Black Death.* By A. E. LEVETT and A. BALLARD. *Rural Northamptonshire under the Commonwealth.* By R. LENNARD. Price 12s. 6d. net.

IN two directions the study of English economic history has made marked advance within recent years. Apart from the publication of a great mass of new material, the methods of historical inquiry have changed in character. Not only are the sources being subjected to a minute and accurate investigation, more scholarly and thorough than anything attempted by the older school of historians, but there is also a wider perception of the danger of generalising from insufficient data.

Miss Levett has produced an admirable monograph, which bears on every page of it traces of patient and untiring research, and inspires confidence by the obvious care and judgment with which she handles and interprets her evidence. This latest contribution to the literature of the Black Death is bound to exercise a permanent and beneficial influence upon all future discussions of the subject.

The purpose of Miss Levett's inquiry is to examine the effects of the Black Death upon the estates of the Bishops of Winchester. As the materials of her investigation she has taken "an unrivalled series" of Account Rolls, known as the Pipe Rolls of the Bishops of Winchester, and now deposited in the Public Record Office. The Account Rolls reflect the economic workings of manorial

institutions, and are therefore more useful than the Court Rolls, utilised by Jessopp, which portray only the judicial side. In the case of the Winchester estates the ministerial accounts extend over two to three centuries (1208-1455), and embrace some sixty manors in the south-west of England, spread over six different counties. Miss Levett does not attempt, of course, to utilise the whole of this vast material, but confines herself to the periods 1346-1356 and 1376-1381; while the manors selected for examination comprise the Hampshire group in the neighbourhood of Winchester, the Taunton group, and a group in the Thames Valley.

The first chapter consists of an admirable study of the Account Rolls, intended to illustrate "the normal working of the Bishop's estates before the disturbing influence of the pestilence was felt." In the course of a valuable discussion several points of interest are elucidated; and, though technical in character, they serve as the basis upon which wide and far-reaching generalisations may be built up. In connection with the *Redditus Assisæ*, Miss Levett shows that (on the Hampshire manors at any rate) the Rents of Assize remained approximately fixed between 1346 and 1455 (Tables I.-III.); and she infers that they "bear no relation to the commutation of services"—in other words, the money paid by the customary tenants for relaxed services was not reckoned as part of the fixed rents. This conclusion seems somewhat too precisely stated; where services had been permanently commuted, as in the case of the molmen, we should expect to find their payments included in the *Redditus Assisæ*. But, in any case, the bearing of Miss Levett's contention on the broader issues of manorial history will be at once apparent to those familiar with a recent attempt¹ to revive the exploded theory of Thorold Rogers that the commutation of services was far advanced by the middle of the fourteenth century. The attempt was based on utterly untrustworthy premises, and any credit it may have enjoyed will be effectually counteracted by Miss Levett's arguments.

On the subject of commutation in general Miss Levett has some sound observations. She recognises that "to sell 'works' is not at all equivalent to commuting them" (p. 32). The failure to draw this necessary distinction has given rise to misleading notions as to the progress of commutation before the Black Death. Commutation was often nothing more than a mere temporary

¹ H. L. Gray, *The Commutation of Villein Services*, in *English Historical Review*, xxix.

expedient dictated by the circumstances of the moment, and not intended as a permanent arrangement; and there is also nothing to show on what principles commuted services were valued. The term "opus" comprehended a variety of meanings: it might mean the work of a whole day, or the work of half a day, or the performance of some definite agricultural operation (task-work). Moreover, the amount of money derived from the commutation of services "is no clue whatever to the area of land freed nor to the amount of wage-paid labour required" (p. 42). With regard to the fines imposed on new tenants, Miss Levett shows that there is no evident connection between the fine paid by a holding and its acreage or valuation, so that the lack of certainty, which is a prominent feature of the agrarian history of the sixteenth century, was already the rule in much earlier times (p. 50). The list of fines also serves to disclose the fact that exchanges of property between neighbouring tenants in the open fields were common in the fourteenth century. The owners of scattered farms were evidently seeking to build up compact holdings and to release their land from communal restrictions.

The second chapter, in which Miss Levett examines the results of the Black Death, "as measured, not by rhetorical lamentation, or interested petition, or paternal legislation, but by hard cash and definite figures" (p. 71), constitutes the *pièce de résistance* of her book. The immediate effects of the pestilence upon the Winchester estates were often considerable: whole families were sometimes swept away; tenements were left on the lord's hands vacant; and on the account rolls appears again and again the significant entry: "Nothing, because he was dead." On the other hand, there is no sign whatever of complete depopulation or chaos. To quote Miss Levett's own summary: "The estates of the Bishop of Winchester during the fourteenth century show no revolution either in agriculture or in tenure . . . no period of anarchy follows upon the appearance of the Black Death." The effects, in short, were severe, but evanescent and short-lived, and there was a "rapid return to the *status quo* of 1348" (p. 142). The main conclusions set forth in this study, and supported by exact references and ample statistics, may be summarised as follows:—

(1) It is impossible to determine what proportion of deaths occurred on each manor. The population of a manor cannot be estimated from the ministers' accounts; and, moreover, the mortality varied widely from district to district (pp. 75–81).

(2) However much the population may have decreased, the survivors were able to meet the new demands made upon them;

and so large a proportion of the vacant tenements, thrown on the lord's hands while the plague was raging, were occupied by 1351 that "the manorial organisation was maintained almost without alteration"; and no change of system was rendered necessary (pp. 82-86).

(3) Labour services were not seriously affected by the Black Death, even at the height of the pestilence. The explanation seems to be that in normal times only a portion of the services owed were actually demanded, and therefore the lord had a reservoir of labour to draw upon in times of stress (pp. 66, 86-121). The surplus of ordinary years, which was usually sold because it was not needed, covered the deficiencies caused by the pestilence. Thus at Naillesbourne in 1348 the number of "works" performed was 581, and the number sold was 3,924. In the year of the plague 2,119 "works" were accounted "defects" owing to the mortality among the tenants; this did not affect, however, the number performed, which was approximately the same as in the previous year; but the number sold was now only 1,774 (pp. 89, 180).

(4) It is true that the demand for hired labour was stimulated, but the rise in wages, however considerable, "bears a very small proportion to the usual balance-sheet of the manor"; and the workmen were therefore able to profit by the situation without the lord incurring serious loss. "The lord could well face a rise of 50 per cent. in the total wages when his wages bill amounted to only £8 or £12" (p. 102). In any case, there are no signs whatever of any changes in the methods of agriculture, or in the organisation of the manor, as the result of a shortage of labour. Examples of leases are rare—even a quarter of a century later the practice of leasing the whole demesne or farming the whole manor was almost unknown; nor is there any marked movement towards sheep-farming (p. 130).

(5) As regards the position of the landlord, the actual profits of the Bishop of Winchester increased rather than diminished during the two years of the pestilence. The source of this increase was the very large amounts received by the lord from the heriots and fines paid by the incoming tenants. At Holway, for example, the fines mounted up from £34 in 1348 to £191 in 1349 (p. 171); and incidentally these entries serve to show that there was no ruin of the countryside or collapse of the manorial organisation at a time when new tenants "were able to find large sums of ready money even in the period of acutest distress" (p. 138).

This rapid summary does not cover all the points raised in
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Miss Levett's valuable and suggestive essay ; but enough, perhaps, has been said to indicate the striking results which she has attained in the course of her investigations. Her work is a protest, and a successful one, against the facile generalisations in which historians have too freely indulged as to the part played by the Black Death in the break-up of the manor. Nevertheless, we believe it would be a mistake to minimise the importance of the great plague as a factor in the economic evolution of this country. Certainly we ought not to regard it in the light of a red thread dividing English economic history into separate compartments ; but it was none the less an economic catastrophe of supreme importance. The chapter which has been added to Miss Levett's monograph by Mr. Ballard, whose untimely death is a loss to English historical scholarship, serves to remind us that in some parts of the country at any rate the Black Death was capable of producing a "cataclysmic upheaval." At Witney, for example, two-thirds of the population were swept away ; as a result there was not sufficient forced labour to cultivate the demesne, the wages bill was multiplied nearly six-fold, and the profits of farming the manor were turned into losses. The lord was therefore driven into commuting the services of all his tenants, and getting rid of the demesne on a stock-and-land lease : in short, at Witney the pestilence marked the change from a "barter economy" to a "coin economy" (p. 203). On the other hand, the manors of Brightwell and Downton are described as "practically unaffected by the Black Death" ; here the lord retained the home-farm in his own hands and continued to cultivate it with servile labour (pp. 210, 216). We may find the explanation of the contrast in "the force of historical psychology" or in "geographical fatalism," or in "different systems of estate management," or in "the peculiarities of manorial custom" ; but the contrast remains, and it is a warning against the teaching which minimises, as it is against the dogmatism which magnifies, the results of the pestilence.

Two considerations must be borne in mind in any attempt to generalise from the statistics with which Miss Levett has furnished us. In the first place, her monograph "is professedly only an attempt to study certain local effects of the Black Death" on a group of manors in the south-west of England ; and she is amply alive to the fact that any conclusions based exclusively on the evidence of the Winchester Pipe Rolls "may justly be confronted with dissimilar evidence drawn from other groups of manors or from other districts" (p. 142). The ecclesiastical bodies

enjoyed a corporate experience denied to private landowners; their estates were organised in a model manner; and their scientific methods of farm management were well calculated to offer a strenuous resistance to the disintegrating influences of the pestilence. How reluctant was the mediæval church to tolerate any invasion of established usages, and with what tenacity it sought to preserve its conservative practices, is shown by the fact that on the eve of the Reformation bailiff-farming still survived on many monastic estates, and the monks were still farming their own demesnes on an extensive scale. But where the estate was less highly organised—and this must have been the case with a multitude of secular manors—there would be a greater difficulty in recovering from the shock of the plague, and the temporary dislocation occasioned by the awful mortality might easily develop into a permanent disorganisation of the manorial economy.

In the second place, the stress laid upon the transient character of the visitation is apt to be misleading. It is not to be denied that the thirty years which followed the Black Death witnessed an enormous increase of free labour and the rapid development of new agrarian conditions in which the customary relations between lord and tenants were superseded by a uniform legal bond and cash nexus. How are we to explain this transition from natural husbandry to a money economy, from labour services and rents in kind to rents in money? Not by the theory of a sudden and devastating revolution forcing on the immediate introduction of money payments. To make the Black Death the fountain head of all the economic changes which destroyed the manorial system is to ignore the fact that these changes were already in operation before the pestilence, and were most active in the last quarter of the fourteenth century and in the fifteenth century. And yet the remarkable progress of commutation in the period between the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt seems only explicable on the ground that the pestilence had weakened irreparably the stability of the old manorial order, and so accelerated the tendencies which were steadily bringing about the dissolution of the customary system. Had there been no pestilence on the scale of the Black Death, the disintegration of the manor as the result of the working of purely natural forces—the gradual permeation of a money economy; the demand of the lord for a more flexible instrument than the inelastic and cumbrous labour dues; the accumulation of capital in the hands of the servile tenants—must assuredly have been an infinitely slower process. Doubtless on many manors the pendulum swung back again, and no abrupt

changes took place in the organisation of the estate: the lord reasserted his authority over the servile tenants and carried on the cultivation of the demesne on the traditional lines. But however evanescent the material effects of the Black Death, the rural society of England as a whole must have been radically and fundamentally affected. The prosperity of the hired labourer owing to the mortality—and the extent of the mortality may be measured by the rich harvest of fines which poured into the lord's treasury—coupled with the new opportunities for advancement afforded by the number of vacant tenements, brought home to the villein the economic and social degradation of servitude and fostered a spirit of revolt against the compulsion to forced labour. The mediæval organisation of rural labour was bound sooner or later to succumb to the unwillingness of the serfs to return to the old conditions. While here and there particular causes operated to retard the progress of commutation and to keep the villeins in bondage, it is clear from the flight of discontented villeins and the formation of agricultural unions that the Black Death left behind it a legacy of bitterness and unrest manifested, as the Patent Rolls show, not only in the Peasants' Revolt, but in other uprisings—a legacy which continued to afflict rural society until villeinage in England had become to all intents and purposes a thing of the past.

The second essay in this volume, a study of "Rural Northamptonshire under the Commonwealth," is the work of Mr. R. Lennard, already known by his book on "Agricultural Wages." It consists of a careful and detailed analysis of the Parliamentary Surveys of the Crown Estates of Northamptonshire made about the year 1650. First the economic conditions of the manors of Grafton and Hartwell, during a period of transition, are described with a wealth of illustration, and the facts are then considered in their historical setting. In later chapters Mr. Lennard gives an abstract of the Parliamentary Surveys of other royal manors in the same county for purposes of comparison, and with the object of discovering "what range of variation in economic structure obtained on the Crown estates within the county" (p. 89). As Professor Vinogradoff points out in an illuminating introduction, "such investigations as those carried out by Mr. Lennard are naturally limited in their bearing on general problems on account of their narrow local basis," but no one will minimise the importance of "collecting evidence set in concrete local surroundings"; and a series of studies of this kind would be invaluable to the economic historian.

Mr. Lennard's essay, like Miss Levett's, serves as a protest against those "generalisations based on inadequate data which have long been the bane of economic history" (p. 78). Take, for instance, the variety of conditions which prevailed within the territory of a single midland county on estates which were all Crown property, and therefore exposed to similar economic and political influences. At Ashton "grazing had hardly been developed at all" (p. 95), but at Greens Norton "the most remarkable feature is the great development of pasture farming" (p. 100). Raundes is described as "a refuge of mediævalism," on the ground of the absence of leaseholds and enclosures (p. 116); but at Holdenby "the mediæval order of things had been almost completely swept away" (p. 109). In short, "there is variety in tenures and variety in agricultural arrangements" (p. 130)—on some manors copyholds and freeholds, the typical mediæval tenures, are the rule (pp. 110, 111, 115, 116), and on others leaseholds (pp. 31, 102, 118); on some manors we find holdings uniform and moderate in size (pp. 39, 103); and on others "evidences of engrossing abound" (pp. 95, 106); on some manors there is "a predominance of arable" (pp. 42, 93, 102); and on others there is "no trace of arable cultivation" (p. 108).

Other interesting facts emerge from Mr. Lennard's study of the Parliamentary Surveys. On the question of the progress of enclosure in the Midlands we are told that they do not throw much light, but it is evident that personal, or, if you like, historical, factors largely determined the degree of rapidity with which the movement proceeded. Economic forces and geographical conditions played their part, but the modern school of historical economists will find in the history of English agriculture ample proof of the fallacies underlying the premises of the classical economists. The English agriculturist, down to the eighteenth century at any rate, was the very antithesis of "the economic man"; he was not actuated purely by considerations of profit. The average value of arable land, for instance, was 4*s.* 6*d.* an acre; that of pasture was 14*s.* 6*d.* (p. 119); in other words, the worth of pasture was at least three times that of arable—and yet in the eighteenth century more than one half of Northamptonshire was unenclosed! Evidently the conservative prejudices of the farming community did not easily accommodate themselves to the varying demands of changing market conditions. In this connection the discussion on pages 127-130 is excellent.

We have space to note only a few more points. The term "every year's land" (p. 104) is evidently the equivalent of "whole-year lands"—that is, land cultivated on a one-field system where

the entire area is brought under cultivation and none of it lies fallow. The obligation imposed on the leaseholders of Higham Ferrers to carry their bread to a particular bakehouse (p. 107, n. 2) is an interesting survival of mediæval "suit of oven." "Lot meadows," such as we still have at Yarnton, are found at Grafton and Hartwell (pp. 44-45); but the association of definite strips of meadow land with particular holdings will be noted as "an instance of individualistic invasion of an older communal system." Evidence of the consolidation of strips in the open fields (pp. 54-57) reveals the gradual dissolution of the Open Field System as the result of disintegrating influences at work in the village itself; and on the process of "engrossing" the Surveys also throw valuable light (pp. 47-50, 107, 120, 123). The tendency to grant leases for terms of years instead of leases for lives is a feature of the first half of the seventeenth century, and the period of thirty-one years eventually becomes general (pp. 31-32, 120-121). An examination of the leases discloses evidence of land speculation (pp. 35-36). Citizens of London were clearly finding land a profitable investment and were getting hold of leases, just as in the previous century they had thrown themselves into sheep-farming. In two cases the demesne is leased by the community of tenants (pp. 95, 116); and we thus have instances of corporate action, of which the classic example is that of Brightwaltham in the thirteenth century, when the whole body of tenants entered into a contract with the lord.¹ In so far as Grafton and Hartwell are typical, the Puritan Revolution would seem to have passed over England without leaving behind it permanent traces on rural economy. "It seems," Mr. Lennard remarks, "that the fields of Grafton and Hartwell suffered little change in the uses to which they were put during the decade of political revolution" (p. 82).

The general conclusion reached by Mr. Lennard may be expressed in his own words: "Though the signs of change are manifest in the Surveys, the surprising thing . . . is rather the permanence of so many features of the older economy. . . . Arable farming was on the whole singularly well maintained . . . and farms of from fifteen to sixty acres maintained themselves . . . in spite of all the forces which made for engrossing" (pp. 86-88). On the other hand, "the scaffolding of the modern village stands beside the ruins of the manor" (p. 46).

E. LIPSON

¹ *Select Pleas in Manorial Courts*, i, 172.