Popular Literature and Social Protest, 1485-1558.

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POPULAR LITERATURE AND SOCIAL PROTEST, 1485-1558

A Dissertation

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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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by

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ABSTRACT

The changes in the character of the English nation under the rule of the pre-Elizabethan Tudors were accompanied by an increased awareness of social and political problems on the part of the people of the realm. This new social consciousness was reflected in contemporary popular literature. Through a study of that literature, an attempt will be made to discover and understand the national reaction to the changing statescape and to evaluate the place of such literature under the early Tudors.

Tudor England before 1558 was troubled with four major social issues: the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries, the agrarian revolution and its accompanying evils — enclosure and dispossession of the tenantry, increased sheep farming, and increased rents and fines — debasement of the coinage and inflation, and the problem of the poor. These same social issues, or their consequences, remained to trouble the Elizabethans; but the voices of social protest were not so vociferous in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Popular literature from 1485 to 1558, both reflecting public opinion and attempting to mould it, attacked all four of these major social problems, usually taking the conservative position and resisting the fundamental changes which were taking place in the functions and patterns of society. Much of what was written merely condemned existing conditions; some writers suggested remedies for the existing evils; and all of them acted as forces in different degrees influencing and
reflecting the temper of the times.

The progress of popular protest literature during the period 1485-1558 was dependent upon the development and improvement of printing and the leniency of the reigning sovereign. It took some time before Tudor printers were able or ready to undertake the publication of ballads and tracts, but by the 1520's popular literature was growing in importance, and its influence was brought to bear on the major social problems. There was a spurt of popular literary activity at the outset of the English Reformation around 1530 which lasted through the dissolution proceedings. Possibly Henry relaxed censorship in order to allow anti-Catholic literature to win him supporters in the supremacy question. Much of that literature which was circulated in the pre-Edwardian 1540's was against Catholicism or the remains of Catholicism in the Henrician established church and was usually anonymous and cast in the form of supplications. The state of the poor and the agrarian revolution were receiving more and more attention during the 1540's. Protest writing reached a climax during Edward's reign, accelerated by inflation, rioting vagabonds, an increasing number of agrarian dispossessed, and an established church which had failed to fulfill the expectations of most active reformers. Medieval customs, price levels, and beliefs which had been slowly vanishing during the first fifty years of the century were now rapidly disappearing; and the social commentators, the spokesmen for the people, became frantic in their search for something of value to take the place of lost ideals, for something stable to hold on to, and for a solution to the glaring social evils of the day. The stability which they thought would be enjoyed when Mary ascended the throne soon proved
to be negative; and because of her severe censorship of the press, the Marian reign became the Dark Ages for sixteenth century popular literature, little remaining to mark the train of popular discontent. Most of the major social problems were settled to some degree during Elizabeth's reign, and crown restrictions on printing were relaxed. Social problems still existed, of course, and protest literature throughout the century continued in its role as popular spokesman for the English middle class.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

It would be a satisfying simplification if one could say that the first Henry Tudor jerked an errant England to its feet, caned discipline into it, and then, like a good father, sent it on its way with enough money in its pocket to prevent it from falling into its old unprincipled ways. A statement such as this, however, would fail to recognize that "errant" England, for the most part, was ready for some sort of discipline and was ready to accept Henry VII as its legal guardian. After almost half a century of family feud, and, at times, general anarchy, the majority of the people were willing to be ruled by a powerful monarch. That they made a wise choice, we can see in retrospect. Henry secured prestige, both financial and political, for England. He developed trade abroad, increased the size of the navy, and advanced the power of the parliament. He secured for England and the English people honor overseas and self respect at home. But most important of all, he gave the people of England a sense of security, a feeling that what would be built one day would not collapse the next because of shifting political sands.

This sense of security brought with it increased activity, political, religious, and social; and the course of this action tended to move farther and farther away from the values, attitudes -- and virtues -- of pre-Tudor England. Moved by a growing sense of nationalism, the people of the realm threw off the yoke of Roman Catholicism
and abolished religious institutions which had existed for centuries. The ages-old cooperative system of agriculture and custom tenure gave way to new methods of land holding and management and increased enclosure and sheep farming. Coinage values were arbitrarily lowered by the second Henry Tudor, and with this debasement came a sky-rocketing inflationary period which doubled and tripled prices which had not changed for over 150 years. And accompanying these changes — and, in some instances, caused by them — was an alarming increase in the number of beggars and vagabonds who frequented the realm.

All social changes are attended by problems caused by those who cannot adjust to change or who have been injured by it. It was thus in pre-Elizabethan Tudor England. The major social problems during the period from 1485 to 1558 were those arising from the changes just mentioned, and popular social critics centered their attention on religion and the Reformation, the agrarian problem, debasement and the dearth, and vagabondage and the poor.

These changes in the character of the English nation under the rule of the early Tudors were accompanied by an increased awareness of social and political problems on the part of the people of the realm. This new social consciousness was reflected in contemporary popular literature. Through a study of the popular literature of that period an attempt will be made to discover and understand the reactions of that great amorphous mass, the middle class, to the changing statescape and to evaluate the place of such literature under the early Tudors. Popular literature we shall define as the bulk of that writing which was not addressed to the courtly and the
intellectual, which was couched in such a language that it would be easily understood and appreciated by the average reader, which was not too long to be printed on broad-sheets or in quartos, and which was properly spiced with humor, invective, or rhyme in order to hold the interest of the general. The middle class will be categorized from the economic standpoint and will generally consist of that large indefinable multitude that is usually able to keep its skirts from dragging in the gutter of abject poverty but is seldom capable of betaking itself off the street and up the steps to gentility or riches.

As has been amply demonstrated by J. W. Adamson, the extent of literacy among middle class Englishmen in the period to be studied was widespread. A large percentage of men and women could read, and their reading tastes were catered to by the printers of that day. Adamson states that the term literacy does not imply that the Tudor middle-class broadside consumer could both read and write, for writing was an advanced science, but it does mean that he had enough education to make him capable of reading the popular literature of that day. To the privileged few the Latin Grammar Schools were opened, but those who desired only a reading knowledge of the vernacular had recourse to other means of instruction. The Church, of course, was the main avenue; and although it did not approach its potentiality,

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the zeal and abilities of the clergymen scattered throughout England were responsible for most of the literacy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The curates and parish priests taught the fundamentals of reading — and sometimes, writing — in their parishes. Endowed chantries conducted schools under the tutelage of the chantry priests. Part of the Christian ideal was the education of the young, and the Church labored diligently but sporadically toward that end. Educational facilities for the lower forms were established in the ABC and Petty schools. These were generally lay supervised and concerned themselves with the teaching of the vernacular. There were also many private teachers who would take a few students, male and female, to tutor. Since they taught in competition with the Church, they could never operate on a large scale, but this group made a recognizable contribution to early education. Schools and teachers existed throughout the nation, in the country as well as in the cities; and an appreciable proportion of the people were taught to read those writings which were simply phrased and written in the language of the "lewd." Although it would be rash to hazard a guess at the proportion of the population of England who could read, it is enlightening to consider the number of works, five thousand, \(^2\) which were printed between 1476 and 1558. Of course, much of this was not in the vernacular and cannot be considered popular literature; but a middle-class reading public was catered to with a wide variety and an extensive output of printings which appealed to their tastes and which attest the size, importance, and influence of the middle-class reader of popular lit-

Since the kind of popular literature with which we are most concerned is that which contains social criticism, it would be well to glance briefly at the most famous or prolific of the social protest writers who will figure prominently in this study. Much of what we have to work with is anonymous, some is fragmentary, and some is of minor significance. Some of that literature which will come to our attention will merely allude to some social problem and cannot be considered as social protest literature. But most of these tracts and ballads were written with the express purpose of influencing the public in favor of or against some major social change. It is with this type and with writers who specialized in social protest writing that we are most concerned.

In 1494 Johann Bergmann von Olpe, an archdeacon in Basel, printed and published Sebastian Brandt's *Narrenschiff*, a satire on the religious and social evils of late fifteenth century Germany. It was immediately popular and translations began appearing as early as 1497 in Latin, Low German, French, Dutch, Flemish, and English. Edition after edition was published at a time when printing was difficult and expensive and usually restricted to works of proven worth. Brandt was able to take the vague and impersonal allegory of the Middle Ages and chisel from

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4 The following biographical material was taken from the work cited after each author's name and the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).
it the sharp features of life and people of the fading fifteenth century. His characters were no longer abstractions of folly, virtue, or lust; they were the farmers, the courtiers, and the prostitutes of medieval Germany. He satirized the foibles of his era with no light hand. He was moral, sententious, fond of padding with classical allusion, and apt to become boring; but he was one of the strongest of the humanist leaders in the fight against the corruption of the Catholic Church, and his popularity quickly spread among the common people.\(^5\)

In 1509 Brandt's *Narrenschiff*, which had by then become popular throughout western Europe, was adapted into English by Alexander Barclay (1475?–1552) as *The Ship of Fools*.\(^6\) Barclay followed chiefly the Latin version by Jacob Locher (1497), but he also made use of the French version by Pierre Riviere (1497) and the German original. Pynson, the publisher, included the woodcuts which had accompanied Brandt's work and which had added so much to its popularity among European middle-class readers.

Barclay's work, as has been mentioned, is an adaptation rather than a translation. It makes no attempt to reproduce Brandt's wording and phrasing, and it is over twice as long as the original, which is partially due to Barclay's use of the seven-line stanza. The popular


spirit of the work is emphasized throughout, and Barclay states that he writes for the common man.

My speech is rude, my terms common and rural,
And I for rude people am much more convenient
Than for Estates, learned men, or eloquent. 7

He adds the English character to his ship's crew and passengers and by more attention to detail surpasses his original in the presentation of people rather than abstractions. His beggars and rustics pick and steal and dance and fight with convincing realism. Barclay was ever conscious of the moral, as was Brandt; and his characters, written with an eye to interesting detail, were also minute moral treatises and warnings.

One reason for The Ship of Fools' importance, especially to this study, is that here we have a good example of popular literature, written about subjects which have popular appeal, written in a style that entertains as it instructs, and written in the language of the common people. Also, Barclay wrote an English prose that was more regular in form and spelling and much easier to read than most of that in the half century which followed. He addressed the common people in their own language, and everywhere he takes the popular side against the oppressors. He castigates the middle and lower classes for their fighting among themselves, for the slanders they spread about their neighbors, and for trying to advance up the social ladder over the backs of their peers; but he is quick to show the sufferings of this class of people as engendered by greedy churchmen demanding their tithes, local justices handing down decisions in favor

7Ibid., I, 2.
of the one who presents him the largest pourboire, and foolish physicians who practice without learning and charge without conscience. Perhaps Barclay was medieval in his moralizing and allegorizing, but the popular spirit of The Ship of Fools, his skillful delineation of character and insight into human nature, and the regularity of his vocabulary and sentence structure show that here we have signs of the beginnings of modern English language and literature.

Most of our information concerning Simon Fish (d. 1531) is furnished by John Foxe's Acts and Monuments, which fixes the first date in Fish's life at about 1525. Around that year Fish, a gentleman of Gray's Inn, was forced to leave England for acting in an interlude satirizing Wolsey and the Church. In Europe he fell under the influence of William Tyndale, Jerome Barlowe, William Roy, and other Reformation exiles and became strongly imbued with the dissenting spirit. Sometime during his exile, around 1528, he wrote "A Supplication for the Beggars." Copies of the work were spread about England soon after, and we may assume that they were quite popular. How they reached the king we shall never know; Foxe gives two stories concerning the incident. In the first story a copy of the work is sent to Anne Boleyn, who is directed by her brother to show it to the king. This she does and Henry is highly entertained by the tract, so much so that he sends for Mrs. Fish and instructs her to call her hus-

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band home from abroad. When Simon returns, the king embraces him "with loving countenance," they go hunting together, and Henry gives Fish the king's signet as protection against the Protestant-hunting Sir Thomas More, then Chancellor. In the other version, Edmund Moddys, the king's footman, tells Henry of two merchants who have a book that is "a marvel to hear of." The king has the men sent for, reads the work, and commands the men not to tell anyone that their ruler has seen the book, stating "If a man should pull down an old stone wall and begins at the lower part, the upper part thereof might chance to fall upon his head." However accurate the stories may be, they do illustrate the effect of the work during the early stages of the Reformation.

During the fall of 1529, London was flooded with copies of the "Supplication," suggesting that the king himself might have had them spread about to gain sympathy for his cause by attacking the Church's prestige. The vigorous style of the tract and its espousal of an idea becoming widespread made it extremely popular, and it soon achieved the notoriety of being banned. In the work, Fish adopts the persona of one of the king's poor beadsmen and complains that after the clergy gets through with their exactions, there are no alms left for the deserving poor. Statistics, grossly exaggerated, are cited throughout the work, showing how much money the king is being deprived of by the clerics, how many honest women are being violated by the lewd clergymen, and how much property — one half of the realm — the Church controls. Its importance was sufficient to evoke an answer from the official Church apologist, Sir Thomas More, who replied to the "begging proctor's" tract with "The Supplication of Poor Souls in Purgatory." Another mark of
its importance and popularity is illustrated by the several imitations which were written in the following two decades.

Closely connected to Simon Fish in time and style of writing are William Roy (fl. 1528) and Jerome Barlowe (fl. 1528), the co-authors of the 1528 poetical satire on Wolsey and English Catholicism, *Rede Me and Be Not Wroth*. Both Roy and Barlowe were Protestant exiles who eventually found their way to one of the centers of the European reform movement, Strasburg. Roy had been closely associated with Tyndale and had contributed much toward Tyndale's 1525 translation of the Bible, but there seems to have been some disagreement between the two men, and Roy moved on to Strasburg. Of Barlowe we know much less, only that he had been with Roy as a Franciscan novice at Greenwich convent, had later been forced into exile, and had eventually migrated to Strasburg. The dialogue which the two collaborated on was written in 1528 and sent to England in the same year, at which time the work was banned. For a long time the poem was referred to as *The Burying of the Mass in Rhyme*, because it was a direct result of the abolition of that ceremony in parts of Germany by the Bernese Conference on January 28, 1528. The mass is dead, and Watkyn, who is full of the new gospel faith, and Jeffrey, who still relies on the craft of the Catholic clergy, wonder where to bury it. They finally decide on Canterbury at St. Thomas à Becket's tomb, but in their discussion they canvass all the evils of the English Catholic Church.

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One of the most realistic pictures of the seamy side of sixteenth century life is to be found in Robert Copland's (fl. 1508-1547) "The Highway to the Spital-house," written in 1535. This work, whose main purpose is to show the many roads to ruin through a concluding catalogue of fools, begins with an exceptionally realistic description of the class of folk who resort to the English spital houses at the end of every day. In a dialogue between Copland and the porter of the house, beggary and vagabondage are discussed generally, and various types of true and feigned beggars are described. The dialogue is realistic; the setting is quite commonplace and believable—Copland takes refuge from a shower on the porch; and the description and characterization, especially before the cataloguing of fools, are lifelike and vivid. Copland himself was not a writer on any large scale. He did write another popular work, "Qyl of Brentford's Testament," but he was a printer by profession, having served his apprenticeship under William Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde, and a book seller and stationer. Copland's publications, most of which were in the popular vein, place him among the other printers of that era whose main purpose was to reach the middle-class reading public with entertaining and salable works.

The historical importance of Thomas Starkey (1499?—1538) depends


almost entirely on his actions during the years 1535 and 1536. In 1535 Henry VIII commissioned Starkey, at that time one of the king's chaplains, to get Reginald Cardinal Pole's opinion concerning the divorce and papal authority. Starkey, who had been in Cardinal Pole's household in Venice and Padua and had served as chaplain to Pole's mother, began the correspondence with the hope of reconciling the king to the exiled Pole; but the latter's dogmatic Catholic stand in "Pro Ecclesiasticae Unitatis Defensione" (1536), his answer to Henry, erected a final barrier between the king and the cardinal. After this the scholarly Starkey retired from public life, accepting a church living which had been bestowed on him in December, 1536. Toward the end of these negotiations, when Starkey found himself with some leisure moments, he wrote his major work of social criticism, "A Dialogue Between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset, Lecturer in Rhetoric at Oxford." Both of the men concerned in the dialogue were old friends and associates of Starkey's in the years preceding the beginnings of the English Reformation, and the subjects which they discussed in the dialogue were those which Starkey says they discussed together at Oxford about 1529. In its manner of presentation the book probably had little popular appeal. It is long, involved, verbose, and in many places quite dull. But the subjects which the two gentlemen discussed were certainly subjects of a highly significant nature. For its general inclusiveness — the agrarian reform, the state of the poor, the mechanics of statecraft, and inflation, to mention a few — it may be compared to More's Utopia, and for that reason it must be considered among the chief works of social criticism during the early Tudor period.
Two extremely important critics of and commentators on the agrarian scene are Thomas Tusser (1524?-1580)\textsuperscript{12} and Sir Anthony Fitzherbert (1470-1538),\textsuperscript{13} both of whom are outstanding among the early Tudor social critics for their enthusiastic yet practical acceptance of enclosure. Of the two, perhaps Tusser is less qualified to speak on agricultural matters since his experience with farming was limited and seemingly abortive. His principal work before 1558, \textit{A Hundredth Good Pointes of Husbandrie}, printed by Richard Tottel in 1557, was extremely popular, however; and before the end of the sixteenth century, thirteen editions of his work were published. In its final form as \textit{Five Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie} it was published in 1573. Tusser's book is one of the earliest of that type known as farmers' almanacs. In it are maxims of the Benjamin Franklin sort and a large quantity of advice in verse, showing the farmer how he might increase his yield and income. Tusser, who was by vocation a singer, prospered little at farming; but the popularity of his work during the sixteenth century establishes him as a prominent figure in the popular literary world and points to the fact that in spite of the crudeness of his rhymes he was a writer of some influence on the social scene.

Sir Anthony Fitzherbert was of a different sort from Tusser. He was wealthy, he was an outstanding barrister during the reign of Henry

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VIII, he was well known as a diplomat, and he was a writer of some renown, having published several definitive works in English law. His publishing of *The Book of Husbandry* and *The Book of Surveying*, both in 1523, was therefore an adventure into new fields for Fitzherbert. These works, however, do not show the touch of a common farmer; they are the writings of a country gentleman, one who is financially able to experiment with such things as the breeding of horses and new methods of timber management. *The Book of Husbandry* is, like Tusser's work, filled with practical advice to the farmer. Unlike Tusser, Fitzherbert wrote his work in prose; and the extremely smooth and lucid style and its clarity and directness reflect the preciseness of the legal mind. *The Book of Surveying* discusses the legal relation of the landlord to his tenants and the various measures by which the landholder may increase the value of his land. Both works reveal the writer's concern with the religious duties and moral obligations of the tenant and landlord, and although Fitzherbert is one of the few who openly preached the value of enclosing, he was quick to denounce the landlord who fleeced or evicted his tenants.

There were eleven editions of *The Book of Husbandry* published in the sixteenth century and almost as many editions of *The Book of Surveying*, which again illustrates the popularity of works on agriculture despite their promulgation of an unpopular practice, enclosure. It certainly evidences the interest of quite a number of sixteenth century readers in advanced agricultural methods.

Of Henry Brinklow very little is known except that he was at one
time a Gray Friar and that he died in 1546. Two of his works, *Complaynt of Roderyck Mors* (1542) and *The Lamentacyon of a Christian Agaynst the Cytie of London* (1545), remain, however, to give us an insight into his personality. Of all the social critics, Brinklow was the most vitriolic and bitter. His writings reflect the disappointment of a man who watched the Reformation begin, only to realize that the results were nothing compared to what he had hoped for. Instead of seeing a Christian commonwealth growing out of the suppression of the religious houses, Brinklow saw that the wealth of the monasteries was grossly misspent, that the lands were apportioned to the rich and the king's favorites, and that the poor were much worse off than they had been before their source of charity, the religious houses, had been abolished. Brinklow's railing is the cry of an idealist who realizes that his country is moving away from the ideal rather than approaching it. His language is strong and violent. He works himself into a frenzy meditating on the low state of the church and the morals of the English people, and this frenzy is found in his work, which is sometimes drastically impractical but is always powerful in emotion and enthusiasm. His works were frequently reprinted, and the wide scope of social evils which he commented on was undoubtedly a decided influence on popular thinking.

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Like Brinklow, Robert Crowley (1518?-1588) was comprehensive in his castigation of the social evils of his day. No aspect of life escaped his scrutiny and he judged it with a certain pessimism that did not preclude sympathy with those oppressed. His influence as a popular writer was widespread and was supplemented by his popularity as a preacher and his publications as a printer. He wrote voluminously as a Protestant protagonist and continued writing and fighting for that cause as a clergyman until the end of his life. The works with which we are most concerned were all written during the Edwardian era. They are his "Epigrams," "The Voice of the Last Trumpet," "Pleasure and Pain," "The Way to Wealth," and "An Information and Petition Against the Oppressors of the Poor Commons of This Realm." In addition to these works of social criticism, Crowley printed The Vision of Piers Plowman in 1550, whose exhortations were just as timely and applicable in the mid-sixteenth century as they had been in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Again comparing Crowley to his predecessor, Henry Brinklow, we see that here is another social critic and reformer whose ideals had not been satisfied by the mechanics of the Reformation. Because of the misuse of Church lands and funds the poor commons were sinking deeper in poverty and despair, and Crowley pointed to this misuse as the root of many social and moral evils. Unlike Brinklow, however, Crowley preached a stoical acceptance of these wrongs. He was a reformer and in church matters he would have desecrated the altars

and accoutrements of Catholicism with the most rabid of Protestant enthusiasts, but to those who were oppressed — the agrarian dispossessed, the beggars, those who were forced to pay high rents — Crowley preached that acceptance here means reward hereafter.

One of the most interesting of all sixteenth century popular writers is Andrew Boorde (1490?-1549), a physician, scholar, and traveler. He became a Carthusian monk early in his life but received a dispensation from his order in 1528, at which time he went abroad to study medicine. He traveled widely thereafter, both in search of medical knowledge and in the service of Thomas Cromwell, and returned to England around 1542 where he remained for the rest of his life. Our final account of him is in keeping with the rest of his worldly and adventurous life. He was sent to the Fleet for keeping three loose women in his chamber at Winchester and there he died in 1549.

Boorde had quite a reputation as a wit and a jester, and several series of jest books — "The Miller of Abington," "Scogin's Jests," and "The Merry Tales of the Mad Men of Gotham" — have been assigned, with little verification, to his authorship. The more important works, which were perhaps written earlier but were published during the last period of his life in England, were the Introduction of Knowledge, the first popular geographical handbook; The Dietary of Health, a popular manual of diseases and their treatment; The Breviary of Health, a companion piece to The Dietary; and the Book of Beards, a treatise condemning

beards generally and specifically. As can be seen at a glance, social criticism was not Boorde's specialty. He quite humorously and picturesquely satirized the customs and fashions of English life, but he dealt only indirectly with the major social movements of the period.

A popular writer and priest whose life touched four reigns and who seemingly was able to flourish in spite of the changing political and religious scene was William Forrest (fl. 1550). He is believed to have begun his court service as a retainer to Cardinal Wolsey, but after the Cardinal's death Forrest was one of his bitterest critics. He dedicated the work with which we are concerned, "A Pleasant Poesye of Princelie Practice," to Somerset in 1548, and during Mary's reign he addressed several panegyrics to that queen and was one of her chaplains. He maintained his Catholic sympathy after Mary's death, but was protected by the patronage of the equally Catholic Duke of Norfolk. "A Pleasant Poesye" is addressed to King Edward and opens with advice to the king as to how he should conduct himself at the table and in the field and how he should choose a mate. The social criticism comes later in the work and is concerned with compulsory education, the wool trade, enclosure, and the poor, among other things. The poetry itself leaves much to be desired, but Forrest, as we shall see, is somewhat ahead of his time in some of his social criticism.

Of the many politically influential Protestant preachers during

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the Edwardian Age, three were outstanding as social critics. These were Hugh Latimer, Thomas Lever, and Thomas Becon. Of the three, perhaps Latimer (1485-1555) was the most famous and the most complete in his analysis of the political and moral decay of mid-century England. His sermons, especially those seven preached before Edward in 1549, were eloquent in denouncing most of the evils of his day. Enclosure, rack-renting, the worldly clergy, debasement and inflation, the state of the poor: all of these and more were subjects of Latimer's sermons before the king, and one wonders how he escaped the axe with some of his scathing denunciations of Edwardian politics and the extreme brand of Edwardian Protestantism. Latimer's principal fame rests in his role as a reformer. As early as the 1520's he was busy denouncing the evils of Catholicism, and throughout his life, with the exception of Edward's reign, he remained embroiled in religious controversy. But he was more than that. He was a man to whom the values of his forefathers appeared as the true, unchangeable values, a fact which made him violently opposed to many of the changes the Renaissance brought with it. Materialism, utilitarianism, and capitalism were all opposed by Latimer, who easily recognized that the brave new world was not so brave as it was selfish and that it was becoming more and more amoral. This theme of the decay of an age forms the basis for most of his sermons, and that his cry reached the people is illustrated by the fact that three editions of his sermons were pub-

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lished during Edward's reign.

Thomas Lever (1521-1577) was more than a generation behind Latimer in age, but followed that divine in his bluntness and boldness in denouncing, in sermons preached before Edward VI, the courtiers, the unpreaching preachers, and the general immorality of the English people. He was extremely interested in contemporary problems and current events and devoted the major portion of his sermons to such matters rather than to subjects purely doctrinal. He was, on the other hand, a forerunner of the Elizabethan puritan; and when the question of doctrine arose, Lever was in the vanguard of those who advocated root-and-branch reform.

Thomas Becon (1512-1567) was all his life an ardent admirer of Hugh Latimer, who can be considered Becon's chief moulder into the Protestant frame. Like all clerics with reforming zeal, his life during the 'thirties and 'forties was extremely hazardous; but like the rest, he came into his own during Edward's time, when he was Cranmer's chaplain, a preacher at Canterbury cathedral, and chaplain to Somerset. Becon was as much a writer as he was a preacher, and the long list of his publications is comprised of things ranging from the ethereal "News from Heaven" to the quite matter-of-fact "Homily Against Whoredom." Becon was not as incisive a thinker and critic as either Latimer or Lever. He was more concerned with public manners and morals...
than with the graver issues of the Common Weal. But he was not averse
to discussing such questions as enclosure or the vagabond problem; and
when he warmed to the subject, he could be quite effective. Becon's
position as a social critic rests with his pamphlets, which were numer­
ous, fetchingly titled, and probably easily sold.

The most important work of social criticism in mid-sixteenth cen­
tury England was probably not even known during the period which is
discussed. This work was John Hales's *A Discourse of the Common Weal
of This Realm of England.* The book is long, compared to most popular
works, and written in the form of a dialogue among several men — a doctor,
a knight, a husbandman, a merchant, and a capper — who, expressing
attitudes typical of their walks of life, discuss the state of the
Commonwealth during the reign of Edward. The editor of the work,
Elizabeth Lamond, assigns its authorship to Hales, its setting to
Coventry, the date of the conversation to 1549, and the two principal
characters, the knight and the doctor, to John Hales and perhaps Hugh
Latimer. The *Discourse of the Common Weal* was first published in 1581
by W. S. (William Stafford?), who also claimed authorship, but Miss
Lamond shows that the work was written much earlier about events which
took place and conditions which flourished during the Edwardian era.
Hales was a well-to-do landholder who had profited by the dissolution
of the monasteries and chantries. Unlike many of the landlords of his
day, however, Hales had a strong feeling of the responsibility inherent

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21 John Hales, *A Discourse of the Common Weal of This Realm of
England*, Elizabeth Lamond, ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1893),
pp. ix-lxxii.
in land ownership and was strongly opposed to indiscriminate enclosure and rent raising. He was vitally interested in the problems of those oppressed by the agrarian revolution, and as a member of Parliament in 1548 he introduced three bills — for rebuilding decayed houses, for maintaining tillage, and against forestalling — all of which failed to pass. In that same year Hales and five others were appointed to a commission to investigate the enclosure problem in the Midlands. It was during this investigation that the dialogue took place, and the discussion moved from enclosure to the many other problems existing in England at that time. Hales, with his experience and knowledge of contemporary problems, was able to present a comprehensive picture of the evils of his time and to show the various attitudes, and the errors in these attitudes, held by many mid-century Englishmen. Because it was not circulated, so far as we know, during the Edwardian era, it had no effect on contemporary thought and opinions; but as a picture of the conditions then existing, it is unsurpassed in social protest.

The most interesting pieces of contemporary journalism in the period 1485-1558 were the black-letter broadside ballads. Actually this type of popular literature did not exist before the introduction of the press, but its family can be traced back several hundred years to the medieval popular folk ballad. Strictly defined, the black-letter ballad was a rhymed composition, printed on one side of a single sheet,

usually folio size, and intended to be sung in the streets. It was printed on coarse paper in black-letter type and was sometimes embellished with woodcuts. The broadsides were, like modern newspapers, concerned with any bit of news or wisdom that might sell, and the range of their topics extended from the ludicrous to the sublime. This all-inclusive nature, though, is most evident during the Elizabethan Age and later. During the years of the early Tudors, popular balladeers were most concerned with religion and politics, and few ballads exist prior to 1558 which treat of the "monstrous pigge" and similar newsworthy subjects so dear to the Elizabethan ballad monger.

The early popularity of the broadside ballad is attested to by the laws passed for its control, as well as for the control of other popular works. During Henry VIII's reign ballads had been circulated which severely criticized Wolsey, Cromwell, and even the king himself. Politicians with axes to grind turned to the ballad for the dissemination of their ideas. Religious leaders, Protestant and Catholic, vented their spleens and preached their doctrines in ballad form. The ballad was not just the handiwork of the lowly hack writer; it was one of the principal media for social and religious protest writers, and as such it sometimes stepped on the toes of the chiefs of state. Therefore, in 1543 the Act for the Advancement of True Religion and for the Abolishment of the Contrary specifically named "printed ballads, rhymes and songs" as instruments used by persons who desired to subvert the true doctrine of the Scriptures and the peace of the realm. 23 Those who violated the law

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were subject to a £10 fine and three months in jail for the first offense and confiscation of property and life imprisonment for the second. Within a month thirty-three printers had been haled into court for an investigation of their publications, which points to the conclusion that at this time ballads and other popular works were widespread and the subject of much concern to the king. When Edward came to the throne, the 1543 act was repealed; nevertheless, the Privy Council closely watched the printing of ballads and the authors of seditious ballads and tracts were punished. A month after Mary became queen she issued a proclamation against "books, ballads, rhymes, and interludes" which were printed without a special license; and within a year the Act against Seditious Words and Rumors was passed to control the circulation of "divers heinous, seditious, and slanderous writings, rhymes, ballads, letters, papers, and books." The punishment for disobeying the law was severe, the loss of ears, £100, or loss of a right hand being the penalty for disobedience. These laws were evidently well enforced, for the period of Mary's reign is singularly lacking in social protest writing. Ballads of Protestant sympathies did circulate surreptitiously, it is true, but very little popular literature remains to the modern reader who would like to study the middle-class attitudes toward the other social problems of that period.

The progress of popular protest literature was dependent upon the development and improvement of printing and the leniency of the reigning sovereign. It took some time before printing was common enough to undertake the publication of ballads and tracts, but by the 1520's popular literature was growing in importance, and its influence was brought
to bear on the major social problems. There was a spurt of popular literary activity at the outset of the English Reformation around 1530 which lasted through the dissolution proceedings. Possibly Henry relaxed censorship in order to allow anti-Catholic literature to win him supporters in the supremacy question. Much of that literature which was circulated in the pre-Edwardian 'forties was against Catholicism or the remains of Catholicism in the Henrician established church and was usually anonymous and cast in the form of supplications. The state of the poor and the agrarian revolution were receiving more and more attention during the 'forties. Protest writing reached a climax during Edward's reign, accelerated by inflation, rioting vagabonds, an increasing number of agrarian dispossessed, and an established church which failed to fulfill the expectations of most active reformers. Medieval customs, price levels, and beliefs which had been slowly vanishing during the first fifty years of the century, were now rapidly disappearing; and the social commentators, the spokesmen for the people, became frantic and panicky in their search for something of value to take the place of lost ideals, to find something stable to hold on to, and to find a solution to the glaring social evils of the day. The stability which they thought would be enjoyed when Mary ascended the throne soon proved to be negative; and because of her severe censorship of the press, the Marian reign became the Dark Ages for sixteenth century popular literature, little remaining to mark the train of popular discontent. Most of the problems to be discussed in the following chapters were settled to some degree during Elizabeth's reign, and crown restric-
tions on printing were relaxed. The social problems still existed, however, and protest literature continued in its role as popular spokesman for the English middle class.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} For general discussion of protest literature and social problems in the reign of Elizabeth, see various chapters in the following:

CHAPTER II
Religion and the Reformation

In 1485, when the great battle near Market Bosworth had ended and a new King Henry ruled, England was a country theologically bound to the Roman Catholic Church. It is true that there were frequent protestations against the Pope, his church, and his clerics; but nevertheless, the Church of Rome was the Church of England, officially sanctioned by king, lord, and commons and receiving the lip service of the majority of the people. To all outward appearances England was a land of a single faith and would remain so in spite of the whiff of Lollardy ever hovering over the statescape.

To the medieval Enganderer the functions and services of the Church were numerous and varied. For the state it furnished secretaries, ambassadors, ministers, and civil servants of every degree and kind. It afforded the realm financial support in times of emergency and served in the capacity of a savings bank for those fortunate enough to accumulate

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1 For further information concerning the Church in medieval England, see:

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plate and specie. And it acted as a sedative in controlling the excitable and sometimes rebellious populace. For the people the Church provided care for the sick, education for the illiterate, and charity for the poor. The church building was the social and trade center of the community. At the religious services and holy days and at the church fairs and ales, the common man congregated and met his friends to drink, swap horses, and catch up on the latest news. And for the thousands whose lives were empty of everything except hard times and a cold hearth, the Catholic Church provided a philosophical shield against the slings and arrows of a hostile world.

Those who attended to the duties and functions of the church formed a large and important class in medieval society. Bindoff estimates that there was approximately one cleric for every hundred of the adult population. Clerics were placed in the religious stratum in accordance with their function, status, and outlook. There were four classes in the lower level of clerical society. The parochial clergy included the parsons and priests who administered to the physical and spiritual needs of their parishioners. The chantry priests were attached to commemorative altars, and their primary duty was to pray for the souls of the departed. They did more than this, however, frequently conducting schools and maintaining accommodations for the poor and sick. The friars were unattached to a particular

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religious house. They supported themselves in their nomadic existence by begging and from what money they could wheedle from people by preaching and selling their spiritual wares. The monks and nuns were wholly or partially withdrawn from the outside world and spent their lives in prayer and meditation. The people on this level were usually drawn from the ranks of the peasant stock, and their attitudes and intellect generally reflected their nearness to the soil. The upper clergy came from a different environment; they were from the families of the English yeomen, the landed gentry, merchants and professional men, and the nobility. When it was no uncommon thing for a man to hold several church offices, a pluralist was able to fill his pockets with the incomes from deaneries, canonries, and prebends and as a matter of acknowledged fact the Church furnished a lucrative profession for many whose only purpose was self aggrandizement.

The Church was an ancient and accepted part of English life in 1165, but nationalistic, moral, and doctrinal reactions against Roman Catholicism, some of which had set in as early as the eleventh century, were to effect a drastic change within the next sixty-five years. The Normans precipitated the nationalistic reaction by introducing a foreign upper clergy. Bishops and abbots were imported from France, and the ties with Rome were strengthened. Then, during the Babylonian Captivity (1305-1376) and the fourteenth century wars with France, the Church acquired still more of an alien taint. During this period England made its first steps toward an Anglican church. In 1305 Edward I first renounced papal authority by forcing the Church to pay taxes. This contro-
verted a papal bull stating that no taxes could be required of the clergy without permission of the papacy. Statutes of Provisors, which permitted the king to appoint his choices to church offices, were passed in 1351, 1364, and 1390. And the Statute of Praemunire, passed in 1353, prohibited ecclesiastical appeals to Rome and the use of papal authority which might infringe on the power of the crown. This statute was England's best weapon for keeping the Roman Church at proper distance.

During the fourteenth century, when England was taking its first positive steps against foreign intervention in church and civil affairs, public opinion became more vociferous in attacking Church evils. The governmental restrictions were aimed against the Church's meddling in state affairs; public opinion directed its attack against clerical morals and doctrine and, to a lesser extent, against Catholicism and matters of state. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* contains the broadest satire against the morals of the Church and its churchmen to be found in England. As a veritable cross-section of medieval life, his characters probably depict the various clerical types as they were generally thought of during the Chaucerian Age. Thus, we are introduced to the worldly monk, who is fat from feasting and who loves horses and the hunt more than the confines of his cloister. Also presented is a summoner whose visage was so repulsive that he frightened children. Morally he was corrupted by his own lechery and his love of strong drink, and it was said that he would exchange his concubine for a quart of wine. His friend the pardoner was of like disposition. The pardoner had come straight from Rome and had with him a sack full of spiritual wares which included a wallet crammed full of pardons, and various holy relics which
had been compounded out of such items as pillow cases and pigs' bones. Neither is Huberd the friar depicted as a holy man, for he is worldly, a lover of women and good times, with a special talent for extracting contributions. Chaucer is not one-sided, however, in his descriptions of the church people of his day. He introduces us to a poor parson who is a man of strong religious convictions, learned, diligent in his attention to the spiritual life of his flock, and completely unworldly. From reading Chaucer one may gather that criticism of the clergy was widespread in his day and that the general target of public criticism was the cleric's worldliness and his inattention to his religious duties.

Much more bitter are William Langland's attacks on the Church in The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman, also written in the last half of the fourteenth century. Langland is more concerned than Chaucer with the political unrest of his day, ascribing much of the trouble to greed, and much of the greed to the Church and churchmen. The Church is poisoned by its lands and riches, he states. Since such worldly possessions be poison, he continues, and make the Church imperfect, it would be a charity to purge it of its poison "ere more peril fall." (C-Test, Passus XVIII, 11.220-232). Proceeding from a criticism of the whole to a criticism of the individual, or a class of individuals, he attacks the greediness of the friars. Confess yourself to some friar, are his words of council, for while Fortune is your friend friars will always love you (B-Test, Passus XI, 11.53-54). Langland's picture of

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the friars and the remainder of the clergy, ever seeking charity but seldom dispensing it, is typical of the attitudes toward the clerics of that day.

The anonymous Peres the Ploughmans Crede, written in the 1390's, followed the same alliterative style as its predecessor in denouncing the fourteenth century churchman. The author appeals to the four orders — the Minorites, the Carmelites, the Dominicans, and the Augustinians — for instruction in learning the Creed; but they are so concerned with condemning each other's orders that they never get around to explaining it to him. He finally encounters the rustic, Peres, who castigates the mendicants and explains the Creed to him. 4

John Wycliff's writing and preaching in the latter half of the fourteenth century constituted the most important popular force against the Catholic Church in England before the Reformation. He attacked the Church for three reasons, deploiring its decay because of its immorality and worldliness, because of its fallacious doctrine, and because of its infringement on rights of state. 5 He attacked the greediness of the clergy and their indisposition to the spiritual care of their flock, stating that they would imperil their bodies and souls to obtain a fat benefice but would not go a mile to preach the gospel.

He attacked the doctrine of transubstantiation and other Catholic tenets


based on miracles that could not be seen or tested, as having no
profit nor "ground in God." Wycliff's doctrine as found in the tract
"Of Dominion" denounced the temporal power of the Pope and stated that
all rulers hold their power directly from God. The Lollard movement,
which sprang from Wycliff's teachings, fostered what its members be­
lieved to be true Christianity, a Christianity divorced from the inter­
pretations and outside control of Rome and based on individual
interpretation of the Bible. The Lollards were persecuted for the
next century and a half, but their teachings spread and their ideas of
religious freedom continued into the sixteenth century, where they
merged into Protestantism.

Thus, at the beginning of the Tudor Age we see that the feeling
of a need for reform was strong. The government had already taken
steps to keep the Church from infringing on England's sovereign rights,
and a patriotic reaction against the foreign elements in Roman Cathol­
icism. had long ago set in. Public opinion was strong in its denuncia­
tion of the manners and morals of the churchmen and the worldliness of
the Church. And Lollardy had begun a movement against doctrine which
struck at the very foundation of Roman Catholicism. Add to this
England's gradual emancipation from illiteracy and superstition, a
movement prompted by the growth of education and the rise of printing.
The people had begun to think for themselves, to develop a spirit of
individualism which refused to be dominated by a vague, far-distant
foreign power. The growing spirit of humanism, which was to be further
advanced by the writings of More, Colet, and Erasmus, brought about
increased criticism of the worldliness and secular nature of the Church and a desire to reform it -- from within, however -- and make it less temporal and more spiritual. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the soil was prepared for the coming Reformation. There was a general dissatisfaction with the Church and the clergy. It no longer attempted to serve its original purpose of ameliorating poverty, dispensing charity, and affording spiritual guidance. In a world of increasing interest in the things of the world, the philosophy of the Church was sadly out of date, and the abandonment of this philosophy by the churchmen was accompanied by a similar abandonment of the Church by the people. The ideal of the Church was a life spent in preparation for the life to come; the attitude of the Renaissance man was that this world and this life were to be enjoyed to the full without the trammels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

It is not hard to understand, therefore, why the Church and the clergy were held in such disrespect in pre-Reformation England. Alexander Barclay's The Ship of Fools (1507) contains one chapter describing what we may assume to be a typical church service. Some of the parishioners come to church to show their clothes, and they spend their time getting up and down, coming and going several times so that the rest may see their apparel. Others bring hawks and hounds to church with them and preen their birds during the services. In A C. Mery Talys, published around 1525, there are three stories involving incidents in which a member of the congregation rises and

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confounds the priest with an impertinent or humorous answer. "The curate hearing this, was abashed, and all the audience made great laughter" is a typical ending of such a joke and is indicative of the lack of respect paid to the lower clergy in that period.

It is not difficult to find ample reasons for this loss of prestige by the clergymen; in fact, the popular literature of the early sixteenth century is scarce that does not allude to the evils of the Church. "God Spede the Plough," a ballad written about 1500, is a picturesque indictment of the clergy's constant fleecing of the people. The author meets a ploughman in the field, who proceeds to enumerate all those who wait until his harvest is done and then descend on him for tithes and doles.

Then come the grey Friars and make their moan,
And call for money our souls to save;
Then come the white Friars and begin to groan,
Wheat or barley they will fain have;
Then come the friars Augustines and begin to crave
Corn or cheese, for they have not enough;
Then come the black friars which would fain have—
'I pray to God, speed well the plough.'

Besides these come the poor observants to be paid for preaching, threatening summoners, priests, and clerks of Saint John's Friary. When these beggars leave there is little left for the poor farmer. 8

From the ballad "Now a Dayes," written in the early 1520's, we hear


of another manner in which the Church oppresses the poor financially. The author tells us that the Church is not content with the lands it has but is an encloser and must be ever buying and selling "unto the lands great shame." Thus, in that great agrarian movement which was to change the centuries-old system of feudal tenure, the Church was seen as an early participant and could be held accountable for some of the rack-renting, speculating, and enclosing which became rife near the mid-century.

The worldliness of the clergy was a popular target of popular writers. Theoretically the clergy were a breed apart, separated from the world by irrevocable vows made at their consecration. Supposedly they were to devote their lives to prayer and service to others, surrendering the profits and pleasures as well as the cares of the world. But this was not so. In fact, it was so far from so that the following lines can be considered typical of literary descriptions of the lower clergy in the early sixteenth century. This is a picture of Sir John, a lecherous priest, who gets his just deserts in the ballad, "The Tale of the Basyn."

Him good and courteous I find ever mo;
He harps and guitars and sings well thereto.
He wrestles and leaps, and casts the stone too.

In short, he is a jolly fellow like some of Chaucer's churchmen who loves good drink, jovial companionship, and buxom wenches better than

the outmoded tenets of his priesthood. A typical literary friar in *A C. Mery Tale* mounts to the pulpit to deliver a homily before High Mass and sorely rebukes the congregation for breaking their fasts before mass. During a gesture at the end of this rebuke a pudding which he had stolen from a nearby hostelry fell from his robe, "...and when the people saw that, and especially they that broke their fast there the same morning, and knew well that the wife had complained how she had one of her puddings stolen, they laughed so much at the friar, that he incontinent went down out of the pulpit for shame." Of course, clerics were not all like this, but this was their reputation in the popular literary world. But, it would have been difficult for the lower clergy to have been anything but worldly. Consider the example set by their superiors. Cardinal Wolsey amassed an immense fortune and was the epitome of ostentation. "A little man, great possession, much sin and small devotion, low born and high promotion:" this was Wolsey, the same whom John Skelton in "Speke, Parrot" described as characterized by "Pomp, pride, honor, riches, and worldly lust." It was difficult enough for the lower clergy to follow the paths of unworldliness; it was practically impossible when they were conscious of their superiors' example.

Wolsey came under indictment quite frequently by the popular poets


11 *Shakespeare Jest Books*, I, 97-98.

12 "Now a Dayes," *Ballads from Manuscripts*, I, i, 99.
of the early sixteenth century. "An Impeachment of Wolsey," written in 1528, violently rebukes the great churchman for his greed and pride and for the ways of error in which he has led the country. He is condemned for the burning of so-called heretical books and for sending so much English money to the papacy in Rome. Inevitable fate, Atropos, is running apace to arrest him for his wrongs, and he can save himself only by abject repentance.

And do like the peacock, for thine avail:
Look on thy feet, and down with thy tail,
And off with thy golden shoes;
And lay down thy pillars, pole-axes, and crosses,
By the which this land hath great losses,
And peel the people no more.

Written approximately seven years earlier, c. 1521, the ballad, "Of the Cardnall Wolse," also attacks Wolsey's greed and pride; but this time it is the Cardinal's excessive power, especially over the nobility, which receives the brunt of the attack. It is unbearable to the author, possibly a noble, that "a churl, a butcher's cur," should hold such heavy sway over the people. The author appeals to the king for redress because no one else dares speak the truth for fear of losing his head.

The greed and pride of the clergy were attacked in the early part of the century by the ballad, "The Ruyn' of a Ream'." Its central idea is that the clergy are bringing the country to poverty and eventual ruin.

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14"Of the Cardinall Wolse," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, ii, 331-335.
through their inordinate pride and the money required from the people to feed that pride.

Their hearts in pride is set so high
that no man with them they think may compare.
Riding along they look so solemnly
as gargoyles in a wall, which grin and stare,
And think all the weight that they do bear:
So think the prelates, above all men
that the wisdom of this realm rests all on them.

Riches of great abundance come to them from the realm, the writer relates, and some of it is gotten by extortion. "And on lucre is set all their affection." They will not speak without money; they sell their sermons for gold with which they purchase higher offices and live like temporal dukes and earls. The author of "Now a Dayes" tells of another commodity which was commonly found on the clerical market. "Now is God's church merchandise," he discloses, and all the clergy are involved in the buying and selling of benefices. Laymen and craftsmen also enter this clerical-commercial competition, and it matters little what happens to the parish as long as the speculator gets his tithes. Somewhere back in the Middle Ages, the attributes of poverty and humility had become mere words and lost their meanings as a way of life to many of the churchmen. The spirit of enterprise and competition entered a world which was founded on the idea of renunciation, and poverty became an unfortunate circumstance and humility a lack of self respect, both opprobrious.

15 "The Ruyn' of a Ream'," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, i, 152-166.

16 "Now a Dayes," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, i, 96.
The worldliness of the clergy went beyond their violation of the ethics of religion and we find that popular literature is most vehement when it is attacking the immorality of the churchmen. That there were virtuous prelates we must believe, but they are extremely hard to locate in popular literature. In The Ship of Fools we are introduced to religious fools, shepherds who are lewder than their sheep and who keep their lewdness cloaked under cowls. The author of "Now a Dayes" asserts that priests are lechers, who "spare none that they can get, whether she be maid or wife." Dan Hugh, a monk of Leicester, was such a one until he was killed by the tailor for attempting to seduce the latter's wife. According to popular report, no woman was safe in their midst. Sir John, the lecherous friar in "The Tale of the Basyn," sleeps with a farmer's wife every time the rustic leaves home. It was common knowledge that most of the clergy had women either in their abodes or at their call, and seemingly this was accepted as customary by the people. It appears from reading the popular literature that this violation of their priestly vow was something to laugh at, not to deplore. In A C. Mery Talys we find the following story. In the town of Botelley there lived a miller who had a comely wench for a daughter. The curate in the next town loved the girl and had her at

17 Barclay, Ship of Fools, II, 60.
18 "Now a Dayes," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, i, 95.
his pleasure. Then came a Sunday morning and the preacher delivered a sermon to his flock.

You wives, you be so curious in all your works, that you know not what you mean, but you should follow Our Lady. For Our Lady was nothing so curious as you be; but she was a good homely wench like the miller's daughter of Bottelley. At which saying all the parishioners made great laughing, and especially they that knew that he loved that same wench.20

The vows of celibacy had gone the same way as the vows of humility and poverty by the sixteenth century. To the clergy this world was to be enjoyed before the next world, so the majority refused to deny themselves the pleasures of sex.

The lower clergy was marked by ignorance and superstition, for many were rustics only barely separated from the soil from which they had sprung. Phillip Hughes, relating the results of several visitations between 1517 and 1530, notices that one of the most serious complaints is directed against the ignorance of the clergy. In some cases there is no educational program at all for the novitiates. At Bicester and Chacombe the canons are described as ignorant, some not even knowing the rules of their orders. In a 1519 visitation at Markby a priest is discovered who can scarcely read and who refuses to learn. At Wellow eight canons are portrayed as having more interest in their hunting dogs than in their own education and sacred studies.21 Alexander Barclay in an envoy attributes this ignorance of the lower

clergy to simony.

The cause why so many priests lack wit
Is in you bishops, if I durst truth express,
Which not consider what men that you admit
Of living, cunning, person, and godliness;
But whosoever himself thereto will dress
If an angel be his broker to the scribe
He is admitted how be it he be witless.
Thus sold is priesthood for an unhappy bribe.22

A certain amount of superstition was coincident with the ignorance and illiteracy of the sixteenth century clerics, and most of the population, for that matter. The stupid priest who is gulled into believing that he has seen a ghost, devil, or some other spirit from beyond is a stock character in popular literature.23

The preceding are a sample of the complaints against the clergy which were common in Tudor England before the Reformation machine, the Seven Year Parliament, began to operate. In the latter part of 1528 and the first of 1529, on the eve of the Reformation, three books were distributed among the English people — William Tyndale's The Obedience of a Christian Man and How Christian Rulers Ought to Govern, William Roy and Jerome Barlow's Rede Me and Be Not Wroth, and Simon Fish's Supplication of the Beggars — which taken all together were supreme indictments of Roman Catholicism and complete statements of Reformation doctrine. These works, circulated so near the 1529 crisis, must have had a tremendous influence on public opinion.

Rede Me and Be Not Wroth had as its pervading sentiment one which

22 Barclay, Ship of Fools, II, 63.

has been common to literature of social protest since its beginning.

Alas, alas.
The world is worse than ever it was.
Never so deep in miserable decay,
But it cannot thus endure all way.

This universality of decay was attributed to the greed and the pride of the clergy, and the authors became specific in directing the bulk of their attack against Cardinal Wolsey — "The mastiff cur bred in Ypswitch towne, Gnawing with his teeth a king's crown." Nine pages are devoted to a detailed description of Wolsey's tyranny, his selling of church offices, his extravagance at Hampton Court and Christ's College, his pride, and his lineage and offspring. He is accused of seeking to rid England of the poor by sending them off to be slain in abortive wars and of causing the trouble between Henry and Catherine.

Alas, since England first began
Was never such a tyrant there.
By his pride and false treachery
Whoredom and bawdy lechery,
He has been so intolerable
That poor commons with their wives
In manner are weary of their lives
To see the land so miserable.

The attack on the Pope is not so long but is equally vitriolic. It is climaxed by three stanzas every other line of which begins with "Fie upon..." and which is completed with a denunciation of some papal evil. Fie upon the Pope's devilish interdictions, his bulls, briefs, and letters; fie upon his golden three-folded crown, his majesty and renown; and fie upon his carcass, both quick and dead. "Blessed they be which are cursed of the pope, and cursed are they whom he does bless." The authors attack the clergy in general, their worldliness,
pride, wealth, greed, sinfulness, lechery, and their reluctance
and inability to preach. They attack the monks and the laziness
and immorality of monasticism; the begging, lewd, dishonest friars;
monastic rent raisers; the superstition of the clergy — to mention
a few of Roy and Barlow's targets. Rede Me and Be Not Wroth is a long
poem; it covers practically every evil of the pre-Reformation church as
seen by these popular authors.24

John Foxe dates the arrival of Simon Fish's Supplication of the
Beggars in England in 1528. He tells us that the king kept the book
in his bosom for three or four days, then he sent for Mrs. Fish, and
told her that she might send for her husband, who was in Germany, and
that he could return without fear of danger.25 So we see that perhaps the
influence of Fish's six-page pamphlet reached even to the king. Addressed
to Henry, the Supplication was an argument ad hominem, a plea to
the king to regain the half of the realm which the clergy owned, to
regain the power which the churchmen usurped, and to regain the money
which the spirituality fleeced from their flocks. Supposedly written
by a spokesman for the king's beadsmen, the tract denounces the lazi-
ness of the clergy, who take from the people the charitable gifts
which should be given to the poor. "Set these sturdy loobies abroad in

24 William Roy and Jerome Barlowe, Rede Me and Be Not Wroth, Edward
59, 50, 29.

25 John Foxe, The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, S. R. Cattley, 
the world, to get them wives of their own, to get their living with their labor in the sweat of their faces, according to the commandment of God...." Although Fish's primary target is the clergy's financial exactions, he does not let clerical immorality escape comment. But for holy men, 100,000 women would have lived honest lives; for what woman will work for three pence a day when she might get twenty for sleeping with a monk.

Yea, and what do they more? Truly nothing but apply themselves, by all the sleights they may, to have to do with every man's wife, every man's daughter, and every man's maid, that cuckoldry and bawdry should reign over all among your subjects, that no man should know his own child, that their bastards might inherit the possessions of every man, to put the right begotten children clear beside their inheritance, in subversion of all estates and goodly order.

Furthermore, the spokesman continues, it is impossible to make laws against them because of their strength in Parliament. If anyone does charge them with an injustice, as did Richard Hunn, he is accused of heresy and in some cases he is murdered, as was Hunne. They seek their own glory, not Christ's; they pray for only those who pay them, and their purgatory is invented to separate men from their money; although it is their duty to aid the poor, the churchmen lack charity and refuse the poor remembrance alms and care in hospitals. The only hope for the nation — a solution which will gain the king the people's love and obedience, make the idle work, restore prosperity, and bring the gospel to all the people — is to turn the idle spirituality to labor.
Tie these holy idle thieves to the carts, to be whipped naked about every market town till they will fall to labor, that they by their importunate begging, take not away the almesse that the good Christian people would give unto us, spare, impotent, miserable people, your bedmen.

William Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man and How Christian Rulers Ought to Govern* (1527-1528) undoubtedly lacked the popular appeal of the two previous works, for it had neither the rhyme and rhythm of the first nor the brevity and vitriol of the second. But that it did have an immense influence, we can easily believe. It was extremely popular with Anne Boleyn, who induced Henry to read it and enjoy it in 1529 or 1530. It was carried by Thomas Bilney along with Tyndale's New Testament just before his martyrdom in 1530. Its influence probably came through the dispersal of its teachings by the more learned Protestant teachers and preachers of that day. Phillip Hughes asserts that the theses of *The Obedience* are the bases of what was to be the religion of ordinary Englishmen for centuries to come. The foundation of Tyndale's doctrine was justification by faith alone, the invalidity of good works, man's individuality, his freedom to read the Bible in

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his own tongue and to establish personally his relation with God.

Sacraments and ritual, according to Tyndale, are important only so far as they remind man of his relation with God; they have no intrinsic value. The various customs of Catholicism are artfully manufactured lies by which the Church swindles the people of money and goods. The worst transgression of the Church, however, is its control of political affairs; this is the central idea of The Obedience. From here, Tyndale proceeds to construct a political philosophy of divine right of kings. It gives them the authority to rule the subjects as they choose, drawing their power directly from God.

Let every soul submit himself unto the authority of the higher powers. There is not power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not to be feared for good works, but for evil. Wilt thou be without fear of the power? Do well then, and so shalt thou be praised of the same; for he is the minister of God for thy wealth. But and if thou do evil, then fear; for he beareth not a sword for nought; for he is the minister of God to take vengeance on them that do evil.  

Its appeal to Henry VIII is understandable. The popular appeal of all the works earlier mentioned is understandable when one considers the attitudes of the general public toward the clergy. Because of the abundance of anti-clerical popular literature it is evident that the nation was approaching a change. But there were some who opposed the

change, or some elements of change, and these people also had their
scribes who dabbled in propaganda.

In 1525 or 1526 there appeared a ballad entitled "Against the
Blaspheming English Lutherans, and the Poisonous Dragon Luther." The
ballad is allegorical, the central figure being the poisonous dragon
(Luther), who has stung many of God's people.

A poisonous Dragon
Hath infected my region,
Of whom young serpents hath sprung;
His venomous inflations
Hath infected many nations,
And much of my people hath stung.

The dragon's den is in Germany, but there is a cave near London —
perhaps the author is referring to Cambridge — where his disciples
magnify him. Because so many have been inflicted with heresy by the
dragon's sting, God's Catholic Church is derided, his sacraments
set at nought, his priesthood despised. Fasting, prayers, oblation,
pilgrimages, and good deeds are ridiculed; alms giving is said to be
needless. Faith alone is necessary for the dragon's brood. Making the
sign of the cross is said to be legerdemain; watered beer is as ef-
ficacious as holy water; and holy oil is no better than butter. All
of the holy principles of the past are being despised and calumniated
by "new fangled inventions."

Now rex, defensor fidei,
This name have I given thee,
A name of high report.
Help, therefore, and aid my preachers,
Of true faith and fervent teachers,
Against this arrogant sort!

Henry is given to understand that if he does not search through his
realm and weed out all schismatics, his England will suffer the same
excesses of the peasants as occurred in Germany and will be visited by plague and pestilence. 30

In 1527 Cuthbert Tunstall gave Sir Thomas More a dispensation to read heretical tracts and doctrines in order to refute them. 31 More was the logical choice; he was distinguished for his writing, he was noted as a speaker, and he had already entered into the field of religious controversy by assisting Henry in the writing of A Defense of the Seven Sacraments. Under the pseudonym of Gulielmus Rosseus, More had violently attacked Luther's reply to Henry's Defense. He was, also, well acquainted with the works of the Church fathers and quite capable of disputing with the most learned of the religious disputants. More began his work as an official controversialist with the Dialogue Concerning Heresies and Matters of Religion, a long tract in four parts attacking the heresies which had been drifting into England from Germany. He was especially concerned with Tyndale's New Testament, "The Parable of the Wicked Mammon," and "The Obedience of a Christian Man," all of which he criticized in detail. In addition, he defends the practice of praying to saints, reverencing images and relics, making pilgrimages, the authenticity of miracles, and the divine infallibility and absolute authority of the Roman Catholic

30 "Against the Blaspheming English Lutherans, and the Poisonous Dragon Luther," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, i, 275-290.

Church. More also defends the Church against slanderous charges growing out of the burning of Thomas Bilney and the suicide of Richard Hunne. More's debut was quite successful, the Dialogue requiring a second edition in 1530.

In the same year, 1529, Fish circulated his Supplication for the Beggars, which More answered with The Supplication of Souls before the end of the year. Fish's Supplication, which was cast in the form of a petition from the beggars of the realm to Henry was not dangerous because of its diatribe against the clergy, but because it was substantiated with statistics supposedly proving that half the goods of the realm and a third of its area were in the hands of the clergy.\(^{32}\) These statistics and Fish's attack on purgatory were the targets for The Supplication of Souls, More first attacks the gross errors in Fish's statistics. He then condemns Fish's condemnation of the clergy as a generalization based on inadequate sampling. The second part of More's Supplication is an argument for purgatory, based on More's reasoning, the Scripture, and the Church fathers.

Tyndale continued sending his controversial tracts to England; and in 1530 and 1531 appeared Practice of Prelates and Answer unto Sir Thomas More's Dialogue. Both contain general and bitter attacks on Catholicism and more specific attacks on More. More answered in his Confutation of Tyndale's Answer, which was published in two parts in 1532 and 1533. In the first part More presents Tyndale's case,

\[^{32}\text{Fish, "Supplicacyon for the Beggars," p. 4.}\]
point by point, and proceeds to dispute it. In the second part he is more concerned with Tyndale's New Testament and repeats much material from the Dialogue in criticizing its validity. He specifically attacks Tyndale's substitution of congregation for church, seniors (later changed to elders) for priests, repentance for penance, knowledge for confession, love for charity, and favor for grace. More's Confutation also contained an answer to a short pamphlet by the one-time friar, Robert Barnes, entitled What the Church Is. Barnes took a position against papal infallibility and the value of papal tradition. He denied that the Catholic Church was the Church of Christ and stated that the Catholic clergy are the greatest enemies of the true church on earth. More devotes the eighth book to refuting Barnes and making light of Barnes's railing style and poor reasoning.

In 1532 John Frith, one of the ablest of Protestants and then in prison for heresy, wrote a tract entitled Book of Purgatory. In it he attacked the doctrine of purgatory and the doctrine of transubstantiation, asserting that the latter was questionable and should not be regarded as a necessary article of faith. More followed Frith with a refutation entitled "A Letter of Sir Thomas More, Knight, Impugning the Erroneous Writing of John Frith Against the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar," an unusually mild and short tract restating the principles of More and the Church on transubstantiation.

In 1533 More, alarmed about the king's tolerance of Protestantism and persecution of Catholicism, the increase of heretical books — especially one by a supposedly Catholic author, Christopher Saint-German — and the precarious position of the Church, published his Apology of
Syr Thomas More, Knvyght. It was a defense of his former positions and an inclusive answer to most common Protestant arguments against Catholicism. More published *The Dellelation of Salem and Bizance* in 1534 in answer to another of Saint-German's tracts; and concluded his career as a controversialist with another defence of the sacrament, which was written from the Tower in 1535. More's death deprived Catholicism of its staunchest partisan and England of its most vigorous controversialist.

The good old days of religion were passing, but More and a few others fought doggedly against the newfangledness in religion—justification by faith alone, every man who can read the Bible equal to the pope, Mass said in English. On the other hand, the good old days were not so good to the majority of popular writers, and the Lutheran innovations were welcomed heartily in many circles.

On November 3, 1529, Parliament was called to consider the "king's matter," a problem which had been in the making as early as 1503. In December of that year Pope Julius II had granted a dispensation which allowed Prince Henry to marry his brother's widow, Catherine. Henry later protested the legitimacy of the action; Archbishop of Canterbury Warham never did accept it, but Henry and Catherine were married in

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1509, shortly after Henry had been crowned King of England. The only offspring of this union to survive was Mary, born in 1516. By 1526 it had become obvious to Henry that there would be no male issue from Catherine. He attributed this misfortune to his living in sin with Catherine and desired an annulment. Coincident with these conscience pangs came the beginning of his affair with Anne Boleyn. Whether his desire for a male offspring or his love of Anne was his prime motivation, he wanted to get rid of Catherine; and Cardinal Wolsey advised him to appeal to Pope Clement VII. The Pope was in a difficult position, however. Not only was it bad precedent to annul a former pope's decree, but he was now under the control of Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and Catherine's nephew. Wolsey arraigned Henry in May, 1527, and accused him of living in sin. This was the beginning of six years of maneuvering, of trips and trials, of decretals and dispatches, which were finally concluded in May, 1533, with the marriage of Henry and Anne, who never did receive the Pope's dispensation or blessing.

In 1529 when Campeggio prorogued the Legatine Court, Henry realized that he had been following the wrong course; so he discharged Wolsey and appealed to the English people by calling a Parliament to meet in November. The Reformation Parliament was largely composed of middle-class lawyers and merchants, who were royalist, anti-papal, and anti-clerical. Although it was not a packed parliament, its sentiments were much the same as Henry's; they were more concerned with the Church's political power than its morals, with its financial exactions than its doctrine. So it is that they were able to separate the English
Catholic Church from the Roman Catholic Church by the Act of Supremacy in 1534 and not make any noticeable change in Catholic dogma and doctrine. One of their last acts, an act abolishing monasteries whose incomes were less than £200 annually or whose occupancy was twelve clerics or less,\(^3^4\) was ostensibly a blow at clerical immorality, but a closer examination seems to indicate that again the king and parliament were more intent on finances than morality.

To the common man, however, monastic dissolution was the result of monastic immorality. At least, this is what he had been led to believe by the popular writers who pointed out the many iniquities of convent and monastery. *Rede Me and Be Not Wroth*, by Roy and Barlow, contained violent denunciations of monastic life and vividly portrayed all the evils and sins of monasticism.

Their cloisters are the devil's mews,  
Far worse than any stews  
Or common places of whoredom.  
They are dens of baudiness  
And furnaces of all lecherousness,  
Like unto Gomorrah and Sodom.  
Young lads and babes innocent  
They bring in by their inticement  
To their lewd congregation.  
Whom they receive to profession  
Before that they have discretion  
To their eternal damnation.  
For when they feel by experience  
The burning of their concupiscence  
Pricking their hearts with love,  
Considering also their bondage

\(^3^4\) For further information concerning the dissolution, see Geoffrey Baskerville, *English Monks and the Suppression of the Monasteries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937).
How they can use no marriage
As a Christian man doth behove,
Then to quench their appetites
They are fain to be sodomites
Abusing themselves unnaturally.
And so from hope of salvation
They fall into desperation
Ordering their lives most shamefully. 35

The 1533 ballad, "The Image of Ypocresye," devotes a section to monastic irreligion, and attacks the monks and priors for their drunkenness, intemperance, lechery, and laziness. 36 This particular ballad is notable for its length and monotony, but it is the most complete expression of Protestant protest against clerical evils that can be found between 1485 and 1558. Although the literary accounts of monastic immorality are corroborated by reports from the visitation commission of 1535-6, 37 it is necessary to understand that both accounts were made by people with ulterior motives, and the picture cannot be taken as all black. Hughes, in his explanation of the character and motives of the four principal commissioners, illustrates the mercenary designs of the crown in this movement toward dissolution. 38 In 1539 Parliament passed an act vesting in Henry and his heirs all of the property which had formerly belonged to the monasteries, and the crown now controlled not only the allegiance of

35 Roy and Barlowe, Rede Me and Be Not Wroth, pp. 95-96.
36 "The Image of Ypocresye," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, 1, 167-274.
the Church of England but also its wealth.

Separation and dissolution had not been unaccompanied by criticism, and much of the criticism resulted in violence. It is paradoxical that in the course of Henry's separation of the Church from Rome, both Catholics and Protestants should have suffered his wrath for their opposition to his procedure. Thus Thomas Bilney was burned for his Lutheran precepts, and Sir Thomas More was beheaded for supporting Catholicism. Henry's policy of moderation failed to satisfy the radicals of both leanings. Especially in the north of England was Henry's and Thomas Cromwell's reformation policy unpopular.\textsuperscript{39} A general unrest in that area was brought to a climax in 1536 with major revolts in Lincoln and York. The latter, which came to be known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, was the strongest resistance movement during Henry's reformation. A popular ballad entitled "An Exhortation to the Nobylles and Commons of the Narthe" was circulated during the uprising, and was a general condemnation of the southern heretics, the base-born commoners who were engineering the dissolution, and the dissolution itself. The unknown author of this work did not shrink from the way of the sword and called the northerners to fight for their cause.

\begin{quote}
For us it is better in battle to die,
And of our mortal lives to make a conclusion,
Than heresies extremely to ruin with tyranny,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} For a discussion of the rebellions in the North see Ibid., I, 296-320.
The nobility of the realm brought to confusion;
Christ's church very likely is spoiled to be,
And all abeys suppressed: it is more pity!40

In spite of revolt and near revolt, by 1540 Henry had accomplished
his purpose. He had separated the English Church from Rome and was in
control of its wealth. To establish Christian harmony within his realm
he had instituted the Ten Articles of 1536 and the Six Articles of
1539, the first through passage by convocation and the second by an
act of Parliament. Both were essentially Catholic in nature, requiring
of the people an acceptance of transubstantiation, single communion,
auricular confession, masses for the dead, and an observance of the
monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, once they had been
made by a cleric. For the benefit of the reformers, the idea of purga-
tory was rejected; the power of the pope was not recognized; praying
to images was forbidden; the efficacy of church ceremonies to remit
sins was denied; and certain holy days and pilgrimages were suppressed.
Henry's chief desire was to dispel diversity of religious opinion, but
the "poisonous dragon" released by the Reformation Parliament was not
to be brought under control by such a puny weapon as a Whip with Six
Strings.

The forces of the Reformation were to continue on their way,
constantly gathering momentum, until the height of uncompromising
Protestantism was reached under Edward VI. In the years preceding
Edward's reign, however, several writers came forth who were not at

40 "An Exhortation to the Nobylles and Commons of the Northe,"
Ballads from Manuscripts, I, ii, 301-312.
all satisfied with the extent to which the Reformation had gone. Henry Brinklow was the most violent and vociferous of the lot. The Complaynt of Roderyck Mors, written in 1542, lashes out at the remnants of Catholicism. "Also away with all your idols and images, both great and small." Banish whoredom and other vices among the clergy by letting them marry, if they will. Let us condemn auricular confession, pull down the vain chantries, abolish the proud colleges of canons, and separate the spirituality, especially the bishops, from all of their temporal possessions except a competent living. "Provide, also, that prayer and fasting may be set forth according to Scripture. And that the sacraments may be ministered in the mother tongue. And that all the service in the church may be taken out of the Scripture, the Old Testament and the New, all invented services set apart." Brinklow repeated his admonitions three years later in The Lamentacyon of a Christian Agaynst the Cytye of London, For Some Certayne Greate Vyces Used Therin. The struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism had grown more severe, and the tone of this tract is, if possible, more bitter than that of the Complaynt of Roderyck Mors. Brinklow in his later tract attacks the same evils which had always been under attack by reformers — pride, greed, immorality, lack of charity — and reveals that the bootlegging of proscribed Catholic wares was in 1545 a flourishing business.

Yea, it is well known that their pardons, and other of their trumpery, hath been bought and sold in Lombard Street, and in other places, as you will buy and sell a horse in Smithfield. Yea, and at Easter, when you should come to the Supper of the Lorde to receive the sacrament of thanks giving, there must you receive the God of Antichrist without signification or godly instruction. Yea, and you must buy it, and pay for it, as men sometime bought pies in Soper Lane.\(^2\)

Two other supplications or complaints to the king were circulated in the mid-1540's. "A Supplycacion to Our Moste Soveraigne Lorde Kynge Henry the Eyght,"\(^3\) written in 1544, repeats most of Brinklow's complaints; and Cowper, the editor, speculates that it and "A Supplication of the Poore Commons"\(^4\) were additional products of Brinklow's pen.\(^5\) The latter tract is more typical of Brinklow's acerbity than "A Supplication to the King," which lacks the vitriol found in that author's two recognized works. "A Supplication of the Poore Commons" is a bitterly wailing sort of tract, paying obsequious homage to Henry's wisdom and goodness in his reformation of the Church and laying all the troubles which have ensued to the corrupt ministers and churchmen. Specifically the author accuses them of misuse of dissolution lands, of speculating, and of rent raising. The king's


\(^{44}\) "A Supplication of the Poore Commons," Four Supplications, pp. 59-92.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.
ministers have wrongly distributed the land, and fines that were once forty shillings are now forty pounds. Of course, this is simply one of the many attacks against the king himself for misapportioning the monastic lands to the jeopardy of the tenants thereon. The author's attitude toward the clergy's morals is little different from the attitudes of the bulk of the popular writers for the preceding several centuries: "Yea, if your Highness would suffer them, their conscience would serve them to lie with our wives every tenth night, or else to have every tenth wife in the parish at their pleasure." 46

There were also attacks against the increasing Protestantizing of the Church. "A Pore Helpe," a ballad written in the 1540's before the death of Henry, decried the loss of the Catholic traditions and the people's turning from the religion of their ancestors to the new methods of worship espoused by the Protestants.

Blessed sacrament, for thy passion
Hear and see our exclamation
Against these men of new fashion,
That strive against the holy nation....

The author's persuasive method throughout is rather weak. He goes to great length to cite the gospeller's arguments against things Catholic, their ridicule of the Mass, robes, candles, ceremonies; but his rebuttal is never objective and logical enough to be convincing. In refuting the Protestant principle of personal interpretation of the Bible, he states that interpretation is the business of the Church and the

46 Ibid., pp. 87-88.
scholar and that the blindness of those who attempt to interpret the Bible without authority leads them and others to heresy. This section is concluded with the following threats:

But hark, ye Lollards, hark!
So well we shall you mark,
That if the world shall turn,
A sort of you shall burn.

To that group of reformers who believe not in the Holy Mass, he replies that it is the same as it was at first and that those who deny its efficacy "should be accursed with book, bell, and candle." There were people who mourned the passing of the beauty of the Catholic ceremonies and dress along with the departure of Catholic doctrine. Whatever popular literature they dispersed to aid their cause must have been slight or ephemeral, or else rigidly suppressed, for very little Catholic propaganda survives from this period.

Henry VIII died January 28, 1547, leaving his nine-year-old son, Edward, under the guidance of a sixteen-man Council of Regency, most of whom had Protestant leanings. This was especially so of Edward Seymour, the Protector, who was soon to release the brake with which Henry had held the extreme reformers under control. During Seymour's reign as Protector, England became a haven for Protestants from the Continent, and their radicalism speeded the reform movement toward its


eventual excesses. English was accepted in all services, and the ceremonies, which still retained much that was Catholic, were stripped of most of their ancient traditions. The use of candles, ashes, and holy water was forbidden, as was bowing before the altar and creeping to the cross on holy days. The marriage of the clergy was sanctioned. And there was a beginning of the spoliation of the churches — destruction of windows, ornaments, images, tapers, shrines, and pictures — which John Dudley, the Duke of Northumberland, was to carry to its logical conclusion, the destruction of most that was beautiful in the outward forms of religion. Under Seymour, who made himself the Duke of Somerset, Parliament repealed the heresy laws, abolished the Six Articles of 1539, and dissolved the remaining chantries. Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer was published in 1549 and given political support by the Act of Uniformity, passed soon after.

The Book of Common Prayer and the act which insisted upon its institution by the clergy caused much complaint in parts of rural England. Devon and Cornwall arose in July, 1549, but were soon brought under control. The seeds of discontent, however, aggravated by the agrarian problem, high prices and cheap money, and the ever-clamoring poor, were wide cast; and the eastern counties rose under one Robert Kett in the most formidable rebellion of this reign. John Dudley was dispatched to subdue Kett and his rebels. This he did, coming into enough power as head of his army, partly mercenaries, to effect a coup d'état and gain the protectorship of the kingdom. Under his leadership Parliament passed a second Act of Uniformity in 1552 supporting Cranmer's second Book of Common Prayer. This second work
was much more Lutheran than the first, using the words table instead of altar, communion instead of mass, and minister instead of priest, to mention only a few changes. Extremely Protestant were the Forty-two Articles of Faith which were sanctioned by Council and Convocation in 1553, near the end of Edward's reign. Under Northumberland, Protestant excesses increased, to reach their climax in The Great Pillage. Thousands of Lutherans and Protestants of other casts came into the country to aid in the spoliation of the churches, the looting of the chantries, and the burning of Catholic works of art.

Against this six-year period of root-and-branch reform, let us place the popular literature of that age and try to check the rate of the public pulse. "Dr. Haddon" in his ballad of 1551, "Exhortation to England to Repent," believed that the country was wallowing in wickedness, that its people were sinful and godless. For her sins God was scourging England with rebellion, dearth, and the plague. Whether the latter is the bubonic plague or the sweating sickness we do not know since both occurred during Edward's reign. "Dr. Haddon's" ballad is unique in that it attacks neither Catholic nor Protestant. His target is general sinfulness.

John Bon and Mast Person (1548) was an extremely popular anti-Catholic tract during the mid-century years. In dialogue form, it lent itself readily to acting and was presented as an interlude. The work is outstanding in its subtlety and gentle humor, both usually far distant in that era of violence and strong feelings. John Bon, the

ingenuous rustic, confounds his Catholic parson by asking obvious but inexplicable questions about the real presence. Mast Person gets off to a bad start when John asks him whether "Copsy Cursty" is a male or female saint and then assumes that Christ must be an elf, to be carried about in so small a glass. He continues in this vein, the parson becoming more frustrated and exasperated by the minute.

PARSON
And after that we consecrate very God and man;
And turn the bread to flesh with five words we can.

JOHN
The devil ye do! I trow. There is pestilence business!
Ye are much bound to God for such a spittell holiness.
A gallows gay gift! with five words alone
To make both God and man, and yet be none!
Ye talk so unreasonably well, it maketh my heart yearn.
As eld a fellow as I am, I see well I may learn.

PARSON
Yea, John; and then, with words holy and good,
Even by and by, we turn the wine to blood.

JOHN
Lo! will ye so? Lo! who would have thought it
That ye could so soon from wine to blood have brought it?
And yet, except your mouth be better tasted than mine,
I cannot feel it other but that it should be wine.
And yet I know never a cause there may be why;
Perchance, ye have drunk blood ofter than ever did I.

Sprinkled throughout with gentle wit and attacking Catholic tenets on their weakest ground, their intangibleness, _John Bon and Mast Person_ provided the Edwardian reformers with a piece of criticism which was also an entertaining bit of popular literature.50

Robert Crowley, the most important popular writer of the Edwardian age, contributed much to the literature of social protest. He was the first sixteenth century publisher of *The Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman*, and its contemporary success is attested to by the necessity of his making three impressions of the work the first year it was circulated, 1550. The sins of the nation appeared much the same in Crowley's time as they had in the last half of the fourteenth century, and he published Langland's protest to supplement his own criticisms. Crowley was a radical Protestant and attacked the now-underground Catholics for the usual things -- lechery, greed, pride, to mention a few. He devotes one of his *Epigrams* to a description "Of Obstinate Papists," who are too stubborn to give up their former faith and give their allegiance to their rightful prince. Some have even fled England, he relates, in order to wear their friar's coats. He concludes by wishing that all papists would follow the example by leaving England. To the priests who are black marketing Catholicism, he gives the warning that if they continue saying their masses in secret and giving men the false hope that England will be restored to Catholicism, they will lose all hope of life everlasting and they are "none of God's elect, but are worse than the cursed Jews." His most telling indictment is directed against Henrician dissolution and the misuse of the dissolution funds. What an occasion there was here to provide for learning and assist the poor, he says. The lands and the jewels that were appropriated could have founded enough houses of education and charity to have prevented the poverty of mind and
wealth that is the plague of Edwardian England.  

The Edwardian Age was the age of the preacher. Radical reform doctrine and ideas which heretofore had been suppressed were now discussed every time gospellers congregated, and in the foreward of this group of "new fashion" Christians were some of the most prominent men of that day, the preachers. The second act of Parliament at the beginning of the reign had enacted that all bishops be consecrated only on the receipt of royal letters patent and that they hold their office during the king's pleasure. The Council was, therefore, able to deprive of his office any bishop who did not sanction the Council's religious policy. In that manner were the leading preachers and religious policy makers of 1547-1553 able to force out the Henrician conservatives and begin a new regime, presided over by such arch Protestants as John Hooper, Nicholas Ridley, John Poynter, Miles Coverdale, and Henry Barlow. Hugh Latimer, who refused the bishopric of Worcester in order to devote his time to preaching, was one of the most popular preachers of his day. Latimer, along with Thomas Bacon and Thomas Lever, was greatly concerned with the problem of the poor and the state of morals of the people. They all felt that the people had been given a chance to lead a good life by the triumph of Protestantism; but the triumph had been marred by pride and covetousness. The following extract, taken from Latimer's famous Sermon of the Plough (1548), shows that worldly clerics had not disappeared with Catholicism. 

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But now for the fault of unpreaching prelates, methink I could guess what might be said for excusing of them. They are so troubled with lordly living, they be so placed in palaces, couched in courts, ruffling in their rents, dancing in their dominions, burdened with ambassadorages, pampering of their paunches, like a monk that maketh his jubilee; munching in their mangers, and moiling in their gay manors and mansions, and so troubled with loitering in their lordships, that they cannot attend it.\(^\text{52}\)

Thomas Lever, looking back over the Reformation trail from the vantage point of 1550, concurred with Latimer in a sermon at Paul's Cross. Papistry has not been banished from England by true religion, he says, but by covetousness. Papistry abused many things; covetousness destroys many more. Papistry is superstition; covetousness is idolatry. Papistry at one time did dim the king's honor and deprive the kingdom of wealth, he continues, and "covetousness at this time does more abuse and decay them both, making the king bare, the people poor, and the realm miserable." In a sermon preached before Edward earlier in the same year, Lever's audacity led him to denounce the spoliation of the monasteries, chantries, and churches — not because he believed that the objects destroyed had any intrinsic or artistic value, but because the act caused many people to doubt the sincerity of the Protestants.\(^\text{53}\) It was a point well made. To those not imbued with the zeal of the iconoclastic reformers, The Great Pillage must have seemed senseless; and the consequent misappropriation of the lead from the church roofs, of


the precious metals from the shrines, and of the objects of art must have appeared to be pure larceny, as much of it was. Thomas Becon, a calmer and gentler spirit than either Lever or Latimer, agreed that worldliness flourished in spite of the existence of Protestantism and that the covetousness and lack of charity caused the misery then to be found in England; but rather than denouncing the cause of the misery of the common people, Becon preaches acceptance of the misery and attempts to instruct the poor in their duties as poor people, to live "quietly and patiently," neither envying, rioting, nor feeling that God hates them. 54

It is needless to mention the Protestant preachers' attitudes toward the principles of Catholicism which had existed before the Reformation and which were still practiced clandestinely. Robes, caldles, altars, and Latin were derided by all Protestants in varying degrees, some violently, some more gently. Those reformers who had the public ear were not wont to spare their defeated adversaries.

Old ways and traditions have a way of dying slowly, and during these seven years of Protestantism, it was the powerful minority who were setting the English religious policy. In the country among the farmers and the rural landed class, in the north and the west where the City's influence was little felt and less appreciated, and wherever the spoils of dissolution had not corrupted and the bony fingers of Protestantism had not poked, there were many who were not in sympathy with the Edwardian Reformation and who longed for a return to the

comfortable warmth of Catholicism. It is easy to see, then, why Mary was welcomed so cordially. Her warm reception came from those who were still Catholic — Henrician or Roman — and from those who had grown sick of the excesses of the Protestants and their oftimes disaffected followers who flocked to the "new fashion" with the belief that it was a social cure-all.

Edward died at Greenwich on July 6, 1553, without ever having wielded the sceptre for himself. Then came the abortive nine-day reign of Lady Jane Grey, the turn of public opinion against queenmaker Northumberland and extreme Protestantism, and on August 3 the triumphant and popularly acclaimed entry into London of Queen Mary Tudor. Although the new queen was known to be a Catholic, few suspected the extremes to which she would eventually go. Popular sentiment in the City quickly illustrated, however, that formal Catholicism was not held in the highest regard. On the second Sunday after Mary's entry into London a dagger was hurled at Dr. Gilbert Bourne when he attempted to preach Catholic doctrine, and he barely escaped with his life. The same day the queen summoned the Council and announced that all preaching was to be suspended except by those who were licensed by Her Majesty. On August 18 a royal proclamation was issued which applied the same measure to every part of the kingdom. The imprisoned bishops — Gardiner, Heath, Day,

For further information concerning the Reformation and the reign of Mary, see Hughes, The Reformation in England, II, 181-352.
Tunstall, and Bonner — were released from prison, and Gardiner was installed as Lord Chancellor. Mary was crowned amidst Catholic pomp and Latin ceremony, and her first parliament assembled on October 5. Although Commons took a firm stand at their first meeting and refused to consider the restoration of dissolution lands and to renounce the ruler's function as head of the Church, they did repeal all acts pertaining to religion which had been passed during the previous reign. By this time there was little doubt in the people's minds concerning Mary's purpose. Those staunch advocates of reform who had set the religious tenor during the Edwardian era — Coverdale, Hooper, Ridley, Latimer, Barlow, and Cranmer — had been already committed to various prisons, so the ballad, "A Warning to Queen Mary, Oct. 10, 1553," proved to be a timely but unheeded warning against a course which was to alienate a goodly part of the realm and be the determining factor in England's acceptance of Protestantism. The ballad's beginning is properly adulatory, addressing Mary as "Rose most redolent." Soon, however, the author comes to his proper business, the warning.

O noble queen, take heed, take heed!  
Beware your own intent!  
Look ere you leap; then shall you speed,  
For haste makes many shent....

And whereas ye your Realm should  
Maintain in all unity,  
You rent the peoples hearts in two  
Through false idolatry.

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56 "A Warning to Queen Mary, Oct. 10, 1553," Ballads from Manuscripts, 1, ii, 431-434.
Is this the way to get you fame?
   Is this to get you love?
Is this to purchase you a name,
   To fight with God above?

Is this your care, to set up mass,
   Your subjects souls to destroy?
Is this your study to bring to pass,
   God's people to annoy? ...

Those whom our late king most did love,
   You do them most disdain;
Those things doth manifestly appear,
   Your colors to be but vain.

One broadsider, not quite so astute — or was he merely being indirect?— praises the newly come queen because she will, no doubt, "build upon her brother's good foundation," and continue the Protestant religion. 57

William Forrest, who was later to become one of the queen's chaplains, welcomed Mary with a sweetly eulogistic ballad in which he compared her to a marigold, the queen of all flowers, and also praised her as a bold champion, "stiffly to stand" and never wavering from the truth. 58

By 1554 Catholicism was well under way. Injunctions prepared by the bishops prescribed the details of church administration and doctrine, required clerical celibacy, and accomplished the removal of all objectionable Protestants from preaching positions. A packed parliament of that year revived the heresy laws and restored the status of the Church to what it had been prior to 1529. Before the year was over Cardinal Legate Reginald Pole returned to England from his exile


and received the country back into the papal fold. Mary's fourth parliament passed an act in 1555 renewing the ties with Rome and restoring the payment of annates. England was now in the position, legally, where she had been before the Reformation, with a few exceptions. Parliament insisted on Mary's retaining the title of Head of the Church, and they refused to restore the dissolution lands, both of which decisions galled the queen considerably. Also, the country was becoming alarmed at the Catholic extremes. Those who had welcomed her as a relief from the Protestant excesses saw now that their religion was in even greater jeopardy, for by 1555 the flames of the martyrs were increasing in number.

It would be difficult to attribute Mary's cruelty during the last three years of her reign to any specific cause. Her policy of toleration and persuasion with which she ascended the throne was soon dispelled by overt acts against those preaching her faith and by rebellions in 1554 in Devon, the Midlands, and in Kent. As she increased her Catholic pressure on the people, their opposition and hostility increased proportionally; and as their opposition increased, she increased her application of pressure. Nor had her personal life been conducive to a well-balanced state of mind. As a child she had been hounded by Anne Boleyn and Protestantism, and her mother had been generally maligned. Now, as a woman, she had been spurned by her husband, Philip; and it seemed a decree of fate that she should be barren. All of these conspired to promote her monomania, the destruction of heresy. Two ballads written during her reign — whether politically sponsored or not, we do not know — praise Mary for her treatment of.
hersy. "An Ave Marie in Commendation of Our Most Vertuous Queene," written by Leonard Stopes, an English priest, addresses Mary as "the mirror of mercifulness" and later states that "grace and all goodness doth garnish her Grace with merciful meekness." This merciful meekness, however, does not keep her from making a riddance of sects and schisms, "of horrible errors and heresies all," and Stopes praises the Virgin Mary for sending her namesake as a Catholic Captain to govern England and withstand the foes of the true faith. An extremely bitter attack on heresy is found in the broadside "An Exclamation upon the Erronious and Fantastical Sprite of Heresy." It is also a plea for the general acceptance of Catholicism by the people, a defense of images, and an exhortation to the people to rely on the authority and antiquity of the Church.

Of the 273 heretics burned on the authority of Mary, nine were gentlemen, twenty-one were clergymen, and fifty-one were women; the rest were tradesmen. Phillip Hughes has from a study of Foxe's Marian martyrs constructed a picture of the typical martyr during the persecutions. He is of the working class or slightly above. It is publicly known that he is a heretic since he refuses to receive the mass and does not attend Catholic services. He has a zeal for personal interpretation


60 "An Exclamation upon the Erronious and Fantastical Sprite of Heresy," Old English Ballads, pp. 27-32.

61 For a popular account of Marian persecution see Foxe, Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, vols. VI-VIII.

of the Scriptures, but his education has led him little beyond parroting the cliches of his sect. These cliches, though, are well known and well organized, and he can handle them with great dexterity in disputation. The Marian martyr is argumentative, dogmatic, and intolerant; and he professes contempt for the learning and experiences of others and for the value of tradition and antiquity in religion. This is a picture of a dangerous type, violent, anarchic, and uncontrollable.

This is not Robert Glover, a gentleman, whose martyrdom is described by Foxe and by a friend of Glover's in a ballad written soon after his death on September 20, 1555. But parts of the ballad recall the picture of the argumentative and vociferous Protestant. Glover was a staunch foe of Catholicism and the pope, and his chief delight was in the reading of the Bible and preaching the Gospel "to every men, both high and low." Another characteristic of the Marian martyrs found in Glover was the fortitude he displayed toward the end. He was disputatious to the very last, finally throwing his judges into a frenzy by overcoming them in debate, a typical Protestant happy ending.

The bishop and his chaplains all
Their learning did then fail,
No answer they could make to him;
Therefore they fell to rail.

By 1558 Mary's Catholicism was decimated by public opinion. Just as the people had sickened of the excesses of Northumberland Protestantism,

"A Ballad Concerning the Death of Mr. Robert Glover," Old English Ballads, pp. 33-46.
so did they of the Marian persecutions. In addition to this, the people could not forget how she had violated public sentiment by marrying Phillip and how her support of his European wars had lost England international respect and Calais. Enclosure continued, the poor were increasing, and prices were continually rising. Gardiner was dead, her Council was corrupt, and her last personal advisor, Cardinal Pole, was in a continual state of despondency because he had not been able to restore the dissolution lands and had fallen in disgrace with the papacy. She must have welcomed death when it came in November of 1558. An ardent Catholic balladeer promptly wrote this eulogy.

She never closed her ear to hear the righteous man distressed,
Nor never spared her hand to help where wrong or power oppressed.
When all was rack, she was the port from peril unto joy;
When all was spoil, she spared all, she pitied to destroy.64

The author proceeds to prophesy that no age can obscure her fame, a prophecy which has been fulfilled in an unanticipated manner. His finale, a tribute to the new Queen Elizabeth, does not indicate that he suspects a change in religious policy; but perhaps he is merely being politic.

Mary now dead, Elizabeth lives, our just and lawful Queen,
In whom her sister's vertues rare abundantly are seen.
Obey our Queen, as we are bound, pray God her to preserve,
And send her grace long life and fruit, and subjects truth to serve.65

Elizabeth was welcomed by as much popular acclaim as Mary received.

64 "An Epitaph upon the Death of the Most Excellent and Late Vertuous Quene," Old English Ballads, p. 24.

Popular sentiment was set against extremism, either Protestant or Catholic; and most felt that Elizabeth would afford relief from the violence which had dominated the preceding decade. The new queen relied on her older ministers, exercised as much tolerance as wise statecraft would permit, and attempted to establish a Church which would be inclusive of those whose religious beliefs leaned toward either Catholicism or Protestantism. Of course, this did not satisfy the extremists; but the majority of the people, who desired nothing more than peace and stability, were content with this religious compromise. In 1559 Parliament repealed all of Mary's laws which had returned religion to its status of 1529, in addition to repealing all heresy laws. In 1563 the bishops conferred on and recast the Forty-two Articles as the Thirty-nine Articles of Faith, casting the Church of England into approximately the same form which it now enjoys.66

Thus was the Anglican Church created — through criticism and acts of Parliament, through destruction of lives and property, and through two abortive reigns which would have made the national Church into an institution representing only a small minority. Coincident with the advance of the Reformation was the production of an abundance of popular literature, propagandistic in nature, both supporting the movement by its denunciation of Catholicism and hampering the movement by its denunciation of Protestantism. Considering the popular literature available, it seems that Protestant ballads and tracts were

more in abundance. Because of the ephemeral nature of the literature, however, it is impossible to say which side was the better represented. Most of the popular literature dealing with matters of religion was propagandistic in nature and violent in style. It was not a period of gentle persuasion and subtleties. Writers like Fish, More, Crowley, and Latimer, when they were addressing the general public, made few attempts to reach the intellect; their purpose was to stir the emotions. So we have a class of literature which, for the most part, was turned out with speed but not care, with a purpose but without planning; and the result is a literature which is invaluable historically, but of little worth artistically. It is the literature of social protest, which cares more for what it achieves than for how it is written.
CHAPTER III

The Agrarian Movement

At the time that Parliament passed the act vesting the royal inheritance in Henry Tudor, Duke of Richmond, and his heirs, the English peasantry was firmly entrenched in traditions of culture and custom which were covered with the dust of over four centuries. Their manner of life had been virtually unchanged in spite of wars and faction, famine, and plague. They were theoretically bound in a state of serfdom, and they lived in such squalor and poverty as would evoke the pity of the poorest Cracker in Georgia. Mud walls and thatched roofs, straw beds on dirt floors, a fire in the house but no chimney, and all of this accompanied by lice and fleas and a variety of rodents: this was the general condition of the English peasantry. At the present time it is difficult to imagine that this sort of existence would appeal to anyone, but in the following century when this particular stratum of society was noticeably disappearing in certain parts of England, popular writers chose its departure as one of their favorite topics and proceeded to romanticize and idealize the peasantry and their virtues. In a sermon during the reign of Edward VI, Hugh Latimer recalls with nostalgia the conditions during his own childhood.

My father was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own, only he had a farm of three or four pounds by year at the uttermost, and here upon he tilled so much as kept half a dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty
kine. He was able and did find the king a harness, with himself and his horse, while he came to the place that he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when he went to Blackheath Field. He kept me to school, or else I had not been able to have preached before the king's majesty now. He married my sisters with five pounds or twenty nobles apiece, so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God.

He kept hospitality for his poor neighbors. And some almesse he gave to the poor, and all this he did of the said farm. Where he that has it now pays sixteen pounds by year or more, and is not able to do anything for his Prince, for himself, nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor.¹

Accompanying this mourning for the death of a culture and traditions, came a general attack on the agrarian changes by all who were concerned with Tudor social problems. This attack reached its height during the tumultuous reign of Edward VI. During that time the middle-class reading public was assailed by great quantities of literature denouncing enclosure and the sixteenth century agrarian movement.

Sermons were preached directed against rack-renters and enclosers and attributing the poverty and discontent to the new agricultural innovations.

National changes as radical as the agrarian revolution of the Tudor's first seventy-three years would quite naturally provide grist for the mills of the popular writers and others whose audience consisted

of the multitudes of the middle class. London, situated on the edge of the fertile Midlands, was directly interested in all major agrarian changes, and the change which was the outward show of this national personality problem was the enclosure movement and its accompanying evils. Many of the land owners in the Midlands enclosed their land for more extensive farming or to raise sheep; in some cases, tenants were dispossessed of land which they and their families had held for many years under the manorial custom; and the word of this upheaval, when it reached London, was twisted and expanded by popular writers until it was presented to the people all out of its proper proportions. To say this, however, is not to intimate that there was not cause for concern. Many people were dispossessed of their homes, and the ranks of the vagabonds were swelled considerably by those left destitute by enclosure. But the popular writers of that day, like some journalists in our own time, were forever searching for the big story, one which would arouse the people and hold their interest, and enclosure provided just such a theme. Now, however, it is possible to ascertain by the more certain appraisal of the historical backward glance that enclosure was not the family-devouring, wooly dragon which was presented to the populace by so many authors of the sixteenth century; and it is the purpose of this chapter to see where fact ends and popular propaganda and fiction begins. At the same time, an attempt will be made to evaluate the effect of popular literature on middle-class social attitudes.

When one whisks the straw and dirt that masks the exterior of

the medieval rurality and explores the social organization of the peasant under the medieval feudal system, he is able to see a way of life innately noble in its spirit of cooperation and "almesse." When the system began to topple, social commentators were quick to notice and deplore this demise of Christian charity, and England during the period of its greatest agricultural changes was never allowed to forget that the past of its grandfathers was morally and ethically a superior era. In Alexander Barclay's *Ship of Fools* (1507) we are told that in times long past there was no deceit or guile among the rustics, and Justice kept her throne among them. Now, however, new ways have corrupted the minds of the men of the village, and they labor ever in burning avarice for deceitful advantage over their neighbors. The apparent demise of charity, both lay and secular, marked the beginnings of the Tudor era; and it was usually considered as a characteristic of the new agricultural system, a system in which the medieval conception of cooperation and charity was being displaced by the modern spirit of competition and individualism.

In 1485 England was still an agricultural country, with small population centers located near the manor houses. The small, rural villages were


4 For further information on the agrarian revolution, both before and after 1485, the following works are recommended:

compactly arranged, house next to house, and dominated jointly by the village green and the church. The country surrounding the village was cleared and open. There were no hedges or fences, no mine-and-thine dividers as signposts of ownership. Daily the people left their village headquarters and tilled the land which had been allotted to their families sometime in the vague past. The land was parcelled out to the folk in acre or half-acre strips which lay in different sections of the manor lands and was so divided that no man would get all bottom land or all poor clay. Each strip was separated from its neighbor by balks, or banks of unplowed turf, which were also used as roads. The average amount of land each family owned amounted to about forty acres. England was then a nation of small farmers, and even the laborers had some land on which they could grow their gardens. All the people in the village had certain rights in the commons, which were the common pasture, the common meadow, and plowed lands which had been left fallow for the year.

The law which these people abided by and under which they held their lands was the custom of the manor, and the laws of immemorial usage gave the farmer a sense of security and a knowledge that the land would be his as long as he conformed to the lease or grant under which he held the land. Rents and fines had long been fixed, and every man knew what was expected of him. In A Proper Dyaloge Betwene a Gentillman and a Husbandman (1530), the anonymous author, contrasting times present with times past, tells us that in the olden days a farmer had little difficulty securing land and maintaining it and that "no higher price was there set than good conscience did require."

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Because of manorial custom or law, each village was a separate entity, unconnected, except in the nationalistic sense, to the neighboring towns. The antiquity of the village and the permanence in tenure of the villagers gave the whole a family-like closeness and a certain insular chauvinism which desired little contact with the outside world. Filial respect was shown to the lord of the manor, and he, in turn, recognized certain obligations and responsibilities to his tenants.

Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, a sixteenth century advocate of enclosure and one of the few who took the landholder's side in the agrarian controversy, recognized the landlord's obligations and considered them both moral and ethical duties. In his Book of Surveying (1523), which was addressed to the landed gentry, he advises the landholders to survey their lands, enclose them, and fix the rents and fines according to what they were in "time past." For "a greater charity nor alms deed a man may not well do, than upon his own tenants; and also to the contrary, a greater bribery nor extortion a man cannot do, than upon his own tenants, for they dare not say nay, nor yet complain, and therefore on their souls go it, that do so, and not on mine."6

Absolute ownership of the land was impossible under the feudal tenure plan, where the king granted land to the duke, the duke to the marquis, the marquis to the earl, and so on down the scale to the laborer, still struggling to free himself from the fading vestiges of serfdom.

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Freeholders, the yeomanry of Tudor England, were complete owners of their land for all practical purposes, although according to custom an indefinite sort of attachment was still recognized. Leaseholders held their lands directly from the lord or some freeholder, the lord being free to lease demesne land or reclaimed land. The greatest number of small-holdings farmers, however, were the customary tenants. This category consisted of all those who held their land by right of inheritance under the manorial custom. Usually this meant that an entry had been made on the manorial court rolls, assigning them to certain plots of land. They renewed their leases regularly by payment of a token fine and worked for a specified time each week on the owner's land in order to pay rent. Those customary tenants who had work of their own to do were allowed to pay for the hiring of workers to take their places. Neither the fines nor the rents had varied to any large degree throughout the Middle Ages, and the lands were passed from generation to generation through the eldest son, who again paid only a token fine when he assumed the ownership.

At the bottom of the scale were the laborers, who frequently held small plots of land for gardening and always had certain rights in the commons. The laborers' value increased rapidly after the Black Plague, when their numbers were reduced. They flourished for a while in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, increased their numbers from the ranks of discontented copyholders and younger sons, and through the high value they put on their services helped cause many landholders to turn from farming to sheep ranching. Many of the laborers were attached to a manor and remained on it in a serf-like status; others wandered
about England searching for work and often swelling the ranks of the rogues and vagabonds; and some were fortunate enough to save money and lease land.

The social organization of the English peasantry in 1485 was characterized primarily by its static quality. Families farmed the same strips of land, lived in the same house, and served the same coat of arms for centuries. The customs and traditions of the people had prevailed for many generations; and they were seldom questioned, less frequently changed, and generally adhered to without thought as to their significance. The tradition of cooperation and things-in-common was the touchstone of medieval farm life. Land, water, wood, hay: the natural resources belonged to the people, and the custom of the manor saw that there was equitable division. The people were inherently connected to the soil through family ties which extended back to the Domesday Book, and the entire structure was based on this manorial custom which had its inception in the dawning of English feudalism.

The picture is somewhat modified, however, if one looks at feudalism with attention to change rather than to characteristics which did not change. As early as 1236 it had been necessary to pass the Statute of Merton to keep the landlords from enclosing so much of a common pasture or common meadow that the tenants would be deprived of pasturage and from enclosing land which controlled the access to farming strips. This would seem to indicate that the earliest enclosures, some of which occurred on monastic lands, were detrimental to the peasants' welfare. Enclosing increased and when agriculture emerged as a profitable business in the fifteenth century, more land was enclosed for extensive cultivation.
From the casual references in The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman to hedging (C-Test, Passus IV, 169; Passus IX, 29), one would assume that enclosure was not an uncommon thing in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. By that time small farms were being enclosed in one large farm; sheep farming and pasture enclosing was increasing; and the inevitable evictions were accompanying some of the enclosures.

Enclosure in the Middle Ages, though, was not a general or a national movement, and in many cases it benefited the small farmer by allowing him to gather all his holdings into one large, more easily managed plot of ground. Although the feudal tenure plan had been undergoing alteration ever since its inception, at the beginning of the Tudor Age it was still largely intact.

It is apparent that the changes between 1485 and 1558 were extremely important and far reaching. Forces over which the peasant had no control began hacking away at the supporting timbers of his way of life, and the structure which had protected so many of England's citizenry before Bosworth had become a tumbled-down shack by the time that Mary lost Calais. The corporate system gave way to the capitalistic system; the land assumed a new value to the nouveau riche speculator. Contract and law were substituted for the custom of the manor, and these new devices were wont to ignore the traditions of the past and the peasantry who lived by those traditions-made-laws. The changes were swift and often ruthless, and the lower classes, always the last to conform to transition, were dragged protesting through the seventy-three years which began the Tudor reign and saw the most drastic period of agrarian change.

It all began with sheep. "Yea, those sheep is the cause of all
those mischiefs, for they have driven husbandry out of the country...and now altogether sheep, sheep."\(^7\) Such was John Hales' conclusion in 1549.

Much earlier, in 1516, Sir Thomas More, the dean of the sixteenth century social critics, arrived at the same conclusion. From his *Utopia:*

"...your sheep, that were wont to be so meek and tame, and so small eaters, now, as I hear say, be become so great devourers, and so wild, that they eat up and swallow down the very men themselves. They consume, destroy, and devour whole fields, houses, and cities." More noted the same evils resulting from sheep raising as did the popular authors of the mid-century, when agrarian disruption was seemingly at its worst and social protest at its loudest: destruction of towns, depopulation of the countryside, and increased vagabondage, to mention a few.

When the Black Death had completed its ravaging of medieval England, the large landholders — the lords, religious houses, freeholders — were unable to obtain laborers to plant their crops and tend their fields. In desperation some turned to raising sheep, for sheep needed very little care and could forage for themselves on the poorest of soils. Since sheep required a large grazing area, the land owner enclosed his land and used what few men were available to tend this new investment. At the same time, the peasants, who had quickly learned their new value on the labor market, found that they could make their own wage scale. This they did, raising the cost of their services and assuming an independence which was to lead to the destruction of their own class.

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England had always raised sheep, but at the beginning of the Tudor Age there was a noticeable increase in sheep production. The large-scale farmers had decided that large-scale farming did not pay. Labor was still high, and the selling price of grain and other farm products was low and was destined to remain on the fifteenth century level for another thirty years, until prices began to rise coincident with coin debasement. Also, the farmer who desired to compete with any success on the market was required to marle, fertilize, and cultivate extensively, and financing this was more than many of the landed gentry could do. Fitzherbert, an advocate of scientific farming methods, stressed the necessity of fertilizing, especially on those manorial lands which had been under cultivation for several hundred years. "Horse dung is the worse dung that is: the dung of all manner of cattle that chew their cud, is very good; and the dung of doves is best, but it must be laid upon the ground very thin." The English fields, after producing for centuries, were becoming chemically exhausted, and it was necessary to lay by half of the land each year. It was natural, then, that when the lord of the manor saw a way to solvency which did not require expensive labor and upkeep, he took it and began raising sheep.

There was a steady demand for English wool on the foreign market in

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1485. At the same time, England's own wool cloth industry was demanding more wool for its looms and was emerging into open competition with its Flemish rivals. There was still much raw wool being sent abroad in the first half of the sixteenth century, however; and William Forrest wrote that with a proper handling of English wool, poverty and idleness could be alleviated in the realm. In his *A Plesaunt Poesye of Princelie Practice* (1548) he recommended that wool which had hitherto been sent abroad in a raw state should be kept at home, providing labor for all those required to prepare it for sale as finished material.

No town in England, village or borough,  
But thus with clothing to be occupied:  
Though not in each place clothing clean through:  
But as the town is, their part so applied;  
Here spinners, here weavers, there clothes to be dyed,  
With fullers and shearsers as be thought best:  
As the clothier may have his cloth dressed.10

The wool and cloth industry and sheep farming solved many of the landowner's problems. He no longer had to search for laborers nor did he have to worry about the condition of his land. Several hundred sheep required little care, and the land supporting the sheep needed very little of the fertility necessary for successful farming.

In order to raise enough sheep to assure himself of a profit, the farmer or investor had to have a large plot of land; and his land needed to be in one piece, not laid out in strips. Also, if he wished to hard

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his sheep at small expense, the pasture had to be enclosed. One man with the aid of a dog could tend several hundred sheep if the sheep were properly contained in a well hedged field, and the usurping shepherd, poverty stricken and existing on milk and whey, was considered of little worth by many Tudor writers.\(^{11}\)

For centuries before, the enclosure of land with hedgerows had been taking place. Landowners had long been enclosing wastes and forests for agricultural purposes, certain plots of arable land for pasture, and had even gone so far as to enclose parts of the commons. A large part of this early movement, however, had been sanctioned and participated in by the small farmers and landholders. Enlightened agrarians, peasants and gentry, found that they could manage their land more easily and get a better yield if it were enclosed. It is interesting and important to note that there were only a few writers of any stature in the early sixteenth century movement who openly supported enclosure. Thomas Tusser, whose opinions we shall consider first, retired to the country in Suffolk somewhere near his thirtieth year, about 1555. By that time, enclosure was a fait accompli in that area, and many of the early difficulties had disappeared. Tusser, who had seen agriculture in commons elsewhere, was quite impressed with farming in several and devoted a chapter in his *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie*, published in 1557, to its defense.

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The country enclosed I praise,
The other delighteth not me,
For nothing the wealth it doth raise,
To such as inferior be.
How both of them partly I know,
Here somewhat I mind for to show.

He begins by comparing unenclosed Leicestershire with enclosed Suffolk and Essex, to the former's disadvantage. In enclosed shires, he relates, land is wasted in balks and broad footpaths, cattle and sheep on the way to the commons stray from the roads and destroy crops, and there is lawlessness and hunting and hawking instead of diligent farming.

The one barefoot and ragged doth go,
And ready in winter to starve:
When the other ye see do not so,
But hath what is needful to serve.
The one pain in a cottage doth take,
When the other trim bowers do make. 12

Such comparisons as the commons' "pain in a cottage" to several's "trim bowers" make it evident that Tusser was carried away with his subject. His attitude toward enclosure, although diametrically opposed to popular opinion, did not diminish his popularity, however, and no less than thirteen editions of his work were published between 1557 and the end of the century.

Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, who by his own admission was a householder and farmer for forty years, was, perhaps, better qualified to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of enclosing; but it must be remembered that Fitzherbert seems to have been a country gentleman, not a simple farmer. As a landholder, it was to his advantage to use the most advanced

agricultural methods. On the other hand, his Book of Husbandry (1534), which was addressed to the small farmer, contained one of the most convincing arguments for enclosing to be found in Tudor literature. Fitzherbert considers enclosure a long-term investment. Taking the cost of caring for sheep and cattle over a three-year period, he shows how this money, if spent on ditching and hedging for enclosure, will provide for the stock from the fourth year on with a tenth of the normal expenses required to maintain a herd on commons. In addition, the cattle and sheep fare better and are more contented being settled in one pasture than they are when they are driven from common to common in order to find forage.  

In his Book of Surveying (1523), which was addressed more to the landed gentry than to the forty-acre farmer, he devotes his final chapter to convincing the landholder that redistribution of the land in several will enhance the value of his land. His suggestion for redistribution is quite complete and may have been the method used in some areas. According to his plan, all the landholders in an area would agree to a redistribution of the land. Then, under the direction of the lords' bailiffs, the tenants would be indifferently allotted the sum of their former acreage in one parcel. Those laborers who had no lands of their own but who had rights in commons would be given a plot near their houses for gardening and a small pasture. This done, leases would be drawn up on the court rolls which would extend no longer than three generations, this counting the present occupant; and the rents and fines to which the tenants had long been accustomed would be imposed in the new rolls' entries. Each lease would be let on condition that the present tenant

would see that his land was ditched and hedged within his lifetime.14

Cardinal Pole, in Thomas Starkey's *A Dialogue Between Cardinal Pole* and Thomas Lupset, *Lecturer in Rhetoric at Oxford* (1536), reveals himself as a staunch supporter of sheep raising and enclosure, stating that only through enclosure can enough meat be raised to satisfy the needs of the English. Sheep, "by whose profit the wealth and pleasure here of this realm is much maintained," have an additional value. Previewing William Forrest's belief in the value of the wool industry to England's well-being, Pole continues: "For if your plenty and abundance of wool were not here maintained, you should have little brought in by merchandise from other parts, and so we should live without any pleasure or commodity."15 All of this, he relates, is dependent upon enclosure and the raising of large herds.

John Hales' Knight, who is the spokesman for the gentry in *A Discourse of the Common Weal* (1549), states that by 1549 enclosed land had become the most profitable land in parts of the Midland.

Experience should seem plainly to prove that enclosures should be profitable and not hurtful to the common weal; for we see that countries where most enclosures be are most wealthy, as Essex, Kent, Devonshire, and such. And I heard a civilian once say that it was taken for a maxim in his law, this saying: that which is possessed of many in common is neglected of all;


and experience showeth that tenants in common be not so good husbands as when every man hath his part in several.

The Doctor, protesting that he does not condemn all enclosure, replies to the Knight.

...if the land were severally enclosed, to the intent to continue husbandry thereon, and every man that had right to common, had for his portion a piece of the same to himself enclosed, I think no harm but rather great good should come thereof, if every man did agree thereto.16

The Doctor would probably have readily agreed to Fitzherbert's plan for enclosure. Hales, a commissioner on the committee to investigate enclosure in 1549, was well qualified to discuss both sides of the case; and he, like Fitzherbert, believed that enclosure was justifiable and necessary to good farming practices. Both, however, were highly conscious of the landlord's moral obligation toward his tenants and believed that enclosure could be countenanced only when it was by the common consent of all concerned.

The type of enclosing recommended by Fitzherbert and Hales' Doctor was not, however, the kind that called forth the criticism of most popular writers. Enclosure as an evil which dispossessed families and sent them out homeless and with scant means of livelihood, this was the type which the writers attacked. As early as 1520 the writer of the ballad "Now a Dayes" tells of the new agricultural trends.

Commons to enclose and keep;  
Poor folk for bread to cry and weep;  
Towns pulled down to pasture sheep:  
This is the new guise!17

16Hales, A Discourse of the Common Weal, p. 49.
When a land owner enclosed the common on his land, or even a part of the common, he violated not only the Statute of Merton, but also the manorial custom and the inherent rights of the peasant. If all or too much of the common were taken, the peasant was left without a place for pasturing his cattle. If a wooded area were enclosed and cleared for tillage or pasturage, he lost a place for gathering fuel for his fire. In order to get a large block of land, the owner might buy out many of his tenants. If any refused to sell, he was completely within his legal rights as owner to evict them. From such practices did sheep farming fall into bad repute. When the older tenants left or were forced to leave their houses, a general decay set in. The sod houses and the thatched roofs soon collapsed or washed down to an unrecognizable mound of earth. In some cases, whole villages were abandoned, and the ensuing deterioration excited much comment from those who had known the towns in their youth. In some cases, the houses were pulled down by the new owners, and the enclosers and "wasters of houses and villages" were attacked as destroyers of civilization. Some writers lay all the miseries of the age to sheep raising and enclosure.

What a sea of mischief hath flowed out of this more than Turkish tyranny! What honest householders have been made followers of other not so honest men's tables! What honest matrons have brought to the needy rock and cards! What men children of good hope in the liberal sciences, and other honest qualities (whereof this realm hath great lack), have been compelled to fall, some to handicrafts, and some to day labor to sustain their parent's decrepit age and miserable poverty! What froward and stubborn children have hereby shaken off the yoke of godly chastisement, running headlong into all kinds of wickedness, and finally garnished gallows trees! What modest, chaste, and womanly virgins have for
lack of dowery been compelled, either to pass over the days of their youth in ingratitude servitude, or else to marry to perpetual miserable poverty! What immodest and wanton girls have hereby been made sisters of the Bank (the stumbling stock of all frail youth) and finally, most miserable creatures, lying and dying in the streets full of all plagues and penury! What universal destruction chanceth to this noble realm by this outrageous and insatiable desire of the surveyors of lands.18

So spake the Archdeacon of Hereford, Robert Crowley, in An Informacion and Peticjon Agaynst the Oppressours of the Pore Commons of This Realm, printed in his own presses and addressed to the Lords and Commons in Parliament in 1550. This was the general tone of the popular sentiment at that time, and the flames of the public's wrath were continually fanned during those hectic years of the Commonwealth.19

Cardinal Pole, in Starkey's Dialogue, recognizes the fact that sheep were usurping the country, but this he attributed to a diminution of the rural population. In times past, he begins, cities and towns were much better inhabited than they are now. At the present (1536), many villages are utterly decayed, and land which supported many Christian people now maintains "wild and brute beasts." Where there were churches and homes, now there are sheep cotes and stables. Pole, the advocate of enclosure, felt that this was a natural phenomenon in a country where there was a scarcity of people.19


19 Starkey, Dialogue, p. 72.
The gentry and the speculators riding rough shod over the peasantry: that is the picture one gets from reading most of the popular Tudor literature, and the preachers seemed to carry the banner in the march against agrarian capitalism. The Rev. Thomas Becon's popular religious tract, *The Jewel of Joy* (1550), contains the following diatribe against the oppressors of the poor.

How join they lordship to lordship, manor to manor, farm to farm, land to land, pasture to pasture, house to house for a vantage? How do the rich men, and specially such as be sheepmongers, impoverish the king's liege people by devouring their common pastures with their sheep; so that the poor people are not able to keep a cow for the comfort of them and their poor family, but are like to starve and perish for hunger, if there be not provision made shortly....If these sheepmongers go forth as they begin, the people shall both miserably die for cold, and wretchedly perish for hunger.20

To the average man in the London streets, there was only one side of the enclosure question, and that was the bad side. The news of the disruption caused by the new hedgerows was spread through the countryside, and with each telling the enormities grew. Reputable clerics and popular hack writers told the same tale, and popular sentiment mounted against all phases of the agrarian revolution.

The nation endured in spite of rebellions and near-rebellions, but the landscape changed considerably during those first seventy-three years of Tudor rule. Hedges appeared to divide the land into large plots for tilled fields and pasture. Houses and villages disappeared, and a few

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large farms took the place of many small ones. The land in the parish
came under the control of a few large land owners, and land which at
one time supported a score or more families came to be maintained by
a few herdsmen. Hales' Discourse of the Common Weal contains the following
indictment.

Marry, for these enclosures do undo us all, for
they make us pay dearer for our land that we
occupy, and causes that we can have no land in
manner for our money to put to tillage; all is
taken up for pastures, either for sheep of for
grazing of cattle. So that I have known of late
a dozen plows within these seven years; and
where forty persons had their livings, now one
man and his shepherd hath all.21

England's population, although increasing during the first half of the
century, was beginning its migration to the urban areas, leaving a
countryside dotted with deserted villages to stir the imaginations of
romanticists for several centuries to come.

There was another type of enclosure which was considered to be
more evil than enclosing for farming or sheep ranching. This was the
enclosing of fields and forests for parks or hunting areas. It was a
common practice among the gentry, especially the nouveau riche, and
Fitzherbert devoted chapters five and six in his Book of Surveying to
the problems of enclosing parks. To those who were unfortunate enough
to be moved out of these recreation areas or to those who were denied
the use of woods for hunting or wood gathering because some lord wanted
a private game preserve, this seemed the height of blasphemy and a

21 Hales, Discourse of the Common Weal, p. 15.
violation of God-given rights. Henry Brinklow's anguish in his *Complaynt of Roderick Mors* (1542) is typical.

Oh Lord God, that it would please thee to open the ears of the king, lords, and the burgesses of the Parliament, that they may hear the crying of the people, that is made through the realm, for the enclosing of parks, forests, and chases, which is no small burden to the commons. How the corn and grass is destroyed by the deer many times, it is pitiful to hear! ...God grant the king grace, to pull up a great part of his own parks, and to compel his lords, knights, and gentlemen to pull up all theirs by the roots, and to let out the ground to the people at such a reasonable price as they may live at their hands. And if their will needs have some deer for their vain pleasure, then let them take such heathy, woody, and moory ground, as is unfruitful for corn or pasture, so that the common wealth be not robbed; and let them make good defence, that their poor neighbors, joining unto them, be not devoured of their corn and grass. Thus should you do, for the earth is the poor man's as well as the rich.22

Many of the wealthy in the reigns of the early Tudors were but a generation of two removed from the soil, and there was still a sincere appreciation of rural life. Their sincerity was overlooked, however, by the author of "Vox Populi, Vox Dei," who displayed the characteristic, middle-class scorn of those newly enriched.

For they that of late did sup
Out of an ashen cup,
Are wonderfully spring up.
That nought was worth of late,
Hath now a cupboard of plate....
With casting counters and their pen,
These are the upstart gentlemen;
These are they that devour
All the goods of the power,

And make them dotish davys,
Under the color of the king's laws.23

These "upstart gentlemen" desired their recreation, and they had the money to buy what they wanted. They wanted woods and fields to ride and hunt in, so they bought them, sometimes upsetting a centuries-old balance in the process. Thomas Lupset, in Starkey's Dialogue, remarks that during Henry VIII's reign there was a general exodus of the well-to-do to the country. "Every gentleman flyeth into the country," he states. "Few that inhabit cities or towns; few that have any regard of them...."24 Country life had become more peaceful than it had been in previous centuries. Moated and bastion-towered castles were giving way to country homes built with an eye to comfort and beauty. Those men who had spent their lives amassing wealth now desired the peace and quiet of the countryside. This impulse toward primitivism, however, was little understood by those dispossessed to make room for boar and bridle-paths.

A major grievance and one exploited by the popular writers and preachers was the intrusion of wealthy men from the city on the agrarian scene. The country gentry -- many of them -- were raising sheep and prosperous under the Tudors. Their city cousins cast covetous and envious eyes toward their possessions, and it was not long before the


24 Starkey, Dialogue, p. 93.
gentlemen of the city who had extra capital began to turn to sheep farming as a profitable investment. Public opinion, led by a chorus of popular writers, was against them from the first. As early as 1520 the author of "Now a Dayes" was attacking the gentlemen-turned-graziers and merchant-speculators. Ten years later an anonymous document, A Proper Dyaloge Betwene a Gentlliman and a Husbandman, attacked the Church and the manner in which it encouraged outside land speculation by city investors. By the 1540's and the reign of Edward every social critic was raising his voice against "the greedy cormorants," the land sharks. Thomas Lever, preaching at St. Paul's in 1550, struck the keynote in this attack against merchants-turned-graziers when he denounced the London merchants who were not content with their God-given wealth but covetously must become sheep farmers also, to the land's sorrow.

...but their riches must abroad in the country to buy farms out of the hands of worshipful gentlemen, honest yeomen, and poor laboring husbands.... A mischievous mart of merchandry is this, and yet now so commonly used, that thereby shepherds be turned to thieves, dogs into wolves, and the poor flock of Christ, redeemed with his precious blood, most miserably pilled, and spoiled, yea cruelly devoured.

Decay and immorality, the usurping of the good old days by bad modernity, greediness taking the place of charity: this was the trend in Tudor England as represented by the popular writers. And one of the

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25 "Now a Dayes," Ballads from Manuscripts, p. 97.

26 A Proper Dyaloge, p. 139.

most grievous complaints was that rich men left their city vocations in order to make more money off the land, land which was a sacred trust and a mother of people, not a commodity to be dealt with as one buys and sells coal or kippered herring. Robert Crowley depicted this new type of capitalist agrarian as the blackest sort of villain in his *The Last Trumpet* (1550).

There can be none unthrifty heir
Whom they will not smell out anon,
And handle him with words full fair,
Till all his lands from him is gone....
They have their spies upon each side
To see when ought is like to fall;
And as soon as ought can be espied,
They are ready at the first call.

In his epigram, "Of Marchauntes," Crowley again attacks the merchant-speculator, saying that "If merchants would meddle with merchandise only,/
And leave farms to such men as must live thereby," then they would be profitable members of the realm. As it is, he continues, they must be ever buying or leasing farms in order to let them out again, raising rents and fines and causing great pain to those who live off the land.28

The Reverend Thomas Becon in his treatise, "The Jewel of Joy," addressed the same sentiments to Elizabeth Tudor in 1550. Becon joined Lever in attributing the cause of all the wretchedness and beggary in the Edwardian era to the greedy gentlemen who had become sheepmongers. Because these graziers control the markets, they have been able to enhance the prices of cloth and mutton; and the "poor man must either buy it at their price, or else miserably starve for hunger, and wretchedly die for

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cold: for they are touched with no pity for the poor."

It was the attitude of unfeeling on the part of the investors which irritated the populace. To them it was a heinous offence for one of the country gentry to enclose his commons or wood or dispossess some of his tenants in a redistribution of land boundaries; ten times worse it was for one of London's mercenary land speculators to do the same thing. In that case, the action was a direct affront to the country man's sense of values.

Much of this antagonism toward merchant and gentleman speculators arose from the traditional Renaissance view that men were born into a particular social class and that they should remain in that class. The class system inherited from the Middle Ages was accepted by all degrees of society and popular literature concurred in its pronouncements.

Each man this law to learn,
And truely his goods to earn,
The landlord with his term,
The plowman with his farm,
The knight with his fare,
The merchant with his ware,
Then should increase the health
Of each commonwealth....

This from the voice of the people, "Vox Populi, Vox Dei." In 1535 Fitzherbert, in his prologue to The Book of Husbandry, categorized the people in six classes, the king, queen, bishops, knights, judges, and yeomen.

31"Vox Populi, Vox Dei," p. 280.
Thomas Lever supported the class system, God-ordained, stating that men were divinely placed in their vocations as merchants, gentlemen, lawyers, or courtiers. It was at the devil's beck that they forsook their positions and purchased farms and benefices, discouraging farmers from the tilling of the ground and ministers from preaching God's word. Crowley, who had something to say about every major social question in the time of Edward VI, devoted a quatrain to the problem of class.

For in the world there cannot be
More great abomination,
To thy Lord God, than is in the
Forsaking thy vocation.

The class system was generally accepted. Man was supposed to stay in his own caste and work at the position into which he had been born. Therefore, when it became necessary for the large landholders to turn to the tilling of their own land, this too was attacked as an act of trespassing on the vocation of another class. It was worse, indefensible, for merchants and wealthy artisans to control the agricultural land.

There was a good reason for this migration and speculation in agrarian matters, though. Heretofore the farming and sheep raising in the country had been of the type that merely afforded support and the purchase of necessities. Money was little used, and trade was carried on in kind. Therefore, there was little money in the country; England's newly-created wealth rested in the possession of the city dwellers. These

33Lever, Sermons, p. 50.

34Crowley, Works, p. 90.
new riches, which had been accumulating in the fifteenth century from an increase in trade and local manufacturing, needed an outlet in new opportunities for investment. They found this outlet in the expanding sheep industry and in agricultural real estate.

Accompanying this movement and bitterly attacked by the social commentators of the period was the raising of rents and fines (payments for the renewal of leases) by landlords and the new investors. Before this time rents and fines had been practically stationary for those who held land under the manorial custom. Now, however, there appeared a group of men who bought up land and leases and increased their cost to the renting farmers. The usual practice was to buy the leases from the landholder, increase the fines, and profit by the difference. Although the leaseholders were not the owners of the land, through speculation they reaped the profit from it, and this was considered morally and ethically wrong.

The most violent social criticism of the period, especially during the reign of Edward, was directed against the land-leasing rent raisers. Crowley castigates them in verse and prose and at every opportunity, calling them "counterfeit landlords" who are not able to be true land­lords but must obtain leases in order to play the part. He devotes two epigrams to their sort, one "Of Leasemongars," the other "Of Rent Raysers." The lease monger has a dream as he lies dying, and in this dream the oppressed tenantry tell him that because of their suffering under his hand they have been promised rewards in the resurrection. Such men as take leases, on the other hand, will be properly doomed to hell. The rent raiser increased his lands from ten to twenty pounds per year, paying
little heed to those who warned him against such practices and asserting that he might do as he liked with that which was his own. Soon, however, this man too fell sick; and a doom-laden voice spoke, "Give account of thy baliwick!" Crowley ascribed the dissension in Edward's England to the rent raisers, lease mongers, and enclosers.35 The grievances of Robert Kett and the Norfolk rebels in 1549 seconded this assertion.36 Crowley addressed Edward's Parliament in An Informacion and Peticion Against the Oppressours of the Pore Commons of this Realm and gave the lease mongers a proper pulpit drubbing.

And doubt ye not, you lease mongers, that take grounds by leases to the intent to let them out again for double and triple the rent, your part is in this plague. The Lord shall take his spirit from you. He shall forbid the clouds of his mercy to rain upon you with the sweet dew of his grace. And you surveyors of lands, that of ten-pound land can make twenty, you shall not be forgotten.37

For when you have multiplied your rents to the highest, so that ye have made all your tenants your slaves to labor, and toil, and bring to you all that may be plowed and digged out of your grounds, then shall death sudainly strike you, then shall God withdraw his comfortable grace from you, then shall your conscience prick you, then shall you think with desparate Cain, that your sin is greater than that it may be forgiven.38

The country man, protected for generations by manorial custom, was now being attacked by the shrewd and wealthy city business man, and the


36 For the Norfolk Rebels' petition of grievances, see Ballads from Manuscripts, I, i, 147-151.

37 This could be a direct attack against Anthony Fitzherbert, who in his Book of Surveying entitled one chapter "How to Make a Township That is Worth Twenty Marks a Year, Worth Twenty Pounds a Year."

38 Crowley, Works, p. 162.
attacker's weapon was an instrument unknown to the rustic. It was a legal right based on an objective interpretation of the law, divested of humanitarian considerations, and completely impersonal. Of course, the renter suffered under this system. He could pay if he had the money; if he lacked the necessary rent, he could take his family and leave to search for another farm, if one could be found which he could afford and which had not been usurped by sheep. Public opinion was not so much concerned with the legality of the procedure as it was with the result of it. Land, so they believed, was the possession of all mankind. People of a certain class, the nobility, were delegated the responsibility of the land, but they were obligated to see that their acreage supported a certain number of people. If the land were kept from the people by enclosure or high rents, the original purpose of the land would be subverted, and legality had nothing to do with the right and wrong of land management.

These new land owners, who constantly relied on the letter of the law in order to get control of the land, were belabored rather vigorously by most of the popular writers, whose favorite epithet for them was "extortioner." Henry Brinklow, in Complaynt of Roderyck Mors (1542) berates them for causing the decay of villages and the depopulation of the countryside. Where once were sixteen households, he says, now there is but a sheep house and two or three shepherds. The lease mongers control all the land, and it has come to the point that a poor man can "scarcely have a hole to put in his head for these great extortioners."\(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\) Brinklow, Complaynt of Roderyck Mors, p. 49.
Latimer this kind of "extortion," meaning that mere legality had superseded manorial custom, was an undermining of the princely power of the king; and those who engaged in such practices—"extortioners, violent oppressors, ingrossers of tenements and lands, through whose covetousness, villages decay and fall down"—were violating the dignity of the crown and the crown’s responsibility to the poor. William Forrest’s "Covetous Lord who conscience hath not" usually had the law on his side, but the people and those who had the people’s ear complained both piteously and wrathfully against him and were ever invoking the aid of the king and parliament to help them in their defence.

There was, however, an explanation for this rise in land values, especially for the skyrocketing of rents and fines between 1540 and 1558. Between 1527 and 1551 the debasement of the coinage was carried on to such an extent that coins were reduced to one-seventh of their value prior to this time. That is, the shilling in 1551 contained one-seventh the amount of silver contained in the shilling of 1527; the remainder of the coin was alloy. This debasement caused complete disorganization of the English economic and commercial system, a fact which John Hales recognized and to which he devoted a large part of the dialogue in A Discourse of the Common Weal. A speech by the Doctor summarizes his (and presumably Hales’) conclusions concerning England’s financial state.

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40 Latimer, Seven Sermons, p. 33.

...I think this alteration of the coin to be the first original cause that strangers first sell their wares dearer to us; and that makes all farmers and tenants, that reareth the commodity, again to sell the same dearer; the dearth thereof makes the gentlemen to raise their rents, and to take farms into their hands for the better provision, and consequently to enclose more grounds.  

The price of wool rose from 6s. 8 3/4d. per tod (twenty-eight pounds) in 1530 to 20s. 8d. in 1550, maintaining an average price per tod of 16s. from 1550 until 1582. The value of the money decreased; the price of wool compensatorily increased. The increase in the price of wool, although ultimately unsound financially, caused the appearance of an agrarian prosperity which was the bait to land speculators. They made their lease or land purchases, raised the fines and rents from their customary value to meet the rising financial scale caused by debasement, and resultantly jarred a set of wage, land, and market values which were as old as English feudalism.

The author of "Now a Dayes" tells us that abbots and priors were enclosers, and in sixteenth century popular literature we read about enclosing and speculating on the part of the clergy. Roy and Barlow's Rede Me and Be Not Wroth (1530), radically Protestant, makes the following accusation against monastic land policy.

They undermined husbandmen,
   In this manner them robbing.
   Where a farm for twenty pounds was set

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42 Hales, Discourse of the Common Weal, p. 104.
43 Rogers, A History of Agriculture and Prices in England, IV, 328.
44 "Now a Dayes," Ballads from Manuscripts, p. 95.
Under thirty they would not it let
Raising it on so high a sum.
That many good householder
Constrained to give his farm over
To extreme beggary did come.\(^5\)

These complaints against monastic enclosure were mild compared to the complaints which arose after the dissolution of the monasteries\(^46\) and the subsequent misuse of monastic lands. Those small farmers who held abbey lands were generally untroubled by the agrarian revolution. It is true that there were cases of rent raising and enclosure, but taken as a whole, the Church was not among the chief sinners. Then, between 1536 and 1540, and with the dissolution of the chantries in the reign of Edward, all of the monastic and clerical holdings came under the control of the king, who, in turn, presented them to his courtiers or sold them to investors. The speculators, whose only interest was mercenary, enclosed and dispossessed as it suited their purpose; and the ranks of the poverty-stricken increased. Again the cry went up from the popular social commentators that there was a misuse of land, a lack of feeling of responsibility on the part of the land owners. Henry Brinklow, a rabid anti-papist, went so far as to suggest that it would have been better for the people and England had the monasteries remained in the hands of the Church, for "they never enhanced their lands, now took so cruel fines as do our temporal tyrants."\(^47\)

\(^5\) Roy and Barlow, Rede Me and Be Not Wroth, p. 98.

\(^46\) For further information concerning the dissolution see Geoffrey Baskerville, English Monks and the Suppression of the Monasteries (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937).

\(^47\) Brinklow, Complaynt of Roderyck Mors, p. 100.
fifteenth of England's land was placed on the market during the process of dissolution; according to popular assent, most of this land fell into hands of investors who considered not "the law of nature and of charity" in dealing with their tenants.

Statutes and proclamations were passed against enclosure, engrossing, and rent raising throughout the reigns of the Henries, Edward, and Mary; but since the enforcement of these statutes rested within the power of those who were benefiting from their violation, very little was ever done. In 1488 Henry VII passed an act against the depopulation of rural areas by the dispossession of the tenantry by enclosers and engrossers. How effective this act was we can see by later attempts to curb the same evils. In a petition addressed to the king in 1514, Henry VIII was asked to see to those covetous Merchant Adventurers, clothmakers, goldsmiths, and other wealthy artificers, traders, and gentlemen who had converted their farms to pasture, depriving former tenants of their livelihoods. "So that where was in a town twenty or thirty dwelling houses, they be now decayed, plows and all, and all the people clean gone and decayed, and the churches down, and no more parishioners in many parishes, but a neatherd and a shepherd...." Henry replied in a proclamation of the same year, stating that no man would be allowed to purchase and own more than one farm and that that farm must be under tillage "by the feast of St. Michael the Archangel next coming." By the same time all pasture land which had been under cultivation at the

48 The following information concerning statutes and proclamations against enclosure relies chiefly on Ballads from Manuscripts, I, 1, 1-107.
beginning of Henry VII's reign must be restored to cultivation on pain of "the king's high indignation and displeasure." Evidently this proclamation was little respected, for in 1516 an act of parliament reaffirmed the preceding proclamation, adding that the owners of untilled land would forfeit half the value of the neglected land and homesteads yearly, until the land be restored to its former usefulness. Nineteen years later in 1535, Parliament passed another act against neglect of tillage, and we see that nothing has changed, except for the worse, since the Proclamation of 1514.

For as much as divers and sundry of the King's subjects of this realm, to whom God of his goodness hath disposed great plenty and abundance of movable substance, now of late within few years have daily studied, practiced, and invited, ways and means how they might accumulate and gather together into few hands, as well great multitude of farms, as great plenty of cattle, and in especial sheep, putting such lands as they can get to pasture and not to tillage, whereby they have not only pulled down churches and towns, and enhanced the old rates of the rents of the possessions of this realm, or else brought it to such excessive fines that no poor man is able to meddle with it....

The act continues, blaming an over abundance of sheep for the dearth, poverty, and crime of the nation and limiting each grazier to two thousand sheep, penalizing him 3s. 4d. per sheep for any over that number. Two years later 27 Henry cap. 22 ordered that all land owners maintain in good condition one farm house for every twenty acres of tillable land. By 1549 there was no amelioration of agricultural conditions, and among Kett's grievances are the following.

We pray your grace, that no lord of no manor shall common upon the common....
We pray that it be not lawful to the lords of any manor to purchase lands freely, and to let them out again by copy of court roll, to their great advancement, and to the undoing of your poor subjects.

"We have good statutes made for the common wealth as touching commoners, enclosers, many meetings and sessions, but in the end of the matter, there cometh nothing forth," said Hugh Latimer in 1549.

Supplications to the king and parliament in the time of Edward were commonplace, and most writers made it a point to show that that which was a disrupter of the people was also injurious to the king and peace of the nation. The writer of "Vox Populi, Vox Dei" addressed a long supplication to the king to remedy the oppression of the people. The most complete denunciation of the agrarian revolution, however, was presented in the form of a short tract in 1550, rather verbosely entitled "Certayne Causes Gathered Together, Wherin Is Shewed the Decay of England, Only by the Great Multitude of Shepe, to the Utter Decay of Houshold Keping, Mayntenaunce of Men, Dearth of Corne, and Other Notable Discommodityes Approved by Six Olde Proverbs." The "Six Olde Proverbs," around which the argument is constructed, are as follows:

The more sheep, the dearer is the wool.
The more sheep, the dearer is the mutton.
The more sheep, the dearer is the beef.
The more sheep, the dearer is the corn.
The more sheep, the scantier is the white meat.
The more sheep, the fewer eggs for a penny.

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49 Latimer, Seven Sermons, p. 41.

50 Vox Populi, Vox Dei," p. 270.
The anonymous author handles each proverb separately, showing that all of England's troubles are derived from an over emphasis on sheep. Through some intricate maneuverings in a maze of hypothetical figures, he concludes that 300,000 people have been set to vagabondage by the usurping sheep. 51

If one were to study the agrarian problem between 1485 and 1558 from the standpoint of contemporary writers alone, he would conclude that it was a seventy-three-year period encompassing changes of the most drastic kind. Crowley, Brinklow, Latimer, Becon -- all of these writers, and more, painted pictures of dismal hues, of countless acres of land enclosed, of thousands of homes and villages decayed and tumbled down, of universal rack-renting, and of numberless families forced from the homes of their ancestors to roam the highways of England as rogues and vagabonds. The popular preachers, pamphleteers, and poets denounced enclosures as immoral and higher rents as extortionate. A few, like Hales and Starkey, were able to see that there were other causes for agrarian and national discontent. Some, like Tusser and Fitzherbert, supported the enclosure system of farming. But most of the writers of popular literature and social criticism were agreed that enclosure and its accompanying evils -- sheep, high rents, rural depopulation -- were the causes of all of the turmoil and disquietude which seemed to increase to a climax during the reign of Edward VI. That they were doing more than

whistling up a wind is confirmed by an examination of the statutes and proclamations passed during this period.

A different picture is painted by modern historians, most of whom agree that only a small percentage of the land was enclosed before 1558 and that contemporary accounts are greatly exaggerated.\(^{52}\) Fisher, analyzing the 1517 Commission on Enclosure, notes that enclosed acreage is only a small percentage of the whole, less than four percent.\(^{53}\) Gay, who admittedly underestimates the total area enclosed between 1455 and 1607, arrives at 2.76 percent, allows the reader to double that figure if he so desires, and states that the amount of land enclosed was still not enough to merit the attention which sixteenth century social critics paid it.\(^{54}\) Leadam's figures, which are in extreme contrast to Gay's, indicate that in particular sections the percentage of land enclosed is high, in one case as high as ninety-six percent of the total area.\(^{55}\) His figures seem to be based on isolated and carefully chosen areas, however, and do not represent a study of a large, typical area or of the

\(^{52}\) S. T. Bindoff, Tudor England (Middlesex: C. Nicholls and Co., Ltd., 1952)), p. 23.


whole of England. Prothero, in general agreement with Gay, concludes that between 1455 and 1637, 750,000 acres were enclosed and 35,000 people were dispossessed,\textsuperscript{56} the latter figure varying considerably from the 300,000 dispossessed by 1550 according to the writer of "Decay of England." Gay's estimate for the period between 1455 and 1607 was 516,673 acres enclosed. Black, considering the results of enclosure during the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, takes 6.23 percent as the maximum percentage of land enclosed in any one area, in this case the Midlands.\textsuperscript{57} Gay's statistical survey and enclosure map indicate that the Midlands were most affected in the enclosure movement. In the northern, western, southern, and eastern sections of England, only a very small percentage of the land had been enclosed by the end of Mary's reign. It is hardly necessary to point out the discrepancy between the historical conclusions and the situation as depicted by the emotionally involved writers.

At the same time, one cannot forget that no matter how negligible enclosure appears from statistics, it was not considered so by those "statistics" who were displaced or dispossessed. The oppressed could not be objective, nor could most of the popular social critics. They were in the midst of a movement which was causing untold misery to those who were uprooted by it; and geographically London, the abode of most of the popular writers, was located near the vortex of the movement, the fertile Midlands. The City received many of the dispossessed, and their

\textsuperscript{56} Rowland E. Prothero, English Farming Past and Present (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), p. 66.

wailing increased the public's wrath against the speculators and greedy landlords. The precarious state of England during the Edwardian era had to be laid to something, so enclosure became one of the whipping boys of that period.

Even now, it is impossible to differentiate between cause and effect. Were the popular social critics spurred on to more and more violent denunciations of the agrarian movement by an increased awareness of this problem on the part of the masses, or were the people incited to an awareness of the problem by the denunciations of the popular writers? A conservative conclusion is that it was a combination of the two. The people, especially of London, were well aware of the effects of the enclosure movement and could see that the way of life of their medieval ancestors was retreating rapidly before the new way of capitalism, that the principle of commons was giving way to the principle of severalty, that the group spirit of the Middle Ages was losing to Renaissance individualism, manorial custom to court legality, and that land, which once merely provided subsistence, was now required to yield a substantial profit. This they saw and in their conservatism deplored. Add to this a feeling of compassion for those who were dispossessed or displaced and those whose rents and fines had been doubled and tripled since the coming of the Tudors, and the aroused citizenry can be understood and sympathized with. The popular writers, both tools and toolers of the masses, were also conscious of the problems; and most of them were better informed. As the public's mouthpiece they voiced the public's anger; and just as the public, then as
now, is prone to exaggerate conditions and is emotionally unfit to judge degree, so were the writers guilty of taking individual cases and isolated situations and inflating them to more dramatic proportions. As the moulders of public opinion, these writers dramatized their reports intentionally for effect and dramatized them unintentionally because of inaccurate observation and thus excited the people to further antagonism toward the malpractices of the landed class.

It can now be seen that England's troubles, especially at mid-century, cannot be blamed solely on sheep and enclosure or lease mongers. These problems, along with debasement of the coinage and the accompanying inflation, the reformation and dissolution and a loss of respect for time-honored religious principles, and the increase in the number of sturdy beggars and impotents, were coincident with England's putting off of her rustic and rural ways for her emergence as a modern industrial society. That the popular chroniclers of that time were unable to see past their own present day is not difficult to understand. They were excited by public complaint and opinion; and caught up in this spirit of righteous and wrathful indignation, they added fuel to an already roaring fire.
CHAPTER IV

Inflation and the Dearth

The England which Henry VII claimed as his own in 1485 was a country on the tide of prosperity. The storm of the Roses dynastic struggle had passed over the lower and middle classes, who had submitted to each successive power; and the last thirty years before Bosworth were a time of growing wealth and expanding commerce. Henry himself furthered the prosperity of his realm by his careful management of the government's finances. He was a thrifty administrator, and in addition to establishing his nation on a sound economic basis, he amassed a sizeable fortune of his own. The coinage was in a satisfactory condition in 1485; and Henry kept it that way, improving it in some respects. He simplified exchange by coining large gold and silver coins which corresponded to the names in use in accounting monetary values. Thus, he struck the first shilling and sovereign (twenty shillings), which were to compete with the 8s. 4d. noble and the 6s. 8d. angel. The shilling and the sovereign were the first English coins to bear a life-like royal portrait. The conventional, frozen-faced crowned figure gave way to a realistic profile on the shilling and a representation of Henry on his throne on the sovereign. This new interest in the coinage, the country's sound economical foundation, and Henry VII's own hoardings were all marks of prosperity. It was a prosperity that was expanding to the point that
new monies were needed to meet the needs of a country in which medieval payments in kind were giving way to modern payments in money.¹

These good times, however, were not to continue indefinitely. The prosperity which showered down its blessings on the upper and lower strata of society became discriminatory as the sixteenth century progressed, and by the 1530's the distance between the price scale and the wage scale for the laboring class was becoming noticeably wider. By mid-century the difference between wages and cost of living had become so great that the entire country was affected, and popular social critics were including this high cost of living, the dearth, among their other standard targets for condemnation. Hales, Latimer, Crowley, Forrest, Becon: all could see the terrible hardships the high prices were working on the lower classes of society and on those whose incomes had been fixed by custom or contract before the inflation began. Each writer had his particular explanation for the cause of the dearth. Some blamed sheep and enclosure; some felt that debasement of the coin-age was the cause of the high prices; and some believed that the


For information concerning the production of the mint under the first two Henry's, especially Henry VIII, see Nora Milnes, "Mint Records in the Reign of Henry VIII," English Historical Review, XXXII (1917), 270-273.
inflation was caused by a general sinfulness of mankind. Whatever the cause, all concurred in the opinion that the dearth was one of England's major complaints at mid-century.

Before examining the attitudes of these sixteenth century social commentators, it is necessary to examine the inflationary sixteenth century prices and compare them with prices before the dearth. First, let us consider grain. The average price of wheat between 1400 and 1540 -- a period which saw only minor price fluctuations -- was 5s. 11 3/4d. a quarter (eight bushels); of barley, 3s. 8 3/4d.; of oats, 2s. 2 1/4d. At the height of the dearth, between 1540 and 1560, the average price of wheat was 12s. 8 7/8d.; of barley, 8s. 1 1/4d; and of oats, 4s. 7 3/8d. Wool rose from an average price of 6s. 2 1/4d. per tod (twenty-eight pounds) between 1400 and 1540, to 18s. 2d. between 1540 and 1560. The prices of oxen, calves, and boars tripled their pre-1540 value. The cost of imported items, such as wines, pepper, cloves, cinnamon, etc., doubled during the dearth years. What made these price increases so significant and created the dearth was the fact that wages did not rise commensurately. The cost of foodstuffs and clothing materials had risen to approximately twice their pre-inflationary value; the wages of most laborers and artisans had increased on an average of fifty percent. Because of the dissolution of the monasteries, the disbandment of liveried retainers, the eviction of many families during the enclosure movement,

2All references to prices in this chapter are taken from Rogers' History of Agriculture, Volume IV, and may be found at the end of the chapter pertaining to the particular commodity mentioned.
and the steady increase in population, there was an abundance of laborers for hire, and their value was not "cried up" along with the enhancement of the cost of saleable commodities. These were the ones that suffered. Those good old days when the wage-cost of living ratio was such that the laborer could prosper were past; and the new era with its capitalistic finance was slowly widening the gap between the common man and the things he wished to purchase.

Although inflation did not occur in such proportions as to arouse much popular criticism prior to the mid-century decades, there had been sporadic comment by popular writers early in the sixteenth century. The anonymous author of the ballad "Now a Dayes" considered the dearth to be one of the marks of a decaying English society as early as 1520.

The great disorder in every city
Causeth great dearth and poverty.
Alas! Alas! it is great pity
That rich men be so blind,
Which for their great pride and fulsome fare,
They pluck and pull their neighbors bare,
And shortly brought behind.3

Another anonymous author considers the three or four years before 1529 to have been dearth years. His tract, entitled "Considerations Following, Wherefore All Manner of Victuals Hath Been So Dear," merits close attention because it is one of the earliest attempts in the sixteenth century to arrive at specific causes of inflation. As has been mentioned above, there was no appreciable rise in prices to be noted in Rogers' lists before 1540. On the

other hand, Wolsey's devaluation of the coinage in 1526 undoubtedly helped cause the slight rise in prices in the years immediately following. This reason is overlooked by the author of the 1529 tract, an oversight which would seem to indicate that the 1526 devaluation was considered of little economic consequence at the time. To continue with the causes of the dearth according to the tract: "First, the king's wars outward, the French wars of 1523-1527, with two or three years continuance of the same, hath been one occasion of dearth; for it was never seen but in time of outward war, dearth always hath ensued." In the same year that the war ended, our author continues, a rot and murrain infected the cattle in the worst epidemic in forty years. Also, after 1525 there were three exceedingly dry summers, causing a scarcity of grass, hay, and water, the death of many livestock, and the subsequent scarcity of meat. Because of a lack of winter grass, much stock died in the winters following the dry summers. For lack of feed, the sheep and cattle bred less, and the result was fewer lambs and calves. The drought-caused scarcity of beans, peas, and mast also brought on a scarcity of pork and fowl and increased the prices of both. Because of the great drought, wild "fish and fowl is utterly destroyed and be at the treble price that they were wont to be at." These figures cannot be verified, since Rogers has no statistics on the price of

4 These increases may be noted on Rogers' chart, pages 351-352. Although there was a light rise in livestock prices in the latter part of the third decade of the sixteenth century, most prices remained very close to the average for the period, 1400-1540, and the increase which our author describes is a comparative one, based on prices in the early 1520's.
wild game. Further enhancing the price of meat, continues the writer, is the forestaller, or middle-man, who purchases the stock from the farmer, raises the price, and sells them at a figure that assures him of a substantial profit. Sometimes, we are told, the farm product goes through three or four hands before it reaches the consumer. With each handling, of course, the price is raised; and by the time it reaches the buying public, it far exceeds its original value.  

That the rise in prices must have been enough to arouse the people is evident by the legislation this inflation brought on. To check the high prices of meat, the statute of 24 Henry VIII, cap. 3 was passed, fixing the prices per pound at 1/2d. for beef and 5/8d. for mutton. The act was evidently not observed, for in the following year another act (25 Henry VIII, cap. 1) added additional powers to ensure its enforcement. Both acts were suspended in 1536, probably because it was impossible to enforce them, ostensibly because there was a great scarcity of food, caused by heavy rains followed by an epidemic among the livestock. It seems more than likely that the farmers were holding back their stock from the market until the ceilings were taken off of meat prices.

At about the same time that "Considerations Following" appeared, in 1529, there was circulated the anonymous *A Proper Dyaloge Betwene

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5 "Considerations Following, Wherefore All Manner of Victuals Hath Been So Dear," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, 1, 18-20.

6 For the texts of the most important acts controlling the prices of grain and foodstuffs from 1533 to the end of Edward's reign, see Ballads from Manuscripts, I, 1, 40-50.
a Gentillman and a Husbandman. The husbandman recognizes a dearth and attributes it to the rent raising on the part of the monastic land holders. The gentleman in the dialogue replies:

This were great shame to be known,
Seeing that half the realm is their own,
That they charge you with such exactions.
Me thinketh so to do is no small crime,
For they kept as good houses aforetime,
While their farm hires were far less.

The husbandman continues his castigation of the monastic evil of rent raising and enclosing, showing how towns and villages had been destroyed, people evicted, and prices enhanced.

By such means all things waxeth dear,
Complaint of subjects crying far and near,
Oppressed with grievous calamity.

Reginald Cardinal Pole, in Thomas Starkey's "A Dyaloge Between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset" (1536), lays the blame for the dearth on both the landholders and the farmers. The farmers have been negligent in raising livestock and produce, thereby creating a scarcity and a dearth. Pole would use the strength of the crown to force them to produce certain necessary commodities. "And another thing there is which few men observe," continues Pole, is the enhancing of rents. "For if the farmers pay much rent, and more than is reasonable, they must needs sell dear of necessity; for he that buys dear may sell dear also justly." Pole would set the rents of all land at the rate prevailing "when the people of England flourished," presumably in the reign of Henry VII or the early years of Henry VIII.

When foodstuffs are expensive for the city dweller, Pole concludes, he must sell his ware after the same rate in order to sustain his family. "And so, consequently, of this root springs all dearth of all things...."^8

All of these pre-1540 accounts by popular writers were merely previews of what was to come in the next two decades. The "terrible dearth" which these writers talked about was insignificant compared to the inflationary anarchy at mid-century. Naturally, at the time of the preliminary inflation before 1540 the rise in prices seemed calamitous, but as yet the wage-price balance had not been sufficiently disturbed to throw England's middle and lower classes into chaos; this was to come in the 1540's.

We have now arrived at the turbulent 'forties, in which decade the Great Dearth was spawned. In the early part of the fifteenth century, manufacturing and commerce in Europe had outstripped the supply of money for exchange. Therefore, with much goods and little money in circulation, the prices had been low. There followed a spurt of inflation in the middle of the fifteenth century when there was an increased output of German and Italian silver and gold, but soon production again overtook the supply of currency, and prices dropped and remained low until the next influx of precious metals, this time from the New World, in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. It took some time for this wealth to be dispersed from Spain throughout Europe, and its influence on England was not noticeably felt until after mid-century.

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This is not to say that there was no effect on the foreign exchange, but that the gold and silver itself did not enter England in any appreciable quantities before the reign of Elizabeth.\(^9\)

There had always been times when high prices had occurred and a dearth had been proclaimed by popular writers. As we have noticed, an inflationary period could be created by wars, severe drought, or epidemics among livestock. The agrarian revolution was causing a slight price rise.\(^10\) Increased trade with an increase in the handling of goods before their final retailing caused prices to be higher than they had been in the previous century. But more specifically, the causes of the Great Dearth in England arose from two outstanding cases of political mismanagement: the dispensation of the dissolution lands into the hands of the speculator-capitalist and the debasement of the coinage.

The crime of the dissolution was not so much the confiscation of the church lands as it was the placing of these lands under the control of individuals who had little feeling of responsibility for those whom the monastic lands had nurtured.\(^11\) As A Proper Dyaloge Betwene a Gentill-man and a Husbandman points out, there were cases of enclosure, rent raising, and even dispossession on lands under Church control. There is


little evidence, however, to show that these evils were widespread.
For the most part, the Church was conservative, even backward, in its land management; and the tenants' obligations were those of their ancestors. Then, when the land — and the people it supported — came under the control of the king and he passed it on to his courtiers and sold some to real estate investors, there was a drastic revision of policy. The speculator was not in business for mere sustenance; he was after profit. In order to realize a profit, he was forced to raise the rents of the land; and to pay the landlord's rent, the farmer raised the prices of his livestock and produce. When this increase in the price of foodstuffs reached the landlord, he was required to raise his rents again in order to maintain the same margin of profit, and so we have the pendulum of inflation continually swinging, first to the landlord, who raises the rent, then to the tenant, who raises the price of his foodstuffs, then back to the landlord, each forced to enhance the value of his goods in his turn. Of course, owners of other than dissolution lands were doing the same thing and had been doing it for years, but the agrarian revolution and the price revolution which accompanied it had been held in check somewhat by the conservatism of the Catholic landholders, who held approximately a quarter of the usable land in England. In 1539, with the dissolution of the monasteries, and 1548, when the chantries were dissolved, this large amount of land was put on the market for speculation. Those who invested in this land and raised the rents and fines in order to profit by it were chief among those responsible for the dearth.
Rent raising was a favorite target of attack of the popular social commentators. By the Edwardian period, when inflation was at its highest, high rents existed throughout England, and there was little difference in rents between lands that were once Church owned and lands which had been manorial. The anonymous "Vox Populi, Vox Dei," circulating in the Edwardian era, cried out against the mismanagement of the church land and the enhancement of its rents by the gentlemen-turned-graziers. The author recognizes the economic cycle but holds the rent-raising landlord responsible from the beginning. The landlord raises the rent; the farmer sells his livestock dearly; and the butcher is forced to sell a carcass of mutton for twelve shillings or a mark. "This is a piteous case! What poor man is now able/ to have meat on his table?" These are the new ways, our author laments; and the commons are unable to pay these new, inflationary prices. The "poor" men (not the poverty stricken, but middle-class artificers, laborers, husbandmen, etc.) who at one time had plenty of butter, eggs, cheese, and honey are now sorely oppressed by the dearth; and it is on these sturdy, middle-class folk that the responsibility for defending the realm rests: "O most noble king," he counsels, "consider well this thing."¹²

Hugh Latimer attributed the inflation to the rich landlords who desired "too much" for their lands. Land that in olden times rented

for twenty or forty pounds a year, he relates, is now let for fifty or a hundred pounds.

Of this "too much" cometh this monstrous and portentous dearth made by man, notwithstanding God doth send us plentifully the fruits of the earth, mercifully, contrary unto our deserts: notwithstanding, too much, which these rich men have, causeth such dears, that poor men, which live of their labor, cannot with the sweat of their face have a living, all kind of victuals is so dear; pigs, geese, capons, chickens, eggs, etc. These things with other are so unreasonably enhanced; and I think verily that if it thus continue, we shall at length be constrained to pay for a pig a pound.

Latimer later attacks those graziers and farmers who hold their wares until they get the price they demand. From the reports of Latimer and Hales, it seems that there was no scarcity of food during the years of the Great Dearth, which indicates the extent to which these politically-caused forces affected the national economy.

Robert Crowley devoted three of his "Epigrams" to the rent raisers, lease mongers, and forestallers, all responsible types in precipitating the dears. Specifically, he laid the cause of inflation to the rent raisers and those who hoarded their goods, waiting for high prices.

Although the author of the tract, "Certayn Causes Gathered Together, Wherein is Shewed the Decaye of England" (c. 1550), does not directly attack rent raising, he does attack the abundance of sheep, a phenomenon

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13 Hugh Latimer, Sermons by Hugh Latimer, George E. Corrie, ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1844), pp. 98-99. Boars on the hoof were 15s. in 1548, 16s. in 1549, and 30s. in 1551; Rogers has no hog prices for 1550; op. cit., p. 527.

coincident with rent raising, and attribute the dearth to an over abundance of sheep. Landlords have now stocked their lands with sheep, he says, and rather than sell wool at a low price they hold it until they can sell it dearly. Where two farmers used to raise beef, now they raise mutton; and so many people eat mutton that it has become expensive. What little beef is raised is sold dearly because of its scarcity. Sheep raising has also taken the place of tillage, and now there is a scarcity of corn, which is also dear.

Finally, with the decay of cottages and farming communities because of enclosure for sheep raising, there is little poultry raised and high prices must be paid for poultry and eggs. All of these conditions prove the proverb:

The more sheep, the dearer is the wool.
The more sheep, the dearer is the mutton.
The more sheep, the dearer is the beef.
The more sheep, the dearer is the corne.
The more sheep, the scarcer is the white meat.
The more sheep, the fewer eggs for a penny.\(^{15}\)

No one, however, was able to see the whole of the economic difficulties at mid-century as clearly as John Hales. His *Discourse of the Common Weal of This Realm of England* (c. 1549) is sharply focused on the financial mess England had gotten itself into by the time of Edward VI. Enclosure, debasement, foreign trade, the dearth: Hales considered them all and discussed them in his dialogue from the standpoint of different segments of society. A merchant, knight, husbandman,

Capper, and doctor discuss the dearth in the first dialogue of "A Discourse of the Common Weale." The husbandman asserts that enclosures are the cause because they have raised the value of rents and have caused much land to be converted from tillage to pasture, resulting in a scarcity and high prices. The capper complains that the dearth has caused him to release some of his apprentices and increase the pay by two pence of those he kept. "Therefore the city, which was heretofore well inhabited and wealthy," concludes the capper, "is fallen for lack of occupiers to great desolation and poverty." The merchant agrees that the land has fallen into decay, that all cities except London are showing the signs of poverty, and that the roads and bridges of the countryside are falling into disrepair because no one has enough money left after paying high prices to pay taxes for repairs. In addition to this, continues the merchant, not only is home-grown produce extremely dear, but imports have increased by a third since 1543. The merchant then repeats Latimer's observation that there is no scarcity of foodstuffs and livestock in the country and concludes with the statement that if enclosure is the cause of the dearth, it should be eliminated. The knight, a landholder, protests that enclosure is not the cause of the dearth; for by enclosure a large harvest of corn has been made the previous years and corn has remained cheap. Enclosure has also increased the number of livestock. The knight admits that there is a dearth, but

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16 According to Rogers, *History of Agriculture*, pp. 289-290, the price of wheat jumped from 7s. 11 1/4d. in 1542 to 16s. 4d. in 1549.
rather than consider himself the cause of it, he feels that he is the victim of it; for all who live by the selling of their wares can keep abreast of the financial times by advancing their prices. The knight protests that he has nothing to sell to "countervalue" those things which he must buy. The husbandman, merchant, and capper quickly accuse him and all landholders of raising rents to the detriment of a sound economy. The knight justifies his position, asserting that much of his land is leased under terms that were made before the dearth. In order to live as he is accustomed, he must purchase other land — possibly dissolution land — rent at the present inflationary rate, or enclose it and raise livestock. "Yet all is little enough!"17

The question of inflation, its causes, and possible remedies is discussed throughout the dialogue; and we may gather that these were popular opinions of the time. Finally, though, the doctor, the omniscient arbiter of the debates, points out the true cause of the dearth. Earlier he had shown how the difference between money values in England and Europe caused Englishmen to buy dearly and sell cheaply.18 Now he shows how the debasement of the coinage is the principal reason for the rise of prices in England. "For even with the alteration of the coin began this dearth; and as the coin appeared, so rose the price of things withal." Take, for example, a coin which was minted before the debasement in 1543. With it can be purchased as much wares, either


18 Ibid., pp. 16-17.
domestic or foreign, as could be bought before the debasement.

And thus, to conclude, I think this alteration of the coin to be the first original cause that strangers first sell their wares dearer to us; and that makes all farmers and tenants, that rear any commodity, again to sell the same dearer; the dearth makes the gentlemen to raise their rents, and to take farms into their hands for the better provision, and consequently to enclose more ground.

The doctor then shows that the only solution to the financial problem of the realm is a restoration and revaluation of the coinage. The coinage in circulation since the debasement began should be devalued until its face value was equal to its intrinsic value. Coinage hereafter should be minted at "the old rate and goodness." 19

A study of Hales' work provides a link between the two causes of the dearth, since he considers both the agrarian revolution, accompanied by a rise in land and agrarian values, and the debasement of the coinage. We may accept Hales' view that debasement was the principal cause of the Great Dearth of mid-century. Capitalist agrarianism was one cause and would have brought about a rise in prices had there been no debasement, but inflation would not have advanced as rapidly as it did when accelerated by Henry VIII's mischief in 1543. Perhaps with a slow increase in prices there would have been a commensurate rise in wages, and the dearth could have been avoided. As it was, the prices skyrocketed in the seven years between the beginning of debasement under Henry and its climax under Northumberland,

19Ibid., pp. 104-105.
and the working man's wages were forgotten in the rush.

Devaluation and reduction of size of money was nothing new in the sixteenth century. Ever since Edward III first added gold money to the currency of England, rulers had felt constrained at times to alter the value of the coinage in order to maintain a proper ratio between the two metals. When silver rose in value, the silver coins were reduced in size; when its value decreased, they were made larger. These early changes, however, were made honestly; the ruler was not seeking a way to pay his debts cheaply or increase his treasure. These sins were reserved for Henry VIII. 20

Henry inherited a sizeable fortune along with his father's throne in 1509, but his lavish expenditure at court and his attempts at trimming and maintaining the balance of power in Europe soon reduced the wealth left by Henry VII to nothing. 21 He existed precariously on forced loans and benevolences during the years prior to 1526, at which time the first significant tampering with the coinage began. The sovereign (twenty shillings) was cried up to 22s. 6d., the 6s. 3ds. angel to 7s. 6d. As it was explained to the people, the king desired to make the money current in England to be of the same value as that

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21 The following information on the history of the debasement of the coinage relies chiefly on Charles C. Oman's "The Tudors and the Currency, 1526-1560."

For further information concerning the financial state of England during the period under discussion, see Frederick C. Dietz, "English Government Finance, 1485-1558," University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, IX (1920), 1-124.
used abroad, because heretofore the much finer English coins were bought up by foreigners and recoined in their own mints at a considerably higher value. That the king should adopt this plan to equalize standards was economically sound and politically honorable. What was not divulged to the people, however, was the fact that Henry's creditors, while receiving the same nominal amount, would get only eight-ninths as much bullion. Allowing the earlier pieces of coinage to circulate at this new rate, Henry proceeded to mint new coins at the twelve percent reduction.

To ensure the economic stability of the realm, the king forbade any person to raise the price of his merchandise by using the reason that the money had been enhanced. The prices of some commodities did rise slightly, however, as we have seen in the 1529 tract, "Considerations Following, Wherefore All Manner of Victuals Hath Been So Dear." At the same time, increased sheep and cattle raising was driving many people off the farms and into the cities, increasing the urban labor force and keeping wages down to the pre-1526 scale.

Henry was content to leave the coinage alone for several years after the 1526 reduction. The sale of the dissolution lands helped him financially for a few more years, but by 1543 he was again desperately in need of money and in poor standing with his creditors. This year marked the beginning of debasement. The gold money was little affected; the alloy was increased by only two penny weight per ounce of gold. In silver pieces the alloy was increased from one-thirteenth to one-fifth in each coin. In addition to increasing the amount of alloy, the pound of gold, which since 1527 had been coined
into £20 of money, was now to be coined into £28. The pound of silver was to be coined into 48s. instead of 45s.

As a result of the debasement Henry was able to pay his debts with only five-sixths as much bullion as was earlier required. Also, the old, undebased coinage began to leave the country because foreign traders refused to accept the debased currency at face value; and the price of foreign goods rose.

In 1545 England was accosted on the north and east by her bitterest enemies, Scotland and France. She suffered a defeat at Ancrum Moor at the hands of the Scots and barely escaped a devastating war with France by the intervention of a plague which decimated the French troops. Although England was safe at the end of the year, she had been forced to pay heavily for the mustering of the troops to her defence. To acquire this money Henry debased the coinage a second time. Instead of £28, £30 was coined from a pound of gold. The weight of the silver did not change, but the silver coins became half alloy. In the following year Henry debased the coinage again, minting silver coins that contained twice as much alloy as silver.

Henry died in 1548, leaving the coinage in a miserable state. Nothing was done to improve its condition during Edward's first years, and Somerset continued minting money of the same stamp and baseness as Henry had issued. In 1549 a well publicized purification

\[22\] For the financial condition of England from 1548 to 1558, see Frederick C. Dietz, "Finances of Edward VI and Mary," Smith College Studies in History, III (1918), 57-135.
of the coinage was made. Edward issued coins which were not as base as those from the 1546 mint, but they were not as large either. In fact, they contained the same amount of silver as did those of the previous mint. Ostensibly to rectify the coinage problem, Somerset made a second move to restore the proper value to the currency, calling down the value of the shilling from 12d. to 9d. and bringing the extrinsic value nearer to the intrinsic value that it had formerly had.

The nadir of the coinage was reached under Northumberland in 1550, in which year he not only called down the shilling from 9d. to 6d. but he issued coinage that was baser than Henry's last issue. To pay off £80,000 of royal debts Northumberland coined silver of that nominal value, which was abased by three-fourths alloy. This was the basest money ever to be minted in England.

Toward the end of Edward's reign an honest attempt at purification was made. The purity of the silver coinage was restored to eleven ounces two penny weight fine out of twelve, approximately what it had been before the 1527 casting; but the size of the pieces was smaller than those minted in that year. The fineness of the gold sovereign was also improved, but not as much as the silver coins. What should have been the beginning of a restabilization of the English financial system, however, failed because the 1543-1550 coinage was not called in. The crown refused to take this expense; and as a result, all of the fine currency was spent abroad, where it received full, intrinsic value or was hoarded by the first receivers, who perhaps feared that the government might have another fling at
debasement if the state debts became overburdening. Bad money drove out good, and the old money alone was seen in the market tills. Naturally, the dearth continued; for the public, seeing only the base coinage to which it had long been used, continued to set its prices accordingly.

The repeated debasement and crying down of the coinage which was at its worst during the Edwardian era, caused a steady rise in prices which reached a peak around mid-century, according to Rogers' figures. A surprisingly small number of the popular social critics attributed the Great Dearth of mid-century to debasement, however. Thomas Becon, in his tract, "The Fortress of the Faithful" (1550), announced that the cause was the general sinfulness of the people.

Methink the occasion of this dearth, wherewith we are now oppressed is not so greatly to be ascribed unto the covetousness of certain greedy gripes, as unto our own selves, unto our own ungodliness and dissolution of life, which so live as though there were no God at all, also behave ourselves as though there were neither heaven nor hell.

William Forrest's "A Pleasant Poesye of Princelie Practice" (1548) indicts the forestallers and rich farmers, who in time of plenty hoard up grain in order to create high prices through scarcity. This sin, he concludes, is the cause of the dearth and the misery of

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23 This is best noted by a study of ten-year price averages found at the end of each chapter in Rogers' History of Agriculture, IV.

the poor and "crieth for vengeance to heaven from the earth."\(^\text{25}\)

"Dr. Haddon's Exhortation to England to Repent" (1551) preached that for her sins England was being scourged by the three plagues of rebellion, the sweating sickness, and the dearth.

O England! why dost thou defer
To put on sackcloth next thy skin,
Or ashes on thine head to scatter,
Since God doth scourge thee for thy sin....

Hereof, so sore a dearth doth spring;
Hereof, cometh filthy poverty;
A scourge eke sent from God to stinge
And plague the proud with scarcity.\(^\text{26}\)

Hugh Latimer, who was an enlightened social critic as well as a scourger of the sinful, was able to view the problem from a more practical aspect. Likening himself to the prophet Isaiah, who also commented on things made impure, Latimer asserted that the debasement of the coinage was effected through covetousness, that it tended to hurt the poor people of England, and that he and Isaiah were responsible for administering reproof in such cases. This sermon, the third in a series of eight preached before Edward VI, answered charges of sedition which he said had been made against him for attacking debasement in earlier sermons. In his first sermon before the king he had been facetious in regard to the coinage.


\(^{26}\) "Dr. Haddon's Exhortation to England to Repent," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, ii, 326-327.
We have now a pretty little shilling indeed, a very pretty one: I have but one, I think, in my purse; and the last day I had put it away almost for an old groat: and so I trust some will take them. The fineness of the silver I cannot see....

As early as 1548, Latimer, attacking unpreaching prelates, attacked the low state of the mint. "I cannot tell you; but the saying is that since priests have been minters, money hath been worse than it was before. And they say that the evilness of money hath made all things dearer." 27

The Edwardian ballad "Vox Populi, Vox Dei" complained of the baseness of the coinage. Merchants who trade overseas, it lamented, are forced to pay high prices for their goods because the English currency, which at an earlier time was much more precious than the European coinage, has declined to such an extent in intrinsic worth that foreign merchants refuse to take it at its face value. Therefore, the English merchant is forced to sell imports at the inflationary rates if he is to make any profit.

This coin by alteration
Hath brought this desolation,
Which is not yet all known
What mischief it hath sown.

Woe unto those who began the debasement, concludes the writer, for they have oppressed the commons, and great pain is in store for the

27 Latimer, Sermons, pp. 137, 95, 68.
nation before the sick currency be well again.\textsuperscript{28}

John Hales' editor, Elizabeth Lamond, believes that the doctor in \textit{A Discourse of the Common Weal} might possibly be Hugh Latimer;\textsuperscript{29} and knowing that prelate's attitude toward debasement, this seems to be a valid hypothesis. The doctor is quite vehement in denouncing debasement — more so than Latimer was in his sermons before the king -- and ascribes the dearth to the state of the coin.

And now I must come to that thing...which I take to be the chief cause of all this dearth of things, and of the manifest impoverishment of this Realm, and might in brief time be the destruction of the same, if it not be rather remedied, that is the basing or rather corrupting of our coin and treasure; whereby we have devised a way for the strangers not only to buy our gold and silver for brass, and not only to exhaust this Realm of treasure, but also to buy our chief commodities in manner for nothing.

The doctor continues to philosophize on coinage values, expressing the sixteenth century belief that the only sound currency was one in which the face value of the coins corresponded fairly closely to their intrinsic value. For a government to interfere with the metallic content was thus to upset not only the currency but the values and prices expressed by that currency. This was especially so concerning foreign trade. Coinage would be accepted overseas for its intrinsic worth only; therefore, a greater number of the coins would be required to purchase items during a period of base money than would


\textsuperscript{29} Hales, \textit{Discourse of the Common Weal}, pp. xxi-xxiv.
be required if the money were pure. "We must buy dear all things brought from beyond the seas, and therefore we must sell again as dear our things, or else we should make ill bargains for ourselves." The cost of foreign merchandise has risen a third part since debasement began; the same increase has taken place in the cost of English goods; and the angel that before debasement was worth twenty groats is now worth thirty, but there is less silver in the thirty than there was in the twenty. The doctor concludes with the remark that trade in kind with foreign countries would show that the intrinsic values had not changed, i. e., "we shall have as much silk, wines, or oils from beyond the seas, for our tod of wool now as we might have had before the alteration of this coin."  

The result of debasement, the doctor informs the knight, will be the impoverishment of the realm. All of the old coinage and precious metals in other forms are being hoarded or sent out of England. In spite of the king's orders against the exportation of gold, men have found ways to get it out of the country, "as by putting the said coin in their ship's ballast, or in some vessels of wine, or other liquor transported to us or from us. Then, every creek in the Realm have not searchers; and if they had, they be not such saints as would be corrupted for money." The departure of the wealth of the realm can be extremely disastrous, explains the doctor; for if the king finds that he must wage war, he will also find that there is no money in the land with which to hire men and ships and purchase guns.

30 Ibid., pp. 69-80.
and armor. The wealth of a nation is its *nervi bellorum*, its sinews of war, and without wealth a king is powerless.³¹

Hales shows an amazing understanding of public affairs and social problems; certainly he is the only popular writer who deals so fully with the problem of debasement. As a political figure he was closely in touch with the difficulties of his times; and his comments on the agrarian revolution, the balance of trade, the dearth, and debasement, to mention a few, are enlightened, thoughtful, and objective, more so than those made by most of his contemporary social protest writers.

When Mary came to the throne in 1553 she announced her intention of restoring the purity of the coinage. In that same year, whether before her announcement or after is not known, a treatise was circulated by John Pryse, who addressed the work to the Queen. The work is introduced by the phrase, "Things to be taken for sure grounds about the restitution of the coin," and this is followed by five reasons why the coinage must be restored to its old purity. The first reason is as follows:

> No prince can set price of any wares to endure for any time, no more can he bring to pass that his coin shall be better esteemed specially any long time, than the goodness of the metal that the coin is made of doth require, because every realm must have traffic with other, and metals have their prices set certain, one above another in their degrees through the whole world, as one portion of gold is worth twelve times as much silver....

At that time, according to the extrinsic value of the 1543-1550

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coinage, the gold-silver ratio in England was five to one. Secondly, the value of merchandise is measured by the intrinsic value of the money. Thirdly, the print inscribed on the money is supposed to be the sign of the intrinsic value of the money. Fourthly, "...as the coin is abased the price of all things that are vendible must and do arise after the same portion that the coin is so abased." Pryse adds that English money has been altered in two ways, by debasing its purity with alloy and by decreasing its size and weight; and now the value of the currency is a third of what it has represented. Finally, the best money is being carried out of the realm, and only the old, debased coinage is left with the English. Pryse counsels an immediate restoration of the purity of the coinage — "though there were once some loss to be borne therein" — if financial equilibrium is to be restored.\(^{32}\)

In spite of the need for a reform of the coinage, in spite of very legitimate and reasonable protests by popular social critics, Mary's intentions came to naught. She coined money that was of fineness equal to the pre-1527 mint. She struck the old noble and angel with their original medieval faces and medieval purity. But the all-important step of calling in the base money in circulation was not taken. Consequently, her coinage went where all good money had gone since 1543 — overseas, and the inflationary prices continued to exist.

It was left to Elizabeth to do away with the base currency that had plagued England since 1543. At the first of her reign she sent out investigators to determine the amount of the debased coinage then in circulation. On a fixed day these men took a survey of the currency in the tills of all the butcher shops in London. They then issued a proclamation entitled "The Summarie of Certaine Reasons, Which Have Moved Queen Elizabeth to Procede in Reformations of Her Base and Course Monies, and to Reduce Them to Their Values, In Sorte, as They May Be Turned to Fine Monies." This proclamation, which was circulated in a six-page booklet form, was extremely persuasive in nature, pointing out simply but emphatically the various evils which debasement had caused. A reformation would discourage the many counterfeiters, prevent the transportation out of the realm of the nation's wealth, curb inflation, allow those who lived on fixed incomes to be able to purchase the same amount with their pensions or stipends as was originally intended, and would restore England's financial integrity on the foreign exchange. The proclamation admitted that the measure might cause some slight loss and inconvenience at the first, but asked the people's cooperation, stating that the process was "not much unlike them that, being sick, receive a medicine,


"The Summarie of Certaine Reasons, Which Have Moved Quene Elizabeth to Procede in Reformations of Her Base and Course Monies, and to Reduce Them to Their Values, in Sorte, as They May Be Turned to Fine Monies," The Harleian Miscellany (London: Thomas Osborne, 1746), VIII, 67-69.
and in the taking feel some bitterness, but yet, thereby, recover health and strength, and save their lives." The proclamation stated that each piece would be paid for according to its intrinsic value. Most of the coins in circulation in 1560 had been struck between 1545 and 1549, and the testoons, or shillings, were called in for 4 3/4d., a loss of 1 1/4d. to the holder. Elizabeth, who had planned to take a loss in the transaction, gained £15,000 in the end, when a large portion of the money turned out to be from the 1543 mint and was not so debased as the average currency minted thereafter. Most of the people were happy to exchange their old coins for Elizabeth's bright, new, unabased coinage, though; and there was no noticeable adverse reaction to her profiting.35

Prosperity, falling prices, and increased wages did not immediately follow this reformation of the coinage. In fact, prices remained much the same throughout the rest of the century. The benefits of the reformation were seen in increased manufacturing and commerce and in a higher standard of living.

Prices had been destined to rise in England in the latter half of the sixteenth century because of the influx of New World silver.36 There would have been a slight rise in prices before mid-century because of the agrarian revolution, and wages were fated to remain low because of the over-supply of manpower. But without debasement

35 For a discussion of the Elizabethan revaluation, see Oman, "The Tudors and the Currency," p. 186.

the rise in prices and the widening gap between wages and prices would have been gradual. By his financial imprudence Henry suddenly and artificially unbalanced the English economy and set in rapid motion a change that, had it been slow, would not have worked such tremendous hardships on the people as the Great Dearth of the mid-sixteenth century produced.

Popular literature again provides us with a reflection of the prevailing moods and attitudes of the times. Conservative to the last, many social critics saw that prices had increased two and threefold in the decade preceding 1550 and bewailed the passing of a centuries-old national economy. They generally agreed that the inflationary period, especially in the 1540's, was coincident with a national moral breakdown in society, easily demonstrated by the agrarian practices of indiscriminate enclosure and heartless rack-renting. Some blamed the weather, foreign wars, sheep, and the general sinfulness of mankind; but very few — Hales and Pryse were exceptions — were able to see that behind England's economic anarchy was Henry's unethical tinkering with the purity of the coinage. Most of them were unable to see the devastating effects of debasement. Very few of the social critics were far ahead of their times or were outstanding as economists. They were not particularly acute or sensitive social critics and were able to see only the results of the dearth, not the causes; and what influence popular literature had on effecting Elizabeth's final revaluation and calling in of the debased coinage was probably slight.
CHAPTER V
Vagabondage and the Poor

Vagabondage was nothing new in England when Henry VII came to the throne, but it did achieve a notoriety in the Tudor Age which it had not had before. Its swelling ranks began to attract attention. The poor had always been numerous, but by the middle of the sixteenth century their increasing numbers became frightening. Vagabonds -- and this term will be applied to the vagrant class generally -- became an element to be reckoned with in considering every social problem. Some were harmless, impotent beggars who were merely an affront to sight and sensitivity. Others were rogues who bore their hands against every man; were a wild, dissolute, and incorrigible band; and would as soon slit a gullet as a purse. Both types were scabs on the body politic, however, and were legislated against as one group. Large bands of these vagabonds aided the rebels and malcontents in the riots and uprisings of the period. Traveling the highways was hazardous throughout the century because of the many sturdy rogues who lay in wait in the hedges, ready to accost any who seemed to be easy pickings. Even traversing the city streets became dangerous to those who went without one or more companions or, at night, a guard. Through the Tudor Age the depredations of this idle band increased, bringing with them the indignation of the public whom these "masterless men" habitually molested and laws which eventually
curbed the extent of their activities.

Vagabondage and the poverty which generally engendered it had long been the subject of political concern. The Hebrews considered beggary to be the outgrowth of idleness and punished severely those who would not work. Those Egyptians who objected to labor were given the choice of accepting work or being executed. Greece regarded vagabondage as evidence of willful poverty and punished the offenders with death. The Romans put beggars to work on public buildings or in mines, certainly the most advanced method for curbing beggary. The Teutons cast their mendicants into bogs and let them starve. But in spite of the severity of the ancient laws, begging and vagabondage increased during the Middle Ages and achieved professional status with the publication of Liber Vagatorum, around 1514. This work, like John Awdeley's "Fraternity of Vagabonds" (1561) and Thomas Harman's "A Caveat for Common Cursitors" (1566), considers vagabondage as an organized body, having various degrees of rank and a technical vocabulary peculiar to its own members.

Of all the pre-Tudor commentators on popular grievances in

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England, William Langland was the most thorough in discussing
the problem of vagabondage. Vagabond minstrels had not yet
disappeared in the latter half of the fourteenth century and
were held in low estimation by the author of Piers the Plowman.
Langland condemns them and their idle ways, declaring that
they refuse to work, that they are swearers of great oaths, and
that they make fools of the people with their lying stories. These
"japers and jugglers and janglers of jests" are reverenced and
attended more than the preachers, and money is given to them when
it is denied the worthy poor (C-text, I, 35-38; B-text, X, 31-35).
Although Langland believed in Christian charity to the poor,
this charity, he felt, was not to be extended to every beggar. Some
beggars make their rounds until they fill their sacks; then they
begin an orgy of gluttony and debauchery among their fellows (C-text,
I, 41-46). Many affect a disability in order to excite the sympathy
of passers-by, and some of these lawless people break the bones of
their children to gain the pity of alms givers. Some affect the
actions of "lunatic lollers" and leap about and roll on the ground
to attract attention. These people hold no laws nor responsibilities
to man or the state; decency and morality are unknown among them,
and Langland likens them to animals (C-text, X, 137-188). They are
thieves, says Langland, and all men are in danger from them when a
trip must be made (C-text, XIV, 58). Popular writers voiced these
same ideas with increasing frequency a century and a half later.

The first half of the sixteenth century was a period in which
vagabondage in England increased steadily. The number of rogues
and beggars was larger in proportion to the total population than it had ever been before or has been since. There had been professional beggars for centuries, and their ranks had been increased by Christian but thoughtless charity and by the chaotic and anarchic fifteenth century wars, but by the Tudor Age it had become obvious to all who considered the problem that this class was rapidly getting out of hand. Methods of poor relief and means for curbing the depredations of the sturdy beggars were instituted and changed frequently, but their numbers grew and the terror which they caused in their uncontrolled wandering caused mounting anxiety among the people. As early as the last decade of the fifteenth century, the Italian secretary to the Venetian ambassador commented on the problem of the poor in England and the laws which had been passed to control vagabondage.

Such severe measures against criminals ought to keep the English in check, but, for all this, there is no country in the world where there are so many thieves and robbers as in England, insomuch, that few venture to go alone in the country, excepting in the middle of the day, and fewer still in the towns at night, and least of all in London.

The vagabonds were feared and detested and were severely punished

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with scourge, brand, and gallows; but still they came. They infested the cities; they descended on the villages to gull, connive, beg, and steal everything the restics failed to bolt down; and they slunk along the roads and highways, always ready to pounce on the poorly protected traveler, take his valuables, and— if need be — cut his throat. These wandering people were everywhere in the sixteenth century, and they were amply documented in broadsheets, plays, sermons, acts of council, royal proclamations, and almost every paper dealing with the social state of England. Popular literature recognized the problem and lent its aid to arousing enough public sentiment and protest to effect a solution — or attempt to effect a solution.

As has been noted earlier in this study, the period in which social protest writing reached its peak in the sixteenth century was in the turbulent 'forties and early 'fifties. This phenomenon occurs in literature relating to vagabondage also. There were several early references to the great number of the poor to be found in England, however, and one occurs in the ballad, "The Maner of the World Now A Dayes" (c. 1515), which J. P. Collier in the preface to the work attributes to John Skelton. The poet, remarking on the evils of his age, notices the increase of thieves and beggars and dissolute "carders" and dicers. His jaundiced view of the state of society in general would make his conclusions suspect if they were not substantiated in many cases by laws sumptuary and otherwise. That he considered vagabondage on the increase is to be
noted by the following verse.

So many a vagabond
Through all this land,
And so many in prison bound,
I saw never....

This poem can be compared with the longer and more generally critical "Now a Dayes," which circulated around 1520. Both poems are concerned with the moral and social decay of the realm and its institutions, and one of the signs of the times' going from bad to worse, states the poet, is the increase and the state of vagabondage.

Little selling and much pleading,
Many children and small wedding,
Much theft and more begging;
Such is their poverty!

The beggars and rogues were a plague, generally infesting the countryside. They were to be found in great droves camped in remote corners of commons, much like the denizens of the hobo jungles which flourished on the outskirts of towns in the 1920's and 1930's. They wandered among the alleys begging and stealing. They hung about the churches and monasteries waiting for their doles and hand-outs. And most disgustingly, they flocked to weddings, christenings, and burials, where they expected and got the benefit of charity which according to custom, and sometimes will, was dispensed on those

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occasions. Thomas Harman, in his "Caveat for Common Cursitors," relates an incident that occurred in 1521, which illustrates this custom and the extent to which it was carried. At the burial of a certain gentleman in Kent, there was such a gathering of vagabonds about the house of the deceased that they could hardly find room to stand. When night came on, the wanderers were furnished with a large barn and a whole beef and bread and drink, and every one of them was given two pence. When the barn was looked into later in the evening there were counted

seven score persons of men, every one of them having his woman, except it were two women that lay alone together for some special cause. Thus having their mates to make merry withal, the burial was turned to boozing and belly-cheer, mourning to mirth, fasting to feasting, prayer to pastime and pressing of paps, and lamenting to lechery.?

One "Jest in Merry Tales, Wittie Questions and Quicke Answeres (1535) is based on the practice of the poor receiving almesse on such occasions. In this instance a blind man is led by a boy to a country house where a wedding has just taken place; and he stands around begging until he is given meat and the "leg of a fat goose." Such practices as these must have been extremely obnoxious to those who were accosted, especially since the medieval attitude toward charity began to change radically in the materialistic early sixteenth century.


Public attention was focused — not for the first time — on another sort of beggar in 1528, when Simon Fish circulated his tract, "A Supplication for the Beggars." It was a direct and vitriolic attack on the begging friars, pardoners, and other clergy-men who exacted charity from the people under the color of religious need. Fish, who adopted the persona of a legitimate beggar, bewails the loss of alms which are given to clerical beggars instead of to those who are in need and deserve charity. These churchmen are "not the shepherds, but the ravenous wolves going in shepherd's clothing, devouring the flock" and their substance by demanding tithes of corn, wool, wages, and even the poor wife's eggs; practicing private masses and probating wills, and requiring fees and other payments for their every act and service. "Is it any marvel though there be now so many beggars, thieves, and idle people? Nay, truly." The author's picture of the king's beadmen gives us a fair knowledge of the condition of that class of beggars at that time and typifies what must have been their wailing ways of imploring the charity of the people.

Most lamentably complaineth their woeful misery unto your highness, your poor daily beadmen, the wretched hideous monsters (on whom scarcely for horror any eye dare look), the foul, unhappy sort of lepers, and other sore people, needy, impotent, blind, lame, and sick that live only by almesse....

Cardinal Pole in Thomas Starkey's "Dialogue Between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset" (1536) asserts that the poverty of the realm is of late occurrence and seems to infer that the rash of vagabondage has come since Henry VIII ascended the throne. Where in times past there were great riches and liberality, now there is wretchedness and poverty, he states; and where there was abundance, now there is scarceness and penury. "For this is sure, that in no country in Christendom, for the number of people, you shall find so many beggars as be here in England, and more now than have been before time; which argues plainly poverty." Their numbers were made much more obvious by the fact that the general population was steadily diminishing, according to Pole.10

Henry Brinklow, pointing to the great numbers of beggars, stabbed the consciences of those who still remembered the oft-repeated sermons on charity so common to the medieval pulpit. In his 1545 tract, The Lamentation of a Christian Agaynst the Cytye of London Made by Roderigo Mors, the author hearkens back to the medieval plan for alleviating poverty through the charitable giving by everyone who was able to give.

...London, being one of the flowers of the world as touching worldly riches, hath so many, yea innumerable of poor people forced to go from door to door, and to sit openly in the streets a begging, and many not able

to do anything else but lie in their houses in most grievous pains, and die for lack of aid of the rich, to the great shame of thee, O London. That the poor are always with us is amply evidenced by the contemporary written word; that they were becoming even more of a danger to the state in the Edwardian era is shown by the increased concern of popular writers and preachers with the problem. "O merciful Lord, what a number of Poor, Feeble, Halt, Blind, Lame, Sickly — yea with idle vagabonds and disssembling caitiffs mixed among them — lie and creep, begging in the merry streets of London?" exclaimed Thomas Lever in a sermon in 1550. But it was more than a simple concern with their number that attracted the attention of the mid-century social commentators. The Reverend Thomas Becon in his preface to "The Fortress of the Faithful" (1550) voiced what seems to have been the general attitude toward vagabondage. Becon begins by despairing for the "wretched and too much miserable face of this needy and beggarly world" and bemoans the circumstances that produced the innumerable beggars. He continues by saying that because of a lack of clothes and sustenance many whose brains were not perfectly "settled" and who were not patiently bearing the cross of poverty according to Christ's order and their bounden duty were causing dissension within the realm — "abominable seditions,


devilish insurrections, detestable commotions, unrighteous spoil- ings of other men's goods, uncharitable railings upon their superiors..., not considering this plague of famine and hunger to be sent into the world for sin...."13 The vagabonds were now definitely more than eye-sores and petty thieves; they had become a menace to the commonwealth itself. This army of the idle was ready to join in any move through which they might gain plunder, and some of the vagabondage laws of the period were particularly directed against the vagabonds who were sowers of sedition and who gathered in such uprisings as those which occurred in 1549 in Norfolk, Cornwall, and Devon.14 In that same year a tract by Sir John Cheke, "Hurt of Sedicion Howe Grevous It Is to a Commune Welth," concluded with the following indictment of those who participated in Kett's Rebellion.

When we see a great number of flies in a year, we naturally judge there is like to be a plague; and having so great a swarming of loitering vagabonds, ready to beg and brawl at every man's door, which declare a greater infection, can we not look for a grieyouser and perilouser danger than the plague is?15

The Protector's first action in areas of revolt and uprising was the directing of an order to Justices of the Peace to enforce rigidly all laws against idle vagabonds. The people were becoming


more and more afraid of this lawless band; but it was just this fear for their own safety and the welfare of their nation that finally led to a fairly good set of controls to curb the rogues in the last years of Elizabeth's reign.

Edward's reign significantly produced the harshest poor law and the most protest literature against vagabondage in the Tudor Age. Later popular writers perhaps appealed to a larger audience and had a more tenacious grip on their place in the history of English literature, but few wrote with the sincerity of those popular authors of the mid-sixteenth century who could see lawlessness breeding lawlessness. The Edwardian era was a panic period, and the writers of social protest literature could see quite clearly that along with the agrarian revolution, the Reformation, and the dearth, another problem — equally pressing — was the question of what to do with the rogues and beggars, "the infinite number of poor men," that infested England.

It would be difficult to arrive at any one reason for the increase of vagabonds during the period 1485-1558. Most of the popular writers, though, sought for the causes of this plague of rogues and beggars and arrived at some limited conclusions. "The Boke of Maid Emlyn," a popular poem in circulation around 1515, traced a whore's progress to the Bankside stews in London and intimated that this district was filled with such wayward women because of that sex's penchant for

lechery. Thomas Lupset in Starkey's "Dialogue Between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset" laid the cause to simple idleness on the part of the vagabonds: "For it is their own cause and negligence that they so beg; there is sufficient enough here in our country of all things to maintain them without begging." The anonymous author of "A Supplication of the Poore Commons" (1546) asserted that many people were driven to begging in order to pay for the church sacraments, especially at Easter and in the case of burial fees. The Nice Wanton, an interlude of 1547, attributed the cause of increased roguery to a laxity in the rearing of children — a quite modern concept — and moralized at great length on the benefits of birch-rod discipline. No one, however, went to such lengths to explain the causes of increased beggary as did Robert Copland in "The Highway to the Spital-house" (1535). Copland asks the porter of the spital-house the cause of so many beggars. The porter admits that it will be tedious business and spends the following ten pages explaining the various deeds that brought the spital folk to beggary. There are clerics that lived viciously, young heirs that spent their inheritance on "dissolute plays,"


several different kinds of business men who failed to collect debts or sell their goods high enough, people who married too young, masters who pampered their servants, men who were ever at law with their neighbors, and husbands who allowed their wives too much clothing and liberty and were not the masters in their house, to mention a few.

Alas! silly men, ye are ill at ease,
These dainty housewives for to feed and please:
For so they sit and sew half an hour on a clout,
Their whole day's work is patched out,
And so by their trifling, and living nought
With other means, they be higher brought. 21

The causes of the increased vagabondage seem to be more general than those just cited, however, and more closely knit to the English social picture. There were four groups among these wanderers who were victims of their times, who had fallen into vagabondage because of a widespread and unfeeling movement toward materialism which accompanied the Renaissance. All four groups had been dispossessed of a way of life and left without their customary means of making a living. Early in the Tudor Era — on the command of Henry VII — were cast out the liveried retainers, who, having spent their lives as decorative reminders of their lord's temporal power, were now lacking in goods and talents. With this group can be considered those who have been a part of society ever since nation has warred with nation. These were the soldiers, who, when war was over, returned discontented with the more prosaic and unexciting methods of making

a living and decided to pursue a vocation of chance and one in which they had received good training — the profession of vagabondage. Also early in the Tudor era came the first notice of the devastating effects of the enclosure movement. Land which for generations had supported several families was now being fenced in and the farmland turned to pasture, and the people whose forefathers had cultivated the land as their own were left homeless. A fourth group of dispossessed persons was the result of the dissolution of the hundreds of monasteries in England; and with the accompanying eviction the ranks of the rogues and beggars were augmented again; for many of the dispossessed were beggars by profession, and with the loss of the cross as their beggar's emblem, they turned naturally to the tin badge of their secular, and equally parasitic, counterpart.

In the ballad, "Now a Dayes" (c. 1520), we find a verse expressing the following reason for the increase of rogues and beggars:

Temporal lords be almost gone,
Households keep they few or none,
Which causeth many a goodly man
For to beg his bread:
If he steal for necessity,
There is no other remedy
But the law will shortly
Hang him all save the head.22

Contrary to that author's intimations, the temporal lords were not curtailing the size of their households because of a lack of social responsibility. The king had so ordered it. The crown of the first Tudor sat precariously on his head. His title was not indisputable,

22 "Now a Dayes," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, 95.
and there were several of the old Yorkist faction who would have rejoiced at his misfortunes. Henry VII, however, was as wise in ruling after Bosworth Field as he was lucky in winning before it. He recognized the fact that most of England's political troubles were caused by the numerous proud and haughty nobles who were usually warring among themselves but who, if once united, could present a more than formidable front to the power of the throne.

In order to counter this potential threat, Henry established laws limiting livery and maintenance. It was the beginning of the end of the powerful nobility. The law not only called for the "punishment of such persons that give or receive liveries, or that retain any person or persons or be retained with any person or persons" (Statute of Liveries, 1504), but it also deemed it a crime against the throne to bestow any badge or emblem as a sign of allegiance to any particular nobleman. In many cases the lords had hundreds of retainers; practically all of the nobility had a few men under livery. When the law became fact and was enforced, many of the noblemen simply took back their livery and turned their retainers to household tasks. Some of the lords paid fines to the crown and were given special permission to keep a certain number of men under livery. Many others, and this was the generality, were forced to disband their retainers. This flooded the country, says Sir Thomas More in his Utopia, with "a great flock or train of idle and loitering serving men, which never learned any craft whereby to get their livings." More's comment on the plight of the discharged serving men exemplifies the attitude of thoughtful people in the second decade
of the sixteenth century; and although it is out of the realm of popular literature, its particular appropriateness to this problem requires that it be quoted.

Then, in the mean season, they that be thus destitute of service often starve for hunger, or manfully play the thieves. For what would you have them to do? When they have wandered abroad so long until they have worn threadbare their apparel and also appared their health, then gentlemen, because of their pale and sick faces and patched coats, will not take them into service. And husbandmen dare not set a work, knowing well enough that he is nothing meet to do true and faithful service to a poor man with a spade and mattock, for small wages and hard fare, which, being daintily and tenderly pampered up in idleness and pleasure, was wont with a sword and a buckler by his side to jet through the street with a bragging look, and to think himself too good to be any man’s mate.

From all accounts, discharged serving men made good rogues and vagabonds. They must have added a certain amount of prestige to their new vocation, and we can believe that, accustomed as they were to a good and easy living, they formed a group which quickly conformed to rogue traditions. William Roy and Jerome Barlowe’s Rede Me and Be Not Wroth (c. 1529) reminds us that the temporal lords were not the only ones who set adrift their servants. The authors accuse the Church nobility of maintaining servants in idleness, who, when they are dismissed and are masterless, "are constrained to beg or steal." 23

Ever since wars began the discharged veteran has constituted a social problem. The veteran of World War II standing on the street

corner wondering what to do with himself was faced with the same problems as the soldier returning from Henry VIII's wars. To both the future seemed rather pale and sickly; and after the first thrill of being home was past, the problem of how to ease the mounting boredom arose. Many, especially those whose family ties were weak, felt no call to return to their old ways of life. Others, not so fortunate, returned sick or wounded and could not get home if they wanted to. Some of these were given places in almshouses or were licensed to beg; others were too broken in health to do that. In some cases the soldier was given his arms and weapons to sell to finance his way home. Most, however, were left to their own resources. Singly or in bands the veterans moved across the countryside. They were fearless, hungry, and resourceful and were feared both in the villages and the cities. As a good many of the soldiers of that era were criminals freed from prison to join the army, discharge opened the door for the continuation of their profession.

Sir John Cheke's "Hurt of Sedicion" represents a popular attitude toward the discharged service man turned vagabond. It is that author's conclusion that after wars a great number of those who went out honest return home again as roisterers. They have an "unsavory smack" about them and always smell like "day-sleepers, purse-pickers, highway robbers, quarrel-makers, yea and bloodshedders, too." At the end of wars, Cheke asks, do we not commonly see more robbing, begging, and murdering than before? And there are those rogues who stand in the middle of the roads begging
whom it is impossible to refuse lest they by force take all we have. One gives in such cases because he suspects their strength, says Cheke, not because he pities the ex-soldiers' needs.  

Roy and Barlowe’s Rede Me and Be Not Wroth discusses the veteran-vagabond problem and naturally involves it in pre-Reformation Christian polemics. The authors are specific in their charge. Cardinal Wolsey wants the money which is being spent on the poor to use in decorating his palace and acquiring luxuries. The poor are a cumbrance, so he sends them to wars to lessen their numbers. Half of them never return, the authors state, for some are taken prisoners, some die of fevers, and the rest are slain. As for those who do return, they are destitute, are "made beggars/ And so become robbers and stealers."  

After every disbandment the roads were filled with these wandering men. That some were rogues by profession and others were rogues by necessity made little difference to the victims of these wandering bands of discharged retainers and soldiers. When the shadow of the Black Death lifted from medieval England, the large landholder found that there were few left to till his acres for him; so in order to maintain his revenue he turned to sheep farming. He enclosed his land and used what few men were available to tend this new investment. The farmers, in the meantime, had found that their labor had become more valuable, and they began to leave their family acres to sell their services to the highest bidder. As the

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25 Roy and Barlowe, Rede Me and Be Not Wroth, p. 60.
cost of labor and the price of wool rose, more and more of the land­lords turned to enclosure, with the inevitable result that the dis­possessed were left to wander the countryside. This situation was further aggravated by the dissolution of the monasteries. At that time, land which had been let according to the rents and fines as­sessed in the Middle Ages was suddenly put on the market and came under the management of a new type of landowner. This was the capitalist agrarian, who was a land manager rather than a landlord. His purpose was to cause the land to yield a profit, and he brought this about either by enclosure and sheep farming or by raising his rents and fines. In both cases the tenants suffered, and many were forced to leave their homes because they were unable to pay the new rents. Thomas Lever tells how this dispossession was accomplished in some instances.

It is a common custom with covetous landlords to let their housing so decay that the farmer shall be fain for a small reward or none at all to give up his lease, so that they, taking the grounds into their own hands, may turn all to pasture. So now Old Fathers, poor Widows, and young Children lie begging in the merry streets. 26

Practically all of the popular social protest writers discussed the agrarian problem and most of them concurred in the assumption that enclosure and rent raising were causes of the increasing numbers of rogues and beggars. Robert Crowley's tract, "An Informacion and Peticion Agaynst the Oppressours of the Pore Commons of This Realme" (1550), attributed to the agrarian revolution most of the social evils

26 Lever, Sermons, p. 77.
of his day: the decay of education and the "liberal sciences," juvenile delinquency, an increase of prostitution, and a general tendency toward immorality on the part of the common lot. 27 John Hales, in his Discourse of the Common Weal of This Realm of England (1549), laid the cause of the political unrest and uprisings to those dispossessed agrarians, "for by these enclosures men do lack livings and be idle; and therefore for very necessity they are desirous of a change, being in hope to come thereby to somewhat; and well assured, howsoever it befall with them, it cannot be no harder with them than it was before." 28 Thomas Becon, in a tract written in 1550, states that "the cause of all this wretchedness and beggary in the commonweal are the greedy gentlemen, which are sheepmongers and graziers." 29 The number of persons displaced by the agrarian revolution was 300,000, according to a contemporary account found in the tract, "Certain Causes Gathered Together, Wherin is Shewed the Decay of England" (c. 1550). 30 This, of course, was a gross exaggeration, 31 but it does illustrate the seriousness of the effect of enclosure and rent raising on vagabondage as considered by contemporary popular writers. Some of these displaced


31 See enclosure statistics at the end of Chapter Three, supra.
persons went to the industrial centers in cities and towns; some were able to find farm sites elsewhere; others migrated until they found a stretch of waste and erected their hovels and lived as best they could. Many, however, forsook the life of farming and took to the road, where they swelled the already bulging ranks of rogues, vagabonds, beggars, and highwaymen.

The Reformation, which began in fact with Henry's putting aside of Katherine of Aragon, was to jar and scrape through the sixteenth century and leave a well-marked trail of martyrs and displaced people. By the beginning of the Tudor Age the monasteries had lost their original purpose. They dispensed some charity and seemingly caused many vagrants to depend on them entirely by their methodless distributions. They provided a haven for many men and women whose lives had become aimless. And they were — or were reputed to be — the centers of all imaginable vices. They had been shaken severely by public opinion for the preceding two hundred years, but no one had really hammered at the keystones until Wolsey sent Cromwell out to investigate the monasteries in 1524. A few of the smaller ones were dissolved then. Four hundred of the smaller monasteries were dissolved by statute in 1536. Most of those that remained undissolved capitulated or were seized in the following years, these actions being climaxed in the Act Dissolving the Greater Monasteries of 1539. On the whole, Henry is to be complimented on the courtesy and charity which he showed to the dispossessed clerics. Most of them were pensioned or received benefices. A large proportion of the group passed blithely over into Anglicanism and became deans and bishops and other lesser
church officers. Many of the lower order, however, did not receive this close attention. Henry did not always make adequate provision for the homeless monks. As a class they were not very intelligent, and many were forced to begging. The group most affected by the dissolution were the monastic serving men. While their old employers received some compensation for their misfortune, at least enough to keep the majority out of beggary, they did not get enough to maintain their bakers, brewers, gardeners, and the rest of that great horde of serving men who maintained the clergy in such magnificent style. These definitely were dispossessed and dumped out to get by as well as they could. The monks, the summoners, the pardoners, and hundreds of others of the parasitic mob trudged along the highways with their former serving men, a tattered crew with the same aims as their professional and better trained brothers-in-guild.

That this group was not considered a major addition to the number of vagabonds, however, can be seen by the lack of attention given to them by popular writers. As was mentioned above, Roy and Barlowe's *Rede Me and Be Not Wroth* accused the Church of maintaining serving men in idleness and then turning them out to beg and steal for want of occupational training.\(^{32}\) This must have been the case also when these idle servants were discharged wholesale during the process of the dissolution. Henry Brinklow, in his *Complaynt of Roderick Mors* (1542), shows how the dissolution indirectly increased vagabondage by abolishing one source of alms for the beggars. At one time, he states,

\(^{32}\)Roy and Barlowe, *Rede Me and Be Not Wroth*, p. 60.
the monks maintained hospitality and "many thousands were well
relieved of them," but since the dissolution the church has come
into temporal hands, and not "one ha'penny worth of alms or any
other profit cometh unto the people of the parishes where such
parsonages and vicarages be." This would naturally cause a dis­
persal of those beggars who previously depended on certain clerical
establishments for their livelihood. But it must not be overlooked
that while the Church did some good through its method of relief, it
did an immense amount of harm by encouraging begging through its
sometimes indiscriminate charity; and these children of the monasteries
and abbeys were added to the clerics and clerical servants who swelled
the ranks of the vagabonds.

Although debasement of the coinage and the attendant inflation,
in Tudor English, the "dearth," inflicted many hardships on the people —
especially those with lower of fixed incomes — popular writers did
not attribute the increase in vagabondage to either of these directly.
John Hales, however, in his Discourse of the Common Weal did imply that
indirectly debasement of the coinage did cause the impoverishment of
the realm, because the alteration of the coinage brought about higher
prices of all commodities, therefore causing landholders to raise their
rents and enclose more grounds. The dispossession which accompanied

33 Henry Brinklow, Complaynt of Roderick Mors, J. M. Cowper, ed.
(London: Publ. for the E. E. T. S. by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner,

34 Hales, Discourse of the Common Weal, pp. 69, 104.
rent raising and enclosure did, of course, add to the number of wanderers. It would be difficult to prove, though, that debasement was a direct cause of the growing body of rogues and beggars, but one can assume that the inflationary prices — unaccompanied by inflationary wages — did cause many to assume the nomad's tattered cape in search of a better way of making a living in other parts of the country or in other occupations. In their wandering many were probably affected by whatever it was that caused men to espouse vagabondage — adventure, idleness, wantonness — and remained to swell their number.

Although the flowering of rogue literature did not take place until the Elizabethan Era, when such writers as John Awdeley, Thomas Harman, Robert Greene, and Thomas Dekker found some rather sensational journalistic copy in the practices of the vagabonds and cony-catchers, the tradition was being established by popular writers during the first part of the sixteenth century. The alarming prevalence of crime and poverty brought about a desire on the part of the English reading public

to study this world of roguery; and vivid and realistic pictures were
drawn by some of the early Tudor popular authors.

The ranks of the vagabonds included many different types and
degrees, based on methods of operation and strength. John Awdeley's
"Fraternity of Vagabonds" and Thomas Harman's "A Caveat for Common
Cursitors" discuss the various classes of vagabondage and the canting
terms which were peculiar to their particular class of society. These
two authors classified and arranged material which was used by the
later writers who used underworld settings and characters. Before them,
however, other popular writers had discussed the many different types
of beggars, counterfeit and otherwise, and it is from these early authors
that we will study the people who made the alleys of London their homes
and the highways of England their stalking ground.

Most of the early sixteenth century popular writers recognized the
fact that in this great band of vagabonds there were many who were
truly destitute and who deserved the Christian charity which they beg­
ged for. These, however, were not as literally interesting or as
socially irritating as their dissembling cohorts and consequently
received less attention. Robert Copland describes a group of beggars
who were gathering at St. Bartholomew's Hospital after a day of begging.

They were

...both crooked, lame and blind,
Scabby and scurby, pock-eaten flesh and rind,
Lougy and scald, and peeled as apes,
With scantly a rag for to cover their shapes,
Breechless, barefooted, all stinking with dirt
With thousands of tatters, drabbling to the skirt....36

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36 Copland, "Highway to the Spital-house," p. 3.
Most of this lot consisted of true beggars, because the proctor discouraged the counterfeiters from frequenting the place. It was almost impossible, though, to tell the difference between true and false beggars, and because of this lack of distinction they were considered as one lot, generally dissolute and idle. Alexander Barclay, in *The Ship of Fools* (1507) characteristically generalizes, stating that if a beggar has his staff and hood and a bag to carry his loot in, then he thinks that he is "in the midst of his good." If a man gives him clothes or money, the profligate repairs to the nearest ale house where his earnings are quickly wasted.\(^3^7\) This carefree life must have had a great appeal to those who wished to escape the responsibilities of a reputable existence.

Since all things were relegated to their proper place in the natural order of things in the sixteenth century, the vagabonds had also their degrees of nobility and baseness. At the top of the list were the sturdy beggars, the rogues and rascals who lived mainly by thievery and violence; and commanding them — and all those beneath them — was the upright man. This chief among beggars — like Cock Lorrel, the rogue knight in "Cock Lorreles Bote" (c. 1515)\(^3^8\) — had it in his power to require of other vagabonds their money, goods, or women; and all who took up vagabondage as a career had to be installed in the


the profession of roguery by an upright man. Closely behind the upright man and usurping his position if he became strong enough were the rogues and rufflers, who begged from the strong and stole from the weak. This was the group most generally feared and attacked by popular preachers and writers. The porter's description of the ruffler's existence in "Highway to the Spital-house" is indicative of what was considered their way of life.

Rufflers, and masterless men that cannot work,  
    And sleepeth by day, and walketh in the dark, ...
With common women daily for to haunt,  
    Making revel, and drink adieu taunt,  
    Saying, "Make we merry as long as we can, 
        And drink apace; the Devil pay the maltman!"

This was the type that gathered in public places to beg and obstruct the ways with their numbers. They also frequented the less populated areas, and "if ye be cleanly and haply come alone,/ Your purse and clothing may fortune to be gone."39 Two other types of professional thieves were the hookers, who made an art of lifting items by the use of a long pole with a hook in the end, and priggers of prancers, or horse thieves.

Another group of vagabonds relied on feigned sickness or artificially created wounds. Alexander Barclay describes one group which carried this method to a ghastly extreme.

Some other beggars falsely for the nonce  
Disfigure their children, Got wot unhappily,  
Mangling their faces, and breaking their bones  
To stir the people to pity that pass by.  
There stand they begging with tedious shout and cry,  
Their own bodies turning to a strange fashion  
To move such as pass to pity and compassion.

Earlier Barclay had described a group of counterfeit beggars known as palliards. These were beggars who sought to excite compassion by causing artificial sores on their bodies by applying spearwort or ratsbane. It seems to have been a popular method among beggars. Barclay's palliards covered their arms and legs with blood and applied plasters or bound their limbs as cripples.\textsuperscript{40} Robert Crowley in his "Epigrams" tells of overhearing two clapperdudgeons, or palliards, discussing their condition. The first states that he thinks his leg is doing fairly well. His companion replies that his leg looks all right too, especially in cold weather; for then it becomes raw and red with blood. I would not have it healed, he says, for the world's goods, because if it were well I would have no living and no one would pity me, and I would be taken for a sturdy beggar and whipped.\textsuperscript{41} Closely allied to this group were the counterfeit-crankes, those who affected the falling sickness, and Abraham men, who adopted the guise of the insane — "Some put soap in their mouths to make it scum;/ And fall down as Saint Cornelius' evil."\textsuperscript{42}

One group with whom Copland deals is that class of beggars termed the whip-jacks, or vagabonds who pretended to be discharged soldiers and sailors on their way home. These were a sturdy lot and much of the robbery on the highways was attributed to them. Copland presents a

\textsuperscript{40} Barclay, \textit{Ship of Fools}, I, 304, 303.

\textsuperscript{41} Crowley, \textit{Works}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{42} Copland, "Highway to the Spital-house," p. 7.
sample of their begging methods — this particular group of whip-jacks has been set ashore penniless by the Bonaventure — showing how when they once get a little money, either by begging or thieving, they retire to some brothel or tavern, dress in fine apparel, and put on their swords and bucklers and short daggers. "And thus they pass the time with dance, whore, pipe, and thief."

Another group in the highway aristocracy were the peddlars, who in the guise of wandering merchants were also thieves and highwaymen. Copland describes them, "with pack on back, with their boozy speech,/ Jagged and ragged, with broken hose and breech...."

The female vagabonds also had their titles and functions. Bawdy baskets were female peddlars who pandered not only their wares but themselves. The morts and doxies were companions to the rogues and vagabonds, seldom remaining long with one man but dispensing their favors where most gain could be had. Dells were young girls who had not yet undergone the "breaking in" rites which were the privilege of the upright man. These women are treated generally by Crowley in an epigram, "Of Bawds." That author maintains that prostitution was at that time a widespread vice throughout England, especially found haunting "taverns and tippling houses." The porter at St. Bartholomew's Hospital was also plagued by prostitutes and vagabond women who frequented his alms house.

43 Ibid., pp. 7-9.
44 Ibid., p. 23.
Every day
They come so thick that they stop the way.
The sisterhood of drabs, sluts, and callets
To here resort, with their bags and wallets,
To be partners of the confrerie
Of the maintainers of ill husbandry.46

Other vagabonds who perhaps were of too ancient a breed to be
categorized according to sixteenth century canting terms are mentioned
in the popular poem, "God Spede the Plough," which was in circulation
at the beginning of the century. The plowman tells of the great band
of beggars who continually beseech him for alms. These are the prisoners,
who are allowed to beg in order to pay their fines; the tipstaves, who
beg for provision of those in prison; begging scholars; and the king's
beadsmen. He also must pay the minstrels, a band of wanderers slowly
disappearing from the English scene but included among the lists of
vagabonds in "Cock Lorelles Bote" and "Highway to the Spital-house,"47
The largest group, however, are the Church beggars, the Minorites,
the Carmelites, the Augustinians, Dominicans, the parson, summoner,
priests, and observants. Barclay concurs in judging the Church beg­
gars to be of equal disposition with the common lot of beggars.

Some beg for buildings, some for relics new
Of holy saints of countries far and strange;
And with their words fained and untrue
For cause of lucre, about they run and range
But in a simple village, farm, or grange
Whereas these beggars most simple men may find
With their false bones as relics they them blind.48

47"Cocke Lorelles Bote," p. 4.
48Barclay, Ship of Fools, I, 303.
One group, late-comers to the English vagabond scene, achieved a good bit of notoriety because of the stringent laws enacted against them during the sixteenth century. These were the wandering bands of Gypsies, whose first appearance in England probably occurred in the latter part of the fifteenth century. H. T. Crofton, who has made a study of the Gypsies in England, has found no record of them prior to 1505 as having been in Great Britain. Twice in 1505, however, they are referred to in Scottish state records. There is no record of them in England proper until 1514, when a Gypsy woman is referred to during the inquest following Richard Hunne's death. In 1517 John Skelton described Eleanor Rumminge as being "like an Egyptian capped about." By 1530 they had become an intolerable nuisance in England and were legislated against in the act, 22 Henry VIII, cap. 10.

Afore this time diverse and many outlandish people calling themselves Egyptians, using no craft nor fact of merchandise had come into this Realm and gone from shire to shire and place to place in great company, and used great subtle and crafty means to deceive the people, bearing them in hand that they by palmistry could tell men and women's fortunes and so many times by craft and subtlety had deceived the people of their money and also had committed many and heinous felonies and robberies to the great hurt and deceit of the people that they had come among.

The rovers were given sixteen days within which to quit the realm, or they would be imprisoned and would forfeit their goods. Also, no other Gypsies would be allowed to enter the country. Evidently they stayed, though; for in 1542 we find the first mention of Gypsies in popular

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literature, and their reputation seems firmly fixed in the public mind. Andrew Boorde's *Fyrest Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* devotes one chapter to the Egyptians: "There be few or none of the Egyptians that doth dwell in Egypt, for Egypt is replete now with infidel aliens." Boorde then describes those that dwell in England as swarthy and "disguised in their apparel contrary to other nations. They be light fingered and use picking; they have little manners and evil lodging, and yet they be pleasant dancers." He follows this description with an illustration of the Gypsy language. The last act passed against Gypsies in the period under discussion was passed in 1554 under Mary. It was essentially the same as the act of 1530 except that it now became a felony punishable by death for a Gypsy to enter England and remain a month or for one then in England not to have vacated by forty days after the first of the year. Still they remained and Crofton's last entry is from the diary of Samuel Pepys, dated August 11, 1668: "This afternoon, my wife and Mercer and Deb. went with Pelling to see the Gypsies at Lambeth and have their fortunes told, but what they did I did not enquire."

It is not in the plan of this chapter to discuss that disreputable class of connivers, the cony-catchers. Although the vagabonds of our period were not averse to indulging in schemes to relieve the gullible of their money and possessions, the cony-catchers — like their modern counterparts, the confidence men — seem to have been a rather slick and

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energetic group of individuals, necessarily well dressed and possessing enough ready cash to present an appearance of respectability, even affluence. Their usual prosperity alone would separate them from the general run of rogues and beggars, whose way of life depended on their obvious poverty. Also, the problems arising from the existence of such a penniless class as were the vagabonds would not pertain to those who were capable of supporting themselves, even though this support was derived extra-legally. It will not be out of place, however, to mention briefly a few early popular works that paved the way for such cony-catching pamphlets as those by Robert Greene in the last decade of the sixteenth century. *Mery Tales, Wittie Questions and Quick Answers* (1535) contains two stories involving swindlers who cleverly and unlawfully separated men from their money.\(^5\) Copland discloses a device practiced by certain cony-catchers, usually scholars, who masquerade as doctors of medicine and gull the rustics with their quackery.\(^5\) The really important cony-catching pamphlet before the Elizabethan Age, though, was the dialogue commonly attributed to Gilbert Walker, "A Manifest Detection of the Most Vile and Detestable Use of Dice-play, and Other Practices Like the Same" (1532). The work is a lively and readable exposure of the many practices used by professional gamblers. It reveals how the dupe is lured into what he presumes is a friendly game, and it takes him through the various stages of cozenry until the cony is brought to destitution. Methods of

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51 *Shakespeare's Jest Books*, I, 142-147.

cheating with dice and cards are revealed, and gambling nomenclature and canting terms are explained by the seasoned Londoner to the provincial courtier, who, it seems, has been the dupe in a well-contrived design to reduce him to penury. 53 These, however, are not the people with whom we are concerned. They were rogues and wanderers, to be sure. But their appearance did not reveal their morals, so the popular writers, acts of parliaments, and proclamations did not put them in the same class with their more disreputable brothers, the vagabonds.

Taken all together, it was a large and motley crew that frequented the alleys, stews, and highways of Tudor England. They constituted a problem that continually cried for a suitable remedy, some control over the sturdy vagabonds and some practical means of assistance for the impotent beggars. Popular writers who applied themselves to finding a solution to the problem generally agreed that the laws which were intended to control vagabondage were not sufficient to remove the cause or were not properly applied. As late in the period as 1550 Thomas Lever, in a sermon before Edward VI, accused that monarch of improperly supervising poor relief: "For there is never a one of these, but he lacketh either thy charitable alms to relieve his need, or else they due correction to punish his fault." Lever continued in his indictment, stating that London and Westminster were especially lax in attending to

the poor. He did not mean that rogues were never punished. The ballad's comment on the law's severity, "light offence and sore correction," was aptly put; but the early poor laws failed to curb the increase of vagabondage.

Thomas Starkey's "A Dialogue Between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset" (1536) presented some rather advanced, for their time, suggestions for the treatment of vagabonds. For one thing, Cardinal Pole, the principal speaker, would abolish the privilege of sanctuary since it encourages crime. His corrective plan was one which eventually was put into practice. The cause of so much theft in the kingdom was the great number of idle people, Pole asserted. If a man be apprehended for theft, he continued, "I would think it good that the felon should be taken and put in some common work, as to labor in building the walls of cities and towns, or else in some other magnifical work of the prince of the realm, which pain should be more grievous to them than death is reputed; and so by their life yet the common wealth should take some profit." Death for theft, Pole reasoned, was too severe; and the rising rate of robberies showed that it evidently failed to curtail that crime. Later findings substantiated Pole's premise that the vagabonds feared work more than death; for when the rogues and sturdy beggars were condemned to labor rather than to a flogging, their vocation lost some of

54 Lever, Sermons, p. 78.
55 "Now a Dayes," Ballads from Manuscripts, I, 98.
its romance, and its purpose, idleness, was defeated.

Robert Crowley was essentially in agreement with Cardinal Pole in concluding that the methods for handling the indigent were ineffectual. He describes the alms houses in an epigram, showing that they were commonly poorly managed and that many of them no longer sheltered the poor at all. Supposedly returning from Europe, a merchant long absent from the realm is amazed when he finds that where one there was an alms house, now there is a beautiful mansion. This, he presumes, is because England is so wealthy. Later he meets a beggar who corrects this error and declares that the poor have no accommodations, and they "are all turned out and lie and die in the corners...." Men of great wealth have bought their dwelling place, the spital-house; and these rich men refuse to help the poor with charity. Crowley comments on this situation by asserting that since religious maintenance has disappeared, charity must be afforded by the people. He exhorts all to give to the poor, for the blessing derived from the giving will be the same whether the poor are deserving or not. The proper solution to the problem, however, lies in the power of the authorities, states Crowley. They must provide wool and flax and establish work houses in which the poor can work for their livings. Crowley believes, or so he says, that the poor desire work.\(^\text{57}\)

Some of the popular writers and preachers believed that the solution lay in a wider and larger distribution of alms. It was true that the medieval attitude toward alms giving had changed considerably since the Middle Ages. The Renaissance man was more interested in making money to

\(^{57}\text{Crowley, Works, pp. 11-12, 14, 17, 10.}\)
insure his salvation elsewhere. There still remained those, however, who believed that it was the duty of every Christian man to aid the poor with alms. Hugh Latimer maintained this attitude, and Robert Crowley, as pointed out above, believed that the blessing derived from alms giving was the same whether it was dispensed to the deserving poor or not. This attitude was that which had caused so much indiscriminate charity heretofore and contributed to the increase of beggary. Thomas Becon attacked this practice in 1550, condemning not the givers for lacking discretion, but the beggars for accepting the charity.

They also that are called beggars, and get their living by asking alms from door to door, if they have their limbs, and be able to work, ought not to run up and down idly, but to labour with their hands for their living, and with the sweat of their faces to eat their own bread, and to be able also to give somewhat unto the needy. For let them know this to be a most certain truth, that, if they be able to labour and will not, they are thieves before God; and every morsel of bread or meat, that they eat by this their begging, turneth to their own damnation; forasmuch as they eat away the living of the poor needy man, which is feeble, sick, lame, &c.

Becon, nevertheless, was fervent in his exhortation to the people to aid the poor with alms and prefaced his tract, "The Fortress of the Faithful" (1550), with a plea for charity. Henry Brinklow uncharacteristically adopted a Catholic tenet by asserting in The Lamentation of a Christen Agaynst the Cytye of London Made by Roderigo Mors (1545) that everlasting


60 Becon, The Catechism, pp. 60, 583-592.
life would be given to those who helped the poor. This idea of the responsibility of charity resting on the individual never succeeded in the Tudor Age. The disparity between the number of givers and the number of takers had become too great.

In 1529 Simon Fish in his "Supplication for the Beggars" had attacked the Catholic Church for failing to establish alms houses or provide in other ways for the poor. Most reformers believed with Fish that when the sturdy "abbey lubbers" were driven out and the tithes they received were applied to the assistance of the impotent beggars there would be an end to poverty in the realm. That this was not the case is shown by the writers who considered this matter after the dissolution. In Complaynt of Roderick Mors (1542) Henry Brinklow again surprises us by acknowledging some good in Catholicism: "And as touching the almesse that they [the monks] dealt, and the hospitality that they kept, every man knoweth that many thousands were well relieved of them." He qualifies this statement by saying that many more would have been relieved had there not been so many idle monks and had they dispensed all the alms which they collected for the poor. But now, concludes Brinklow, there is no charity at all from the established church, and with the dissolution has come the disappearance of charity. Where once there was a little almesse, now there is none; and the church is failing in its obligation to the poor and the state. "It is amended,

61 Brinklow, Lamentation of a Chresten, p. 81.

even as the devil mended the dame's leg (as it is in the proverb): when he should have set it right, he broke it quite in pieces!"63

This same idea was expressed in the 1546 tract "A Supplication of the Poore Commons:" "Then had they hospitals and alms houses to be lodged in, but now they lie and starve in the streets. Then was their number great, but now much greater."64

The only solution for this maladministration on the part of the Tudor established church was the removal of the poor from the church's care, some of the popular writers believed. Dissolve the chantries, advises Brinklow in his _Lamentation of a Christen_, and take the money derived from them and that money which is contributed to them and bestow it on the poor; for money spent on chantries "availeth the dead no more than the pissing of a wren helpeth to cause the sea to flow at an extreme ebb."65 In his 1542 tract, _Complaynt of Roderick Mors_, Brinklow had advised that all church lands be disposed of and the proceeds given to the maintenance of the poor. He had suggested that hospitals and alms houses be established with the church money and the poor set to their own support by providing them materials to work with.66 "A Supplycation to Our Moste Soveraigne Lorde Kynge Henry the Eyght" (1544) bewailed the already misspent dissolution funds and pleaded with the king to support

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63 Brinklow, _Lamentation of a Christen_, pp. 32-34.
64 "Supplication of the Poore Commons," p. 79.
65 Brinklow, _Lamentation of a Christen_, pp. 88-90, 81.
66 Brinklow, _Complaynt of Roderick Mors_, pp. 51-52.
the poor with profits from the church lands.\textsuperscript{67} But the church was never­
more to assume the full responsibility for the upkeep of the poverty
stricken, and their care became a public rather than a religious duty.

In the Middle Ages three types of charity maintained the poor.
These types may be generally classed as individual, foundational, and
monastic.\textsuperscript{68} Individual acts of charity were much more prevalent then
than they were to become in the sixteenth century, largely because of the
emphasis which the church laid to works of mercy. Coupled with this
virtue was a lack of insight on the part of the givers as to the effects
of indiscriminate charity. The manner of personal alms giving varied.
It might be the giving of small gifts when one encountered the beggar,
or it might be the wholesale distribution of food and money, a practice
which some of the rich nobles and prelates followed. Some of the prelates
are known to have provided food daily for hundreds and dispensed double
or triple alms on festival days. Cromwell is reputed to have fed more
than two hundred persons daily. Most people, however, reserved their
principal charity for their time of death, at which time considerable
doles were given, along with food and drink and the request that all
who received charity should pray for the soul of the dead. The dying
desired prayers for his soul, so he quite willingly paid for them with

\textsuperscript{67}"A Supplycacion to Our Moste Soveraigne Lorde Kyngge Henry the
Eyght," \textit{Four Supplications}, J. M. Cowper, ed. (London: Publ. for the

\textsuperscript{68} For a discussion of medieval charity and charitable institutions,
see Ashley, \textit{An Introduction to English Economic History}, pp. 305-376.
The general information which follows is derived from this study.
what he could not take with him. As the Reformation movement gained strength, fewer and fewer people felt that practicing charity was necessary for the soul’s salvation. Money that had been spent to create a good impression on the powers beyond was now invested in the latest fashion to dazzle the people below — and here charity suffered a major blow.

Foundations — alms houses or hospitals — were established and financed by individuals or groups and had attached to them clerics or laymen, male and female, who were paid to care for the sick and needy. There were at least 460 such institutions established in England at the close of the Middle Ages. The medieval craft guilds were especially instrumental in the founding of hospitals and alms houses. In the beginning they established these institutions for the relief of those of their own craft, but by the sixteenth century the maintenance of these places had come partly under the sponsorship of other donors, and the indwellers might be from any vocation. Their decay, however, set in almost as soon as the practice was begun. The foundations came to be looked upon as a benefice, a means of livelihood for an absentee clerical holder or one who kept most of the income for his own maintenance. Because of this lack of responsibility on the part of wardens — a fact alluded to, as we have seen in Crowley’s epigram on alms-houses — the institutions generally fell into disrepute and began to disappear in the Tudor era.

A basic principle of the early Christian church was the dissemination

Crowley, Works, pp. 11-12.
of education and charity. Concerning the latter, it would be impossible now to determine to what extent the Church fulfilled its purpose. As early as the sixth century the custom arose to divide Church revenues in four portions: one for the bishop, one for the maintenance of the rest of the clergy, one for the maintenance of the church plant, and one for the poor. When in the eighth century the Church began requiring the payment of tithes, this income was supposedly applied to charity. At least the clerics used this exhortation most regularly in inveigling the people to contribute. In the beginning the administration of Church finances fell to the bishops, but by the thirteenth century this responsibility was passed on to the parochial clergy. The parish priests were then required to give a fourth, or sometimes a third, to the poor. As is so often the case, though, practice did not attend promise. Those holders of the large benefices whose income was substantial were, in many cases, absent from their churches, were aliens, or were interested only in personal financial aggrandizement. Poor management, idleness, and dishonesty on the part of the clergy diluted the Church's charity, and there seem to have been few who attempted to prevent the dissolution on the grounds of monastic alms giving.

By the beginning of the Tudor Age the ordinary channels of poor relief were being clogged by improper and impractical management and by a new attitude toward the practical value of charity; and as the medieval voluntary method disappeared, the modern compulsory method was evolved through legislation.

In the early Middle Ages beggars were an accepted and tolerated class of society; because of the influence of the Church on attitudes of charity.
As early as 1349, however, the Ordinance of Labourers made it a misdemeanor to give alms to sturdy beggars. The same act ruled that any able-bodied vagrant refusing work should be put in jail until he changed his mind about labor. In 1388, 12 Richard II, cap. 3 stated that those who refused work would be put in the stocks. Matters evidently did not improve, for we find the first vagrancy law passed under the Tudors specifying that those refusing to reform their vagrant ways and accept work would be punished more severely than heretofore. They would now be stocked for three days and nights on bread and water and then commanded to leave the town. If they were caught again in the same town they received six days and nights on the same fare; and if anyone relieved them with food or drink he forfeited twelve pence. Beggars not able to work were sent to their last places of dwelling or their birth places. Bagging scholars, soldiers, and shipmen were required to carry the proper certificates. And officers found not executing the act were liable to a fine of twenty pence for each omission. The other vagrancy law passed under Henry VII, in 1503, was milder than the first, reducing the number of days vagrants had to stay in the stocks from three to one on the first offense and from six to three on the second. From all accounts justice was well administered during the first Tudor's

70 For a history of the development and a discussion of the Tudor poor laws, see the following:


reign and trouble with vagabondage was kept to a minimum.

The modern poor laws began to take shape in 1531 when the vagrancy act, 22 Henry VIII, cap. 12, was passed. A part of the preamble reads as follows:

...in all places throughout this realm, vagabonds and beggars have of long time increased, and daily do increase in great and excessive numbers, by the occasion of idleness, mother and root of all vices, whereby hath insurged and sprung, and daily insurgeth and springeth, continual thefts, murders, and other heinous offences and great enormities, to the high displeasure of God, the unquietation and damage of the king's people, and to the marvelous disturbance of the common weal.71

As a remedy for these evils several restrictions with attendant punishments were placed on vagabonds. Every impotent beggar was required to have a license and a tin badge from a magistrate in his town allowing him to beg within certain limits described in his license. Those caught begging without a license for that particular place would be whipped from the waist upward or set in the stocks three days and nights on bread and water. A sturdy beggar was to be tied naked to a cart's tail and whipped "till his body be bloody" through the town. He was then to be given a passport back to his last residence of three years or to his birth place. Persons giving aid to sturdy beggars or magistrates who failed to punish vagabondage according to the act were to suffer fines. This act set forth two important principles which were recognized in later legislation. It recognized that it was a public duty of the state to take care of the poor and control the sturdy, and it restricted vagrants

to their own particular area under the responsibility of the magistrates of that area. This act was supplemented by an act in 1535 which presented a plan for the maintenance of the impotent and the setting to work of the sturdy beggars once they reached their destination. The town officials were to provide for the vagabonds from voluntary contributions by the townspeople.

The next important vagrancy law, I Edward VI, cap. 2, was passed in the first year of Edward's reign and is indicative of the almost panic-stricken concern of the nation over the increasing hordes of rogues and beggars. Every vagrant who refused to apply himself to honest labor was to be branded with the letter V and given as a slave to any person who demanded him, to be fed, worked, and punished at the discretion of his owner. If he attempted to escape he was to be branded with an S on the cheek and remain a slave for life. If he ran away again, he was to be put to death as a felon. Children were to be taken from their vagrant parents and given over to servitude. Responsibility for the impotent was again laid to the parishes and voluntary contributions. This law, which was not enforced because of its harshness, was repealed in 1550, and the poor law of 1531 was reinstated.

In 1552 a poor law was passed which considerably altered the voluntary method of poor relief. The city officials were first to exhort the townspeople to give alms. If the citizen refused, the bishop was to send for the person and attempt to persuade him to give. If he still refused he could be jailed or fined at the city magistrate's discretion. This was the first step from voluntary charity to the levying of parish
poor rates assessed on each household. In 1563 an act was passed under Elizabeth allowing the city officials to assess any obstinate person an amount commensurate with his income and commit him to prison until he decided to pay. This was the beginning of local rates levied on the basis of property value and personal wealth, a practice which came into full effect by an act of parliament in 1572.

The culmination of the Tudor poor laws came in the years between 1597 and 1601, when three laws were passed which summed up the earlier laws and established a means of relief and control which continued in effect down to the nineteenth century. These laws categorized the vagrant class into children, the infirm, and the rogues and treated them accordingly. Children were apprenticed until maturity; the infirm were given licenses to beg or were furnished relief from the local rates; and the rogues were whipped and set to work in houses of correction — extreme cases were banished or put to death. Justices of the Peace were to fix the rates, appoint collectors, and see that the poor were provided for and that suitable materials were provided to enable the sturdy to work. Houses for the destitute were to be founded by the money derived from the rates. Benefit of clergy and sanctuary were to be denied all beggars. Ship captains who imported those who could or would not support themselves were to be fined. Licenses were to be given to a very few beggars, this to be determined by the Justice of the Peace. And relatives of the poor were to be responsible for their kinsmen's support if they were able to aid them in any way; the Justice of the Peace was to decide on this also. Thus by the end of the sixteenth century was evolved a very practical means of poor relief.
which did not rely on charity, an abstract quality which seemed to have lost much of its value during the Renaissance and the Tudor Age.

The sixteenth century — and the popular writers of the sixteenth century — saw an alarming increase in vagabondage accompanied by a lack of interest on the part of the people to accept responsibility for that class of society. Documenting, describing the rogues and beggars were the social protest writers, who were not so much interested in making this indigent group the subjects for interesting reading — this was reserved for the Elizabethans — as they were in arousing the people to doing something about them. Very few of these social critics were ahead of their times in their suggestions of a remedy. Those who recommended increased charity were misjudging the character of their contemporaries, most of whom either did not desire to part with their money without getting something tangible in return or knew that unplanned charity was tossing alms in a bottomless pit. Some writers — Brinklow, Crowley, the anonymous authors of the supplications, to mention a few — recognized that alms had in the past been misspent and that very little charity in their own day was forthcoming for the support of the impoverished, but none of them suggested even vaguely the final solution, the collection of rates based on income and property and the dispersal of alms from one fixed point in the parish. In respect to aid for the poor, most writers were far behind their times. They could see that vagabondage constituted a menace to society. They recognized some of the reasons for increased poverty and idleness — the agrarian revolution, the dissolution, the number of discharged retainers and soldiers who
were ill equipped for making their livings by honest labor. But they were too closely allied to the past and the ways of their forefathers to see that vagabond management and a public welfare system required an entirely different approach from what had been the practice before the Tudor Age.
CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Tudor England before 1558 was troubled with four major social issues: the Reformation and dissolution, the agrarian revolution, debasement of the coinage and inflation, and the problem of the poor. These same social issues, or their consequences, remained to trouble the Elizabethans; but the voices of social protest were not so vociferous in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Popular literature from 1485 to 1558, both reflecting public opinion and attempting to mould it, attacked all four of these major social problems, usually taking the conservative position and resisting the fundamental changes which were taking place in the functions and patterns of society. Much of what was written merely condemned existing conditions; some writers suggested remedies for the existing evils; and all of them acted as forces in different degrees influencing and reflecting the temperament of the times.

By the beginning of the reign of Henry VII, a movement which had been rapidly gaining momentum, a nationalistic movement against the outside authority of the Catholic Church, was becoming the chief issue in national affairs. The movement had been a long time under way and had been abetted by many writers during the Middle Ages. Chaucer, Langland, and Wycliff vividly reflected or explicitly treated most of the evils of the Church and churchmen, Wycliff going so far as to question transubstantiation and suggest
the separation of the Church from the state. The work of such writers prepared the way for the attitudes at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the growth of printing and the spread of education caused the development of a spirit of independence which would not allow itself to be dominated from abroad. With this feeling came a general dissatisfaction with the Church, its manners and morals; and it was against these that popular literature made its attack.

Although the early popular writers were vehement in castigating the evils of Catholicism, few suggested any reform measures, either reform from within as the humanists advocated or the root-and-branch reform of the European Protestants. This was to come later. During the first three decades of the sixteenth century the writers were intent on pointing out the moral abuses of the Church and clergy. Barclay's *Ship of Fools* and "The Ruin' of a Ream" attacked the greed and pride of clergymen. "God Spede the Plough" showed the myriad of exactions the Church made on the common man. Wolsey was satirized and criticized personally for his worldliness. And practically all of the popular writers denounced the dissoluteness of the clergymen, most of whom had strayed far from the paths of chastity, so we are told.

Preparing the way more immediately for the English Reformation proper were three works of 1528-1529 -- Tyndale's *Obedience*, Fish's *Supplication for the Beggars*, and Roy and Barlowe's *Rede Me and Be Not Wroth* -- all of which were written abroad, were
specific in their attacks, and advocated drastic reform policies. Considered together they covered all the crimes and abuses of the Church and were a radical and complete statement of Reformation doctrine. These works accurately reflect the climate in which the reformation and separation acts were passed and proclamations were issued by the Seven-Year Parliament, which was convened on November 3, 1529. Popular opinion was decidedly affected and Henry VIII's plans were definitely forwarded by them. There had been and continued to be those who tried to counteract the Protestant movement, chief among whom was Sir Thomas More, but their voices were weak compared to the amount of hard-hitting anti-Catholic popular literature which apparently Henry aided to its intended destination, the hands of the middle-class reading public.

The 1540's were marked by a rash of vitriolic denunciations of lingering Henrician Catholicism and by the continued progress of the English reformation. Chief among those who lashed out at all that was Catholic which remained in Anglicanism was Henry Brinklow, who denounced the same things which all anti-clerical writers had been denouncing for hundreds of years — greed, pride, lechery, general worldliness — and who bewailed the fact that the Reformation had left religion as bad as, if not worse than, it had been. Closely following Brinklow were the anonymous authors of two supplications to the king and parliament, who, like Brinklow, cried for a complete reformation, a disposal of all the customs, garments, and accoutrements reminiscent of Roman Catholicism.
Evidently the popular cry for continued reform took effect, for when Edward came to the throne, root-and-branch measures began in earnest, and every vestige of Catholicism was attacked. During this period the popular authors directed their writing more against doctrine than against manners and morals, and the Protestant divines -- Latimer, Lever, Bacon, and Crowley -- led the way. Their works were characterized by one-sidedness and violence, and they became frenzied in their anxiousness to complete the Reformation as quickly as possible. On the other hand, such writers as Latimer and Lever were quick to point out that all was not well in their own ranks. "Unpreaching prelates," pride, greed: these evils still existed in Edwardian Protestantism.

In spite of the Protestant sermonizing and propaganda the people were ready to see the pillaging reformers go, and Mary was enthusiastically welcomed. Popular literature did not flourish during Mary's reign. She was vigorous in rooting out Protestantism and the literature which supported it, and any which got into circulation was short lived. What little popular literature remains was probably state sponsored, most being panegyrics addressed to Mary. But, in spite of the prevailing views forwarded by this new popular literature of reaction, the people were sickened by Catholic excesses and were enthusiastic in welcoming the next sovereign.

It would be impossible to determine the precise amount of influence popular literature had on the Reformation, but that
it was great cannot be denied. Both Protestants and Catholics were represented by writers who promoted the ideas of their cause and violently attacked their opponents. These partisan writers were widely read and followed, and they exerted considerable influence upon the middle-class reading public. The popular writers also reflected their times and echoed the complaints of the general multitude. On the other hand, popular literature failed to stem either the ebbing or flowing tide of reaction against the contrary excesses during the reigns of Edward and Mary. We can assume that popular literature was a definite force in the Reformation, preparing the way for it and leading it to its climax during Edward's reign. But it was not such a force that it could not be ignored by the general populace when they grew dissatisfied with the two extremes which most popular literature promoted. The people allowed themselves to be led where they wanted to go, but they could not be dragged beyond the via media in matters of religion.

Generally speaking, the agricultural practices and customs which existed in England in 1485 were the same as those which had existed for the preceding several hundred years. The nobility held the land in trust for the crown and allotted the land to the small farmers, who paid their customary rents, tilled the land, and passed the holdings on down to their eldest offspring. The land was apportioned to the tenants in strips, each strip being located in different parts of the manorial holdings to assure each farmer of an equitable portion of good
and poor soil. Certain areas were held in common, and these areas were the joint property of all who were attached to the manor. This method of agriculture had long been in existence, and with it had grown a feeling of responsibility to the landlord on the part of the farmer and a feeling of obligation to the farmer on the part of the landlord. The entire system functioned theoretically on a cooperative basis, every person contributing his part to the running of the manor. There had been a gradual breaking down of this type of farming even before the Tudor Age, but during the reigns of the first two Tudors the disappearance of the system of commonalty was rapidly accelerated. The bulk of the popular literature, extremely conservative, saw this system vanishing; and social commentators like Hugh Latimer reviewed its passing with eyes dimmed by nostalgia and sincerely damned the agricultural practices which were becoming dominant during the early sixteenth century.

There were a few social protest writers who saw the value of enclosing and recognized the need for sheep raising to insure national prosperity. Thomas Tusser and Anthony Fitzherbert were the chief proponents of enclosure, and the works of both were sufficiently widespread and popular to illustrate the public’s interest in improving farming methods. William Forrest was the chief literary advocate of sheep farming and of maintaining the English economy by an increased marketing of wool. These writers were the exceptions, though. Most of
the popular social critics could see only the evils caused by the new farming practices. From Sir Thomas More in 1516 to Thomas Becon in 1550 the complaint continued that the sheep were eating up the people and that where land once supported many families, it now maintained only a shepherd and his dog. In the process of enclosure families were sometimes evicted, and the popular writers pointed to enclosure as the cause of the increase of beggary and made their most pitiful moans in behalf of these dispossessed persons. Some writers believed that enclosure and sheep farming were the cause of inflation, the wholesale destruction of rural villages, a depopulation of England, a falling off of grain production, a decay of morality, and every other problem existing in England at that time.

Aggravating an already serious problem was the dispersal of Church lands after the dissolution of the monasteries. Most of this land was parceled out to the king's favorites and to land speculators whose single aim was to make money from their holding. This speculator class usually had little sympathy with the hardships of their tenants, sometimes never seeing them or the land; and they proceeded to raise the rents and fines, to enclose, and to evict, generally disregarding the established customs of land holding. The worst of this class were the principal targets of the popular writers. The speculators were stepping out of their own social class by becoming engaged in a vocation entirely alien to their own,
stated social critics, most of whom believed that man was born into a particular station in society and that he should remain in it.

The agrarian revolution of the sixteenth century was illustrative of the changes taking place in the character of the English nation. Old, established ways were yielding to new, and public opinion and popular literature did not like to see the ways of their ancestors disappearing. Most social critics looked back on the medieval cooperative methods of agriculture through a rather rosy cloud of romanticism and were able to perceive only the good. Returning to the present, they could see only the bad. Families were being evicted, grain farming was disappearing, prices were high, and beggary was increasing; and all of these, they thought, were caused by the modern practices of land management.

That this was not the case we can now see, but this was the opinion of the general public, and this was the tone of the literature, which taking its cue from public opinion, increased the public discontent. and kept alive a general antagonism to agrarian change, a process which was to continue in spite of their constant protestations.

One of Henry VII's principal contributions to the welfare of England was the establishment of a sound economy, an economy which gave England a period of genuine prosperity for all classes of people. This prosperity did not continue indefinitely, however, and as early as 1520 the ballad "Now a Dayes" indicated
that there was an inflationary period in existence. Prices continued to rise and popular writers continued to point out the hardships these high prices were working on the people, especially the lower classes, whose wages did not increase with the rise in prices. Wolsey's devaluation of the coinage in 1526 contributed to this rise in prices, but none of the social critics seemed to consider it of any importance in causing the inflation. Instead they pointed to the more obvious social problems and laid the cause of the dearth to droughts, foreign wars, sheep and enclosure, and the general sinfulness of mankind.

The inflation prior to 1543, however, was insignificant when compared to that which occurred after that year. At that time Henry VIII began debasing the coinage by adding alloys to the minted moneys in increasing proportions, a project which was continued until 1551. Add to this the increase of land speculators who profited from the spoils of the dissolution and who enclosed and raised rents, causing an increase in the cost of farm produce, and the doubling and tripling of prices during the period 1543-1551 is easily understood. Several attempts were made after 1551 to restore the purity of the coinage, but because the debased coinage was not called in, prices remained high and English money was held of little worth at home and abroad.

Few of the social critics indicated in their works that they realized the devastating effects of debasement on the
English economy. Most continued to harp on enclosure and sheep raising, both of which contributed to the inflation; but few saw that Henry's sudden and artificial unbalancing of the coinage system was at the root of the dearness. Those who did, principally John Hales and John Pryse, recognized the problem for what it was, a shattering of time-established standards and values which had thrown the nation into financial chaos by its abruptness. As in their consideration of other social problems, however, both Hales and Pryse were more concerned with the decay of time-honored values than with the establishment of a new and more practical and applicable set of values. Yet both suggested the corrective measures which were carried out a few years later near the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, when the purity of the coinage was restored and the debased coinage was called in. Many of the social commentators, however, could see only the results of the dearness rather than its causes, and whatever influence popular literature had in effecting a final revaluation was probably slight.

Rogues and vagabonds had always been numerous in England, but by the beginning of the sixteenth century it had become obvious to all concerned with contemporary social problems that their numbers had grown and that they constituted an ever-growing menace to society. With Barclay's section on vagabonds in The Ship of Fools that class of people became a part of English literature, and popular writers throughout the century tried their hands at depicting the wandering folk and their way of life. The clerical
beggar had long been under attack by popular social critics, but the notoriety of Simon Fish's *Supplication* caused the fame of clerical mendicancy to become increasingly widespread. Around mid-century, when vagabondage and the conditions that created vagabondage were at their worst, such writers as Becon and Cheke saw that vagabondage was more than a menace to proper folk, that it was in fact imperiling the commonwealth itself. It was during this period that protest literature and popular preachers shouted their loudest about the vagabond problem, and it was during this period that the laws were more severe than they had ever been before or were ever to be later.

Popular literature found the causes of increasing vagabondage in the high cost of the sacraments, child marriages, juvenile delinquency, and hen-pecked husbands, among other things. Some of the most thoughtful of the popular writers could see, as modern historians see, that the causes of vagabondage were more general than those just mentioned. The four main causes agreed on by Tudor writers and modern historians alike were the dissolution of the monasteries, the agrarian revolution, the increasing number of discharged retainers, and the large number of men released from military service. Popular writers dealt very little with the effect of the dissolution on vagabondage, either not realizing how many monks and monastic serving men had been turned loose to wander, or realizing how many there were and seeing better than modern historians how little they increased the number of wanderers. The changes in agricultural methods with the consequent displacement of agricultural
workers received the most attention, and practically all of the
social critics joined together to attack sheep, enclosure,
speculators, and rent raising. Less attention was paid to the
plight of the discharged retainer and the returning soldier-turned-
rogue.

It would be impossible to say how much influence popular literature
had on the fixing of laws to control vagabondage. Certainly
it kept the problem constantly before the eyes of the law makers.
As has been mentioned before, the height of social protest and
the extremest penalties for vagabondage occurred at the same time.
But in the years around the middle of the century much literature
was asking for more charity from a fixed place in each parish. In
their conservatism the pre-Elizabethan social critics could see
only the old remedy, more charity; but unfortunately, the sixteenth
century Englishman did not feel the need to give alms in order to
receive an extra boost into heaven for his good works.

Thus we can see that popular literature from 1485 to 1558,
usually conservative in tone, impeding progress rather than aiding
it, reflected public opinion at the same time that it moulded it.
Few of the popular writers were ahead of their times; few were out-
standing as economists or were acute and sensitive social critics.
But they were sincere. They were genuinely interested in ameliorat-
ing the major social problems, and they contributed greatly toward
that end. Through their writing they increased an already growing
middle-class social consciousness, and the political strength of
this stratum of sixteenth century English society, once aroused,
became the major force in remedying the social evils of that day.

Popular literature as literature leaves much to be desired. Some of the writers — Brinklow and Crowley, for example — were capable of producing striking and appropriate metaphors. Most of the writers were extremely forceful and obviously sincere. Some genuine satire was produced by this type of writing, notably in "Doctour Doublle Ale" and "John Bon and Mast Person"; and the indirection and restraint of these are refreshing in a field of literature where the direct frontal attack, simple and undisguised, was the rule. And all of it was marked by realism, sometimes intensified to the point of naturalism. Popular literature, more than any other type of literature in the sixteenth century, attempted to depict man and his problems as they existed in reality. It depicted man as he was, usually dissatisfied and sometimes barely eeking out an existence, not as he would like to be, always happy, comfortable, and clean.

On the other hand, popular literature was written to appeal to a middle-class reading public, only slightly educated and generally ruled by emotions rather than reason. This audience did not require subtle handling. It was amused by doggerel verse. Its attention to details was maintained when those details were exaggerated and when they were presented in a great wave of oratory or vituperation. The writers were forced to embellish the social picture in order to hold their readers' attention long enough to bring them to the proper way of thinking, and this necessity of painting with broad strokes in primary colors did not produce lasting
or artistic literature. Much like modern editorials and political cartoons, protest literature lost most of its significance when the time of the problem was past. This was literature of social purpose and the popular writers were intent on style only so long as that style produced the desired effect; they wanted only to be convincing. As a result, we have examined a body of material extremely important for revealing ideas and ways of life but having only a small place in the annals of English literature.

The importance of popular literature rests on two things: it is a reflection of public opinion, and it was an influence on public opinion. As a mirror of sixteenth century social problems, it accurately depicted the prevailing moods and attitudes of the times. This is not to say that this literature depicted any problem accurately. As a rule, popular writers resisted change and deplored "new-fangledness," and many of them did no more than compare contemporary conditions with the conditions of their ancestors. But so was middle-class England conservative, resisting the same changes, and being spoken for and led by the protest writers. The increased intellectual activity of the Renaissance brought on a growing social consciousness among the increasingly important middle class. Their opinions were reflected in and disseminated by the popular writers, and the ideas of the most active and vociferous of the middle-class Englishmen were passed on through popular literature to their less assertive fellows. The literature was widespread, sometimes through the efforts of political leaders themselves, and was printed and reprinted until its influence reached beyond the confines of London and was a major factor in giving an increased importance to the middle-class Englishman.
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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination: May 1, 1956