

“The Black Death” and its Effects.  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ST. ALBANS.  
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As it is not proposed to consider the subject matter of this paper from the medical point of view, a very brief description of the origin and nature of the Black Death must suffice.

Although not brought into Europe till 1347, it started so far East as China a few years previously, and after devastating Asia, it worked its way in a westerly direction till it reached Ireland<sup>a</sup>.

Throughout the Continent of Europe (to which it was brought along the trade-routes from the East), its ravages were fearful<sup>b</sup>. In most countries, writers use almost

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<sup>a</sup> “Gt. Pest.” (Gasquet) p. 1.    <sup>b</sup> *Ib.* p. 16.

identical terms in describing its horrors, while many are afraid lest their bare recital of facts shall rouse incredulity in the minds of posterity. Boccaccio is an authority for the woes of Florence in 1348<sup>c</sup>; and Petrarch relates those at Parma—he indeed could write feelingly on the subject, as his beloved Laura died of the Pestilence at Avignon the same year<sup>d</sup>.

The plague reached England in the late summer of 1348<sup>e</sup>, and beginning with Melcombe Regis in Dorset, gradually swept over the whole country, finally arriving in Scotland, where it did not die out till 1350.

The Black Death itself was a “bubo-plague<sup>f</sup>,” such as is known to have existed in Egypt since the days of Ptolemies, though it had never before invaded Europe—now, however it took root there, and cropped up, intermittently, for more than three centuries to come. It was an eminently contagious disease, it was characterised by “plague marks<sup>g</sup>,” and caused great sufferings—these fortunately lasted but a short time, the patient often dying within twelve hours.

The persons attacked during this, its first outbreak, consisted chiefly of those in the prime of life<sup>h</sup>; the poor people and the clergy being the classes to suffer most. Very often whole households would be exterminated; and from 20 to 60 corpses were sometimes buried in a common trench or “plague-pit” in a single day. The depopulation which the Black Death brought about in England was so great, that the best authorities reckon it carried off fully one-half of the people<sup>i</sup>.

There are several means by which an estimate is arrived at on this point<sup>k</sup>. Among the most important are the institutions to livings in the Diocesan Registers<sup>l</sup>; also the presentations to livings, by the sovereign, recorded on the Patent Rolls. The large number of vacant benefices filled up during the time the Black Death was raging shows how great was the mortality among the secular clergy, fifty of whom are calculated to have died of it in Hertfordshire alone<sup>m</sup>.

The mortality in the monasteries was not less remark-

<sup>c</sup> *Ib.* p. 29.    <sup>d</sup> *Ib.* p. 20., *Ib.* p. 29.    <sup>e</sup> *Ib.* p. 73.

<sup>f</sup> “Hist. of Epidemics,” p. 119. *Ib.* p. 120.    <sup>g</sup> *Ib.* p. 121.    <sup>h</sup> *Ib.* 122.

<sup>i</sup> “*Gr. Pest.*” p. 195.    <sup>k</sup> *Ib.* p. 75.    <sup>l</sup> *Ib.* p. 76.    <sup>m</sup>. *Ib.* p. 177.

able ; at St. Albans Abbey, Michael de Mentmore, then Abbot, and 47 monks were carried off". Such a contagious disease would naturally work havoc where many persons were congregated together, within a limited space, as in a monastic community—while the custom of burying generations of dead monks in chapel and cloister<sup>o</sup>, prepared the site for the reception of the poison, and gave the living but little chance of escaping from it.

Similarly, the mortality among the country parochial clergy may partly be attributed to the vicinity of their homes to church and churchyard ; but it is only fair to say it was often caused by their devotion in ministering spiritually to the sick<sup>n</sup>.

It is from the rolls of the Manor-Courts that many statistics are obtained concerning the mortality among what we should now call the farming and labouring classes<sup>p</sup> ; and at this period these rolls show a very great increase in the number of heriots, or fines due on the death of a tenant<sup>r</sup>.

Other similar evidence is obtained from the "Inquisitiones post Mortem," or inquiries made at the royal command upon the oath of a jury, after the death of a tenant holding immediately of the crown, into the value and extent of his lands.

In Hertfordshire, for thirty years after the Black Death<sup>s</sup>, the accounts of certain manors began with a list of tenancies rendered vacant by that plague. The rolls of the manor of Winslow (in Buckinghamshire), which belonged to St. Albans Abbey, show that, during 1348-9, one hundred and fifty-three holdings had changed hands ; and from other evidence gained from the same rolls, three out of every five adult males in that manor must have perished.

At the manor of Sladen, in Buckinghamshire, but not far from Berkhamstead, by August, 1349, no tenants were left at all, and the land lay uncultivated<sup>t</sup>.

It may be mentioned at this point that a rough Latin inscription on a stone, placed on the N. wall, inside the

<sup>n</sup> "Hist. of Epid." p. 131.      <sup>o</sup> *Ib.* p. 175.

<sup>p</sup> *Ib.* p. 133.      <sup>q</sup> *Ib.* p. 135.      <sup>r</sup> "Gt. Pest." p. 166, *Ib.* p. 99.

<sup>s</sup> "Epid," p. 139, *Ib.* p. 136.      <sup>t</sup> "Gt. Pest." p. 100.

tower of Ashwell Church, near Royston, in Hertfordshire, commemorates both the pestilence of 1349, and a great tempest in 1362 “.

Although the upper classes and townfolk fared best during the plague, they certainly did not all manage to escape it, since in 1349 the wills enrolled in the Husting-Court of the City of London are 10 or 15 times more numerous than in any preceding year<sup>u</sup>. Also at Colchester, which enrolled its own wills, one hundred and eleven were proved at this time—the number of burgesses in the town being but four hundred “.

Having thus shortly passed in review some of the immediate and temporary effects of the Black Death, and before proceeding to consider those which are more distant and permanent, it may be well to glance at the social condition of the people, especially in the country districts, where, unlike the habitual custom of most pestilences, this particular one wrought most destruction.

At this period the Manorial System of servile tenure was still in full force ; though somewhat modified, it is true, in practice, if not theoretically, from the days more immediately succeeding the Conquest. In theory, the Lord of the Manor now, as then, was absolute master over the estate. His own demesne, comprising generally a quarter of the estate, was cultivated under the eye of his reeve by the villeins, who were bound to give their lord so many days’ work in the year, but otherwise were free to cultivate their own holdings, which often consisted of 12 or 15 acres, scattered about over the common fields. Below these were the cottars, who cultivated less land, and sometimes owned only a house and croft ; while above them were the “ free-tenants ” or “ soke-men,” who paid rent variously in money, kind or labour, who could be called upon for military service, but who were not bound to the soil as were the villeins, though like them, bound to appear at the lord’s court<sup>x</sup>.

By the period of the Black Death, the condition of the lower class of tenants had much improved. In many cases, labour-services having been commuted for money-rents, the villeins had risen into copyholders ; while, for

<sup>u</sup> “ Epid,” p. 139 & “ Guide to Herts ” (Foster), p. 78.

<sup>v</sup> “ Epid,” p. 118.      <sup>w</sup> *Ib.* p. 186. & “ Gt. Pest.” p. 176.

<sup>x</sup> “ Industrial Hist. of England,” (Gibbins), p. 15.

the cultivation of their demesne, the landlords looked to the cottars, who not possessing enough land to take up all their time, hired out their services for money-payments<sup>y</sup>, not only to the lords, but also to the richer villeins and freeholders. It must be remembered as well, that to the dwellers on a manor generally, belonged many rights, as of feeding their cattle on the common pasture (as at Port Meadow, near Oxford)<sup>z</sup>, and on the waste; of lopping certain trees in the woodland, and of turning their swine into the woods, to forage for themselves—a right called “pannage.” Very often too the chief villeins had acquired “closes,” or inclosed plots of their own, for which they paid higher rent, apart from their strips in the common fields.

The conditions of life, therefore, in the rural districts, when the Black Death fell on the country, were approaching, though still at a great distance, to those of our own day; the free-tenants and richer villeins resembling our farming class; and out of the ranks of the cottars was already being evolved the class of modern labourers.

On this hopeful state of affairs, the ravages of the Black Death exercised, for the time at least, an almost revolutionary influence. Where so many had been swept away of that particular class on whom depended the cultivation of the soil, (and England, in spite of the rise of towns, and the growth of manufacturing industries, was an agricultural country at this period), it was impossible for the rate of wages, the prices of provisions, the whole condition of villenage to remain unaltered.

The first, and most immediately felt hardships ensuing on the pestilence, fell on the landed proprietors, who saw their estates going out of cultivation for want of labourers, and were obliged to give the survivors a large increase in wages, to keep them from seeking more profitable employment on other manors, or in the towns; besides having to pay a much heavier price for agricultural implements.

Although it would have been unjust to expect the labourers to take the same wages as before the pestilence, seeing that the price of many kinds of provisions, such

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<sup>y</sup> *Ib.* p. 14 & p. 41.      <sup>z</sup> *Ib.* p. 20.      <sup>a</sup> *Ib.* p. 22.

as fish, had gone up; it is to be feared that the labourers often refused to work, and took to tramping the country as “sturdy beggars,” or even as robbers<sup>b</sup>.

The violent measures, however, which the landowners took to remedy matters were not calculated to calm the shattered nerves of the peasants, or to improve the relations between what we now call “Capital and Labour.”

In 1350, but a year after the Black Death, Parliament enacted the “Statute of Labourers<sup>c</sup>,” which aimed at bringing back villenage to its original and oppressive condition. Labourers were now forbidden to wander from the place of their birth; they might neither ask higher wages than were customary in their neighbourhood before the pestilence, nor were landlords permitted to give increased wages.

Worst of all, the stewards of the manors, generally lawyers, exerted their ingenuity in ransacking the old manor-rolls<sup>d</sup>, to prove the rights of the lords to the labour-service of the villeins, and to bring these back to the state of bondage from which, in all but name, time had done so much to free them.

In spite of heavy punishments, imprisonments, fines, and even branding, meted out to breakers of this statute, and its frequent re-enactment, it was impossible to carry it out in its entirety<sup>e</sup>. It long remained as a fretting sore in the side of the labouring class, and to it is partially attributable the general rising which took place among them early in the next reign.

There were of course many other reasons for the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381; the immediate cause being the poll-tax levied in aid of the French war, on all males above 14; but the general state of discontent throughout the country which led to it, can, roughly speaking, be dated “sith the pestilence-time,” as it is put by William Langland, the contemporaneous author of “Piers Plowman<sup>f</sup>”; and all authorities concur in describing an extraordinary upheaval of social and moral conditions.

The teachings of Wyclif’s wandering Lollard-preachers,

<sup>b</sup> “Sht. His.” (J. R. Green), p. 242.      <sup>c</sup> *Ib.* p. 243.

<sup>d</sup> “Const. Hist.” (Stubbs), p. 476.      <sup>e</sup> “Sht. Hist.” p. 242.

<sup>f</sup> “Epid.” p. 188.

who aimed at social, as well as religious reforms, must have greatly influenced men's minds; but, as is usual in such cases, the zeal of his disciples often went beyond the meaning of the Reformer<sup>g</sup>, and the inflammatory doctrines of John Ball and his fellows must not be attributed to Wyclif, and were indeed, abjured by him.

For more than a short reference to the general history of the Peasants' Revolt there is not space here. The insurrection once having started in Kent, spread with startling rapidity over the kingdom, extending from Scarborough to Devonshire, and through the Eastern and Midland counties. In the immediate neighbourhood of London it gathered most strength, and was there only quelled by the death of Wat Tyler<sup>h</sup>, the Kentish leader, and by the wholesale promises of Richard II to grant the social reforms demanded. What these were may be told in the words of J. R. Green,—“ We will that you free us for ever,” shouted the peasants, “ us and our lands, and that we be never named nor held for serfs ”—“ I grant it,” said the boy king; and accordingly numerous charters of emancipation were hurriedly made out—only alas! to be repealed when parliament met the same year; the landowners with one consent refusing to confirm what they were right in considering to have been an illegal action on the King's part<sup>i</sup>.

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And now to turn to that part of our subject which more immediately concerns the City and Abbey of St. Albans. The social conditions which prevailed over England, generally, previous to the Black Death, may be taken as existing also in this neighbourhood; the Abbey authorities and their tenants bearing the same relation to each other, as elsewhere lay proprietors bore to theirs.

Signs, however, are not wanting of smouldering discontent among the burgesses at the existing state of things. The necessity the burgesses were under of grinding their corn, and fulling their cloth at the Abbey mill, which wasted their time, but (by the tolls they paid), increased the revenue of the Abbot, who strictly

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<sup>g</sup> “ Sht. Hist.” p. 233. <sup>h</sup> “ Sht. His.” p. 246. <sup>i</sup> “ Sht. Hist.” p. 247.

enforced the obligation, was for many years one of the bitterest points of contest<sup>k</sup>.

As early as 1274, a dispute occurred on this subject between the townsmen and Abbot Roger de Norton, when the fullers of cloth tried to make use of the Abbot's mills for the particular purposes of their calling; and at the same time to grind their corn in small handmills at home'. After much tumult, Queen Eleanor, widow of Henry III, was induced to mediate, and peace was restored; but prolonged litigation decided the matter in favour of the Abbey.

Later on, in 1326, during the Abbacy of Hugh de Eversden, the burghers rose and demanded "Charters of emancipation, the right of electing members of parliament, common of land, wood and fishery; and of handmills<sup>m</sup>." They actually besieged the Abbey, and finally obtained all they wanted in a deed confirmed in 1327, by Edward III, and unwillingly sealed by the Abbot and monks<sup>n</sup>.

However, under the next Abbot, Richard of Wallingford, all that the burghers had gained was lost again; they were obliged to renounce all their privileges, and the millstones were brought to the Abbey, where they were let into the pavement of a "parlour" near the cloister, to be a perpetual witness to the triumph of the monks<sup>o</sup>.

The memory of these events must have been fresh in men's minds when the Black Death came to St. Albans. Its ravages in the Abbey were as terrible as elsewhere in monastic communities. Walsingham in the "Gesta Abbatum<sup>p</sup>," recounts touching details of the death of Abbot Michael de Mentmore, already alluded to. On the Maundy Thursday of 1349, though already the disease had laid its clutches on him, he had conscientiously performed all his devotional exercises, including the customary one, on that day, of washing the feet of the poor—but by Easter Day, it is recorded that "Dom Michael of pious memory" had passed away. Besides the Abbot, 47 monks, including the prior and sub-prior, died of the pestilence at this time. When the next Abbot, Thomas de la Mare, was elected<sup>q</sup>, he proceeded

<sup>k</sup> "Hist. of St. Albans Abbey" (P. Newcome) p. 226.

<sup>l</sup> Gesta. Abb. Introd. III. xxxvii. and P. Newcome, 183.

<sup>m</sup> "Cons. Hist." II. 477.      <sup>n</sup> P. Newcome p. 210.

<sup>o</sup> "Sht. Hist." p. 246.      <sup>p</sup> "Gt. Pest." p. 97-8.      <sup>q</sup> *Ib.* p. 103.



to the Papal Court at Avignon to receive full investiture of his office ; on the way however, one of his companions, a monk called William de Dersingham, fell ill, and died of the plague at Canterbury.

Abbot de la Mare spent a whole year<sup>r</sup>, after his election, in visiting the cells (or priories dependent on the Abbey) in different parts of the country, hoping too to find more wholesome air in fresh places, owing to the continued prevalence of the plague near London. There being also, from the consequent scarcity of labourers much dearth of provisions in the Abbey, he arranged for 16 monks to be sent to dwell at Redbourne, thus relieving the necessities of those left at St. Albans<sup>s</sup>.

From the fearful mortality among the brethren, the Abbey never seems to have recovered ; so that, whereas in 1335, it numbered probably sixty to seventy monks, in 1396 there were only fifty-one, in 1452 but forty-eight, and at the dissolution no more than thirty-nine<sup>t</sup>.

As has been already shown, the more immediate effect of the Black Death was a widely spread disorganization of social conditions throughout the country

At St. Albans, where, for a century at least, social grievances had been much "en evidence," it was only to be expected that the rebellion would assume alarming proportions, and so indeed it proved.

While the Kentishmen under Wat Tyler<sup>u</sup> were marching northwards upon London, the villeins of St. Albans Abbey had joined with the other Hertfordshire rebels, under Jack Straw, and were making a descent upon it from the north. Their chief demands included: "The abolition of the servile tenure, the emancipation of the native bondmen, and the commutation of villein service for a rent of 4d. the acre."

In connection with the allusion just made to Wat Tyler, of Maidstone<sup>v</sup>, it may be mentioned, that there were at least four other Tylers whose names appear among the insurgents. This seems to prove that the Tylers were a somewhat turbulent set of craftsmen ; and it is an interesting fact, that in 1362<sup>w</sup>, Abbot de la Mare made a special proclamation that no more than the

<sup>r</sup> P. Newcome, p. 246.    <sup>s</sup> *Ib.* p. 247.    <sup>t</sup> "Gt. Pest." p. 215.

<sup>u</sup> "Const. Hist." p. 479.    <sup>v</sup> *Ib.* p. 478.    <sup>w</sup> "Gesta. Abb." III. 47.

former rates for roofing should be charged by the tilers, who evidently wanted to make profit out of the great storm of wind in January of that year, which is commemorated, together with the Black Death, on the stone at Ashwell Church already referred to.

To return to our rioters, while some were marching on London, others, in the town of St. Albans itself<sup>x</sup>, had risen under the leadership of a certain William Gryndcobbe, and made their way to the Abbey to demand their liberties. It was agreed with the Abbot that Gryndcobbe should be sent as a deputation to London; and there he had an interview both with Wat Tyler and with the young King, who, in terror of the insurgents, was just then recklessly conceding charters of emancipation.

From him Gryndcobbe obtained a letter to the Abbot, and riding back to St. Albans, again led his men to the gates of the Abbey. He himself, with some "sturdy followers," burst in on the Abbot in the monastery, and standing over him with drawn swords, they obtained his unwilling consent to carry out the King's letter, which commanded the surrender to the townsfolk of the charter wrested from them in the days of Richard of Wallingford. Henceforth they were permitted to pasture their cattle, to fish and to hunt, in certain specified places; and at last was the long-sought-for boon granted, that of "keeping handmills in their houses or elsewhere, as shall seem best to them<sup>y</sup>."

Other books and rolls which they obtained, chiefly the court rolls, containing an account of the villenage, were burnt in the market-place near the Cross.

The mob, however, had not waited for the signing of the deed, to take matters into their own hands<sup>z</sup>. Already they had levelled the fences which kept them out of wood and meadow, and impaled the head of a rabbit, on a spear-head, in the market-place, as a sign of free warren. The Abbey jail they had emptied of its prisoners, most of whom they liberated, but one at least, for unknown reasons, they "lynched" (as we should say) and decapi-

<sup>x</sup> "Annals of an Eng. Abbey" (Froude).

<sup>y</sup> P. Newcome, p. 258, "Const. Hist," p. 477, and Gesta. III. 308.

<sup>z</sup> "Annals of an Eng. Abbey."

tated, probably in Romeland<sup>a</sup>. Specially did they triumph over the monks in that old matter of the millstones, for, ‘entering a room called the ‘Parlour’<sup>b</sup>, very near the cloister, they there broke to pieces certain stones of handmills, which had been put and brought there by persons of the same town by agreement, upon certain disputes which had existed beforehand between the Abbot of the same place, that then was, and the same persons as to such handmills, in example of their wrong and injury which they had done to the same Abbey, and they tore up the pavement in the same room.’ The fragments were then distributed in the town, being evidently looked on as interesting mementoes of the event<sup>c</sup>.

Having committed many excesses, threatened to destroy the Great Gate of the Abbey<sup>d</sup>, and almost terrified the monks into taking refuge by flight, the rioters had their triumph soon cut short by the news of Wat Tyler’s death. Though for a time they did not fully understand the import of this, and even continued to wrest charters of emancipation from the Abbot, they were disallusioned at last when Sir Walter atte Lee, the King’s Commissioner, with a band of armed men, rode into the town to enquire into the late disturbances.

Headed in their resistance by Gryndcobbe, the burghers refused, at Lee’s demand, to render the charters so hardly won. Their leader was, however, surprised and captured by Sir Walter, together with a certain John Barber<sup>e</sup>, and they were both conveyed to Hertford jail. Fearing the worst might happen to Gryndcobbe, the populace of St. Albans rose<sup>f</sup>, and by threats of vengeance persuaded the Abbot to obtain the release of the prisoners on bail.

This was done, but when Gryndcobbe<sup>g</sup> addressed a gathering of the insurgents at St. Albans, far from seeking to save his own life at the expense of their liberties, he bade them disregard the danger he was in, and abide by their just demands for freedom. His release having availed nothing, from the Abbot’s point of view, Gryndcobbe was shortly after taken back to prison<sup>h</sup>.

The news of the near approach of the King, who had

<sup>a</sup> Gesta. III., 288 & 292. <sup>b</sup> *Ib.* p. 293. <sup>c</sup> ‘Annals of an Eng. Abbey.’

<sup>d</sup> Gesta III., 312 & 314. <sup>e</sup> Gesta III., 339. <sup>f</sup> *Ib.* p. 340.

<sup>g</sup> *Ib.* p. 341. <sup>h</sup> *Ib.* p. 342.

been traversing the country, dealing out everywhere high-handed justice to the rioters, drove those in St. Albans to their knees, and they offered instant restitution of the charters<sup>i</sup> if the Abbot would intercede for them with the King. The charters having been returned, and 6 millstones placed in the “parlour<sup>k</sup>” near where the others had lately been plucked up and destroyed, the Abbot promised to use his good offices in their favour with the King. These do not appear to have been of much service, for Richard was determined on dealing sternly with the offenders. His Chief Justice, Sir Robert Trysilian, sat in judgment on the offenders at the Moot Hall<sup>l</sup>, and by cunning and terrorism contrived to obtain from three sworn juries (“packed ones,” in modern phrase) an indictment against those implicated in the late disturbances.

Upon this, Gryndcobbe, Barber, and thirteen other burgesses were executed by hanging, and many more were imprisoned<sup>m</sup>. John Ball, also who had been captured at Coventry<sup>n</sup> about this time was brought to St. Albans, tried and condemned to death by Trysilian, and hung on July 15th.

It is impossible not to feel sympathy with Gryndcobbe, although Walsingham, writing, of course, from the monkish point of view, calls him one “whose heart was hardened in evil.” He seems to have come of a patriotic family, for a Gryndcobbe appears as one of the burgesses who witnessed the charter granted to them by Abbot Hugh; and a short time after William’s death, Henry<sup>o</sup>, his brother, a London dyer, is supposed to have fomented disturbances in St. Albans, in revenge for his kinsman’s execution. The very name, if, as appears, it denotes one who grinds ears of corn, is interesting, in connection with those disputes, so often alluded to, on the subject of the handmills. Certainly his patriotic address to his fellow-townsmen exonerates him from the charge of selfish intriguing on his own behalf, which is so often levelled at mob-leaders.

I should like to mention at this point that Mr. Page has kindly supplied me with the following interesting and curious fact in connection with the Gryndcobbe

<sup>i</sup> *Ib.* p. 343.    <sup>k</sup> *Ib.* p. 347.    <sup>l</sup> *Ib.* p. 349.    <sup>m</sup> *Ib.* p. 350.  
<sup>n</sup> “Const. Hist.” p. 473.    <sup>o</sup> “Annals of an Eng. Abbey.” Gesta. 364.

family. In 1384, an "Inquisitio post Mortem" was made, as to the value of two messuages in the town, held by Joan, widow of William Grenecob, for her life, "and which after her death ought to revert to the King as an escheat, by reason of the forfeiture of the said William." The jury report, in answer to the writ, that—"the said two messuages are worth by the year in all issues beyond reprises 13s. 4d<sup>p</sup>," showing that Gryndcobbe, according to the value of money at that time, was a man of some substance.

William Gryndcobbe's followers succeeding in rescuing his body, with those of his fellow sufferers, from the ignominy of the gibbet, were afterwards compelled, by order of the King, to replace them with their own hands<sup>pp</sup>.

The final depths of humiliation came when the Statute was promulgated, which formally annulled all the charters<sup>q</sup> granted during the insurrection. What this meant at the time may be gathered from the words in which the King, shortly before, had commissioned certain persons to proclaim throughout Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire "that all and every person and persons<sup>r</sup> that ought to do any manner of service or duty to the abbot or convent, whether bond or free should do and perform the same in such manner as they had been used to do before the late troubles"—imprisonment being the consequence of non-compliance.

The millers of St. Albans<sup>t</sup> do not seem to have taken their defeat quite tamely—sooner than grind their corn at the Abbey they carried it off to distant mills; but afterwards they had to pay a fine for their misdeeds. And still later, farms at Sandridge and Walden, and a mill at Codicote were burnt down by rioters.

As these outrages appear to be only the last dying embers of the Peasants' Revolt in this neighbourhood, it must be imagined that things soon after quieted down in St. Albans, as throughout the country generally.

Most Authorities, however, agree that though apparently so futile at the time, the ultimate results of the Revolt more than fulfilled the expectations of the

<sup>p</sup> Inq. P.M. 7. Rich. II., No. 93. Gesta. III 354, *Ib.* 355.

<sup>pp</sup> Gesta. III., 354, 355. <sup>q</sup> *Ib.* 356.

<sup>r</sup> Gesta. III. p. 353. <sup>s</sup> P. Newcome p. 265. <sup>t</sup> Gesta III., 360.

insurgents. As it had been impracticable to enforce the Statute of Labourers, so was it morally impossible for the retrogressive policy of Richard II.'s government, with regard to villenage, to be carried out. The position of the tenants gradually improved, and to quote from Stubbs, in words that sum up a situation, which it would take too much time to enter into here in detail—"Although the villeins had failed to obtain their charters, and had paid a heavy penalty for their temerity in revolting, they had struck a vital blow at villenage. The landlords gave up the practice of demanding base services; they let their land to leasehold tenants, and accepted money payments in lieu of labour; they ceased to recall the emancipated labourers into serfdom, or to oppose his assertion of right in the courts of the manor and of the county. Rising out of villenage the new freemen enlarged the class of yeomanry, and strengthened the cause of the commons in the country and in Parliament, and from 1381 onwards rural society in England began to work into its later forms."

It may be given as a proof of the practical extinction of villenage, only seventy years later, that in the "Complaint" issued by the insurgents, under Jack Cade in 1451, no mention whatever is made of those claims for emancipation so forcibly urged in 1381.

Very possibly it may occur to some who listen to this paper that, in spite of its title, more attention is devoted in it to the Peasants' Revolt, than to the Black Death itself. If this be so, the excuse must be found in the sub-title, which provides for the "effects" of the pestilence being taken into consideration, and I hope it has been made clear that the Revolt was one, and a most important outcome of the Black Death. The whole subject is one on which historians do not altogether agree. Some are inclined to lay much stress on the effects of the plague on the social conditions of the country; others to minimise those effects. To quote Stubbs once more: "Such different conclusions can only be accounted for by supposing the writers who hold them to take opposite views, not only of the action of the plague itself, but of the periods that precede and follow it".

<sup>u</sup> "Const. Hist." p. 485.

<sup>v</sup> "Sht. Hist." p. 275.

<sup>w</sup> "Const. Hist." p. 479.

It is obviously impossible to state, on the one hand, how long the process might have taken of undisturbed natural evolution (already commenced) of England towards free institutions. On the other, it is probable, that, had not the Black Death occurred, the peasants would never have risen to assert their rights, and by so doing undoubtedly precipitated matters in the direction of freedom. It seems, therefore, neither right to consider all progress as dating from the commencement of the Black Death, nor to look upon that event as more than temporarily checking the progress already begun. From my own study of different writers, I am inclined to the opinion that the Black Death acted merely as a cog on the wheel of progress. Later on, as has been shown, the march of England towards freedom was accelerated.

In concluding this paper, I would like to say that, in its compilation, I cannot lay claim to having consulted original authorities, but the various historians from whom I have gained information generally quote the documents whence their statements of facts are derived. And for access to the works of those historians I am chiefly indebted to Mr. Page, without whose valuable counsel and assistance my task could never have been carried through, and to whom I therefore tender my most grateful thanks.

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