

William
MORRIS

on History

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the house down that our Sunday's beef may be cooked; to lose ten men in a battle where one would be enough; in fine to reduce ten counties to the condition of filthy cinder-heaps in order that ten thousand men may have ten thousand a year each (at other people's expense in all ways) this is the sort of wastefulness which we have grown fools enough to be proud of, but which the old Saxon Chronicler lamented, not without reason: since surely it was one of the causes that made the brilliant victory at Stamford Bridge of no account; that broke the wedge-array at Hastings, and laid Harald the Hapless the last king of the English in a forgotten grave at Waltham Abbey amidst the streams of Lea River.

FEUDAL ENGLAND

1887

The Norman Conquest found a certain kind of feudality in existence in England; a feudality which was developed from the customs of the tribes with little or no admixture of Roman law; and also even before the Conquest this country was slowly beginning to be mixed up with the affairs of the Continent of Europe, and that not only with the kindred nations of Scandinavia, but with the Romanised countries also. But the Conquest of Duke William did introduce the complete or Romanised Feudal system into the country; and it also connected it by strong bonds to the Romanised countries, but thereby laid the first foundations of national feeling in England. The English felt their kinship with the Norsemen or the Danes, and did not feel their conquests when they had become complete, and consequently mere immediate violence had disappeared from them; their feeling was tribal rather than national; but they could have no sense of co-nationality with the varied populations of the provinces which mere dynastical events had strung together into the dominion, the manor, one may say, of the foreign princes of Normandy and Anjou; and as the kings who ruled them gradually got pushed out of their French possessions, England became conscious of her separate nationality, though still only in a fashion, as the manor of an *English* lord.

It is beyond the scope of this article to give anything like a connected story, even of the slightest, of the course of events

between the conquest of Duke William and the fully developed mediæval period of the 14th century, which is the England that I have before my eyes as Mediæval. That period of the 14th century united the developments of the elements which had been stirring in Europe since the final fall of the Roman Empire, and England shared in the general feeling and spirit of the age, although from its position the course of its history, and to a certain extent the lives of its people was different. It is to this period, therefore, that I wish in the long run to call your attention, and I will only say so much about the earlier period as may be necessary to explain how the people of England got into the position in which they were found by the statute of labourers enacted by Edward III., and the Peasant's Rebellion in the time of his grandson and successor Richard II.

Undoubtedly, then, the Norman Conquest made a complete break in the continuity of the history of England. When the Londoners after the Battle of Hastings accepted Duke William for their king, no doubt they thought of him as being much in the same position that the newly slain Harold had been; or at any rate such a king as Knut the Dane, who had also conquered England; and probably William himself thought no otherwise, but the event was quite different, for on the one hand not only was he a man of great character, able, masterful, and a great soldier in the modern sense of the word, but he had at his back his wealthy dukedom of Normandy, which he had himself reduced to obedience and organised; and, on the other hand, England lay before him, unorganised, yet stubbornly rebellious to him; its very disorganisation and want of a centre making it more difficult to deal with by merely over-running it with an army levied for that purpose, and backed by a body of house-carles or guards, which would have been the method of a Scandinavian or native king in dealing with his rebellious subjects. Duke William's necessities and instincts combined led him into a very different course of action, which determined the

future destiny of the country. What he did was to quarter upon England an army of feudal vassals drawn from his obedient dukedom, and to hand over to them the lordship of the land of England in return for their military service to him, the suzerain of them all. Thenceforward, it was under the rule of these foreign landlords that the people of England had to develop.

The development of the country as a Teutonic people was checked and turned aside by this event. Duke William brought, in fact, his Normandy into England, which was thereby changed from a Teutonic people (theod) with the old tribal customary law still in use among them, into a province of Romanised Feudal Europe, a piece of France in short; and though in time she did grow into another England again, she missed for ever in her language, her literature, and her laws, the chance of developing into a great homogeneous Teutonic people infused usefully with a mixture of Celtic blood.

However, this step which Duke William was forced to take, further influenced the future of the country by creating the great order of the baronage, and the history of the early period of England is pretty much that of the struggle of the king with the baronage and the church. For William fixed the type of the successful English mediæval king, of whom Henry II. and Edward I. were also notable examples. It was, in fact, with him that the struggle towards monarchical bureaucracy began, which was checked by the barons, who extorted Magna Charta from King John, and afterwards by the revolt headed by Simon de Montfort in Henry III.'s reign; was carried on vigorously by Edward I., and finally successfully finished by Henry VII. after the long faction-fight of the Wars of the Roses, had weakened the feudal lords so much that they could no longer assert themselves against the monarchy.

As to the contest between the Crown and the Church, two things are to be noted; first, that at least in the earlier period the Church was on the popular side. Thomas Beckett was canonised,

it is true, formally and by regular decree; but his memory was held so dear by the people that he would probably have been canonized informally by them if the holy seat at Rome had refused to do so. The second thing to be noted about the dispute is this, that it was no contest of principle. According to the mediæval theory of life and religion, the Church and the State were one: separate manifestations of the Kingdom of God upon earth which was part of the Kingdom of God in heaven; the king was an officer of that realm and a liegeman of God. The doctor of laws and the doctor of physic partook in a degree of the priestly character. On the other hand the Church was not withdrawn from the everyday life of men; the division into a worldly and spiritual life neither of which had much to do with the other, was a creation of the protestantism of the Reformation, and had no place in the practice at least of the mediæval Church, which we cannot too carefully remember is little more represented by modern Catholicism than by modern Protestantism. The contest, therefore, between the Crown and the Church was a mere bickering between two bodies, without any essential antagonism between them as to how far the administration of either reached: neither dreamed of subordinating one to the other, far less of extinguishing one by the other.

The history of the Crusades, by the way, illustrates very emphatically this position of the Church in the Middle Ages. The foundation of that strange feudal kingdom of Jerusalem, whose king had precedence in virtue of his place as lord of the centre of Christianity over all other kings and princes; the orders of men-at-arms vowed to poverty and chastity, like the Templars and Knights of St. John; and above all the unquestioning sense of duty that urged men of all classes and kinds into the holy war, show how strongly the idea of God's kingdom on the earth had taken hold of all men's minds in the early Middle Ages. As to the result of the Crusades, they certainly had their influence on the solidification of Europe and the great feudal system, at the head

of which, in theory at least, were the Pope and the Kaiser. Doubtless, also, the intercourse with the East gave Europe an opportunity of sharing in the mechanical civilisation of the peoples originally dominated by the Arabs, and infused by the art of Byzantium and Persia, not without some tincture of the cultivation of the later classical period.

The stir and movement also of the Crusades, and the necessities in which they involved the princes and their barons, furthered the upward movement of the classes that lay below the feudal vassals, great and little; the principal opportunity for which movement, however, in England, was given by the continuous struggle between the Crown and the Church and Baronage.

The early Norman kings, even immediately after the death of the Conqueror, found themselves involved in this struggle, and were forced to avail themselves of the help of what had now become the inferior tribe—the native English, to wit. Henry I., an able and ambitious man, understood this so clearly that he made a distinct bid for the favour of the inferior tribe by marrying an English princess; and it was by means of the help of his English subjects that he conquered his Norman subjects, and the field of Tenchebray, which put the coping-stone on his success, was felt by the English people as an English victory over the oppressing tribe with which Duke William had overwhelmed the English people. It was during the king's reign and under these influences that the trading and industrial classes began to rise somewhat. The merchant gilds (of which subject of gilds more hereafter) were now in their period of greatest power, and had hardly begun, as they did later, to develop into the corporations of the towns; but the towns themselves were beginning to gain their freedom and to become an important element in the society of the time, as little by little they asserted themselves against the arbitrary rule of the feudal lords, lay or ecclesiastical: for as to the latter, it must be remembered that the Church

included in herself the orders or classes into which lay society was divided, and while by its lower clergy of the parishes and (afterwards) by the friars it touched the people, its upper clergy were simply feudal lords; and as the religious fervour of the "cultivated clergy," which was marked enough in the earlier period of the Middle Ages (in Anselm, for example), faded out, they became more and more mere landlords, although from the conditions of their landlordism, living as they did on their land and amidst of their tenants, less oppressive than the lay landlords.

The order and progress of Henry I.'s reign, which marks the transition from the mere military camp of the Conqueror to the Mediæval England I have to dwell upon, was followed by the period of mere confusion and misery which accompanied the accession of the princes of Anjou to the throne of England. In this period the barons widely became mere violent and illegal robbers; and the castles with which the land was dotted, and which were begun under the auspices of the Conqueror as military posts, became mere dens of strong thieves. No doubt this made the business of the next able king, Henry II., the easier. He was a staunch man of business, and turned himself with his whole soul towards the establishment of order and the consolidation of the monarchy, which accordingly took a great stride under him towards its ultimate goal of bureaucracy. He would probably have carried the business still further, since in his contest with the Church, in spite of the canonisation of Beckett and the king's formal penance at his tomb, he had really gained a victory for the Crown, which it never really lost again; but in his days England was only a part of the vast dominion of his house, which included more than half of France, and his struggle with his feudatories and the French king, which sowed the seed of the loss of that dominion to the English Crown, took up much of his life and finally beat him. His two immediate successors, Richard I. and John, were good specimens of the chiefs of their line, almost all of whom were very able men, having even a touch of

genius in them, but therewithal were such wanton blackguards and scoundrels that one is almost forced to apply the theological word "wickedness" to them. Such characters belong specially to their times, fertile as they were both of great qualities and of scoundrelism, and in which our own special vice of hypocrisy was entirely lacking. John, the second of these two pests, put the coping-stone on the villiany of his family, and lost his French dominion in the lump. Under such rascals as these came the turn of the baronage, and they, led by Stephen Langton, the archbishop who had been forced on the unwilling king by the Pope, united together and forced from him his assent to Magna-charta, the great, thoroughly well-considered deed, which is conventionally called the foundation of English Liberty, but which can only claim to be so on the ground that it was the confirmation and seal of the complete feudal system in England, and put the relations between the vassals, the great feudatories, and the king, on a stable basis, since it created or at least confirmed order among these privileged classes, among whom indeed it recognised the towns to a certain extent as part of the great feudal hierarchy: they had begun to acquire status in that hierarchy.

So John passed away, and became not long after an almost mythical personage, the type of the bad king. There are still ballads and prose stories of these in existence, which tell the tale of this strange monster as the English people imagined it. As they belong to the fourteenth century, the period I have undertaken to tell you about specially, I will give you one of these concerning the death of King John, for whom the people imagined a more dramatic cause of death than mere indigestion, of which in all probability he really died; and you may take it for a specimen of popular literature of the fourteenth century. I can make bold to quote from memory, since the quaint wording of the original, and the spirit of bold and blunt heroism which it breathes, have fixed it in my mind for ever. The King, you must remember, had halted at Swinestead Abbey in Lincolnshire in his retreat from

the hostile barons, and their French allies, and had lost all his baggage by the surprisic of the advancing tide in the Wash; so that he might well be in a somewhat sour mood. Says the tale: "So the King went to meat in the hall, and before him was a loaf, and he looked grimly on it and said, 'For how much is such a loaf sold in this realm?' 'Sir, for one penny,' said they. Then the King smote the board with his fist and said, 'By God, if I live for one year such a loaf shall be sold for twelve pence!' That heard one of the monks who stood thereby, and he thought and considered that his hour and time to die was come, and that it would be a good deed to slay so cruel a king and so evil a lord. So he went into the garden and plucked plums and took out of them the steles [stalks], and did venom in them each one; and he came before the King and sat on his knee, and said: 'Sir, by St Austin, this is the fruit of our garden.' Then the King looked evilly on him and said, 'Assay them, monk!' So the monk took and ate thereof, nor changed countenance any whit: so the King ate thereafter. But presently afterwards the monk swelled and turned blue, and fell down and died before the King: then waxed the King sick at heart, and he also swelled and died, and so he ended his days."

For a while after the death of John and accession of Henry III. the baronage, strengthened by the great Charter and with a weak and wayward king on the throne, made their step forward in power and popularity, and the first serious check to the tendency to monarchical bureaucracy, a kind of elementary aristocratic constitution, was imposed upon the weakness of Henry III. Under this movement of the barons, who in their turn had to seek for the support of the people, the towns made a fresh step in advance, and Simon de Montfort, the leader of what for want of a better word must be called the popular party, was forced by his circumstances to summon to his parliament citizens from the boroughs. Earl Simon was one of those men that come to the front in violent times, and he added real nobility of character to

strength of will and persistence. He became the hero of the people, who went near to canonising him after his death. But the monarchy was too strong for him and his really advanced projects, which by no means squared with the hopes of the baronage in general; and when Prince Edward, afterwards Edward I., grown to his full mental stature, came to the help of the Crown with his unscrupulous business ability, the struggle was soon over; and with Evesham field the monarchy began to take a new stride, and the longest yet taken, towards bureaucracy.

Edward I. is remembered by us chiefly for the struggle he carried on with the Scotch baronage for the feudal suzerainty of that kingdom, and the centuries of animosity between the two kingdoms which that struggle drew on. But he has other claims to our attention besides this. At first, and remembering the ruthlessness of many of his acts, especially in the Scotch war, one is apt to look upon him as a somewhat pedantic tyrant and a good soldier, with something like a dash of hypocrisy beyond his time added. But, like the Angevine Kings I was speaking of just now, he was a completely characteristic product of his time. He was not a hypocrite probably, after all, in spite of his tears shed after he had irretrievably lost a game, or won one by stern cruelty. There was a dash of real romance in him, which mingled curiously with certain lawyer-like qualities. He was, perhaps, the man of all men who represented most completely the finished feudal system, and who took it most to heart. His law, his romance, and his religion, his self-command, and his terrible fury were all a part of this innate feudalism, and exercised within its limits; and we must suppose that he thoroughly felt his responsibility as the chief of his feudatories, while at the same time he had no idea of his having any responsibilities towards the lower part of his subjects. Such a man was specially suited to carrying on the tendency to bureaucratic centralisation, which culminated in the Tudor monarchy. He had his struggle with the baronage, but hard as it was he was sure not to carry it beyond

the due limits of feudalism; to that he was always loyal. He had slain Earl Simon before he was king, while he was but his father's general; but Earl Simon's work did not die with him, and henceforward while the Middle Ages and their feudal hierarchy lasted, it was impossible for either king or barons to do anything which would seriously injure each other's position; the struggle ended in his reign in a balance of power in England which, on the one hand, prevented any great feudatory becoming a rival of the king, as happened in several instances in France, and on the other hand prevented the king lapsing into a mere despotic monarch. I have said that bureaucracy took a great stride in Edward's reign, but it reached its limits under feudalism as far as the nobles were concerned. Peace and order was established between the different powers of the governing classes; henceforward, the struggle is between them and the governed; that struggle was now to become obvious; the lower tribe was rising in importance, becoming richer for fleecing, but also it was beginning to have some power; this led the king first, and afterward the barons, to attack it definitely; it was rich enough to pay for the trouble of being robbed, and not yet strong enough to defend itself with open success, although the slower and less showy success of growth did not fail it. The instrument of attack in the hands of the barons was the ordinary feudal privilege, the logical carrying out of serfdom; but this attack took place two reigns later. We shall come to that further on. The attack on the lower tribe now growing into importance in this reign was made by the king; and his instrument was—Parliament.

I have told you that Simon de Montfort made some attempt to get the burgesses to sit in his Parliament, but it was left to Edward I. to lay the foundations firmly of Parliamentary representation, which he used for the purpose of augmenting the power of the Crown and crushing the rising liberty of the towns, though of course his direct aim was simply at—money.

The Great Council of the Realm was purely feudal; it was

composed of the feudatories of the king, theoretically of all of them, practically of the great ones only. It was, in fact, the council of the conquering tribe with their chief at their head; the matters of the due feudal tribute, aids, reliefs, fines, sentage, and the like—in short, the king's revenue due from his men—were settled in this council at once and in the lump. But the inferior tribe, though not represented there, existed, and, as aforesaid, was growing rich, and the king had to get their money out of their purses directly; which as they were not represented at the Council, he had to do by means of his officers (the sheriffs) dealing with them one after another, which was a troublesome job; for the men were stiff-necked and quite disinclined to part with their money; and the robbery having to be done on the spot, so to say, encountered all sorts of opposition, and, in fact, it was the money needs both of baron, bishop, and king which had been the chief instrument in furthering the progress of the towns. The towns would be pressed by their lords, king, or baron, or bishop, as it might be, and they would see their advantage and strike a bargain. For you are not to imagine that because there was a deal of violence going on in those times there was no respect for law; on the contrary, there was a quite exaggerated respect for it if it came within the four corners of the feudal feeling, and the result of this feeling of respect was the constant struggle for *status* on the part of the townships and other associations throughout the Middle Ages. Well, the burghers would say, "Tis hard to pay this money, but we will put ourselves out to pay it if you will do something for us in return; let, for example, our men be tried in our own court, and the verdict be of one of compurgation instead of wager of battle," and so forth, and so forth. Well, all this sort of detailed bargaining was, in fact, a safeguard for the local liberties, so far as they went, of the towns and shires, and did not suit the king's views of law and order at all; and so began the custom of the sheriff (the king's officer, who had taken the place of the earl of the Anglo-Saxon

period) summoning the burgesses to the council, which burgesses you must understand were not elected at the folknotes of the town, or hundred (of which more hereafter), but in a sort of hole-and-corner way by a few of the bigger men of the place. What the king practically said was this: "I want your money, and I cannot be for ever wrangling with you stubborn churlcs at home there, and listening to all your stories of how poor you are and what you want; no, I want you to be *represented*. Send me up from each one of your communes a man or two whom I can bully or cajole or bribe to sign away your substance for you."

Under these circumstances it is no wonder that the towns were not very eager in the cause of *representation*. It was no easy job to get them to come up to London merely to consult as to the kind of sauce with which they were to be eaten. However, they did come in some numbers, and by the year 1295 something like a shadow of our present Parliament was on foot. Nor need there be much more said about this institution; as time went on its functions got gradually extended by the petition for the redress of grievances accompanying the granting of money, but it was generally to be reckoned on as subservient to the will of the king, who down to the late Tudor period played some very queer tunes on this constitutional instrument.

Edward I. gave place to his son, who again was of the type of king who had hitherto given the opportunity to the barons for their turn of advancement in the constitutional struggle; and in earlier times no doubt they would have taken full advantage of the circumstances; as it was they had little to gain. The king did his best to throw off the restraint of the feudal constitution, and to govern simply as an absolute monarch. After a time of apparent success he failed, of course, and only succeeded in confirming the legal rights of feudalism by bringing about his own formal deposition at the hands of the baronage, as a chief who, having broken the compact with his feudatories, had necessarily forfeited his right. If we compare his case with that of

Charles I. we shall find this difference in it, besides the obvious one that Edward was held responsible to his feudatories and Charles towards the upper middle classes, the squirearchy, as represented by Parliament: that Charles was condemned by a law created for the purpose, so to say, and evolved from the principle of the representation of the propertied classes, while Edward's deposition was the real logical outcome of the confirmed feudal system, and was practically legal and regular.

The successor of the deposed king, the Third Edward, ushers in the complete and central period of the Middle Ages in England. The feudal system is complete: the life and spirit of the country has developed into a condition if not quite independent, yet quite forgetful, on the one hand of the ideas and customs of the Celtic and Teutonic tribes, and on the other of the authority of the Roman Empire. The Middle Ages have grown into manhood; that manhood has an art of its own, which, though developed step by step from that of Old Rome and New Rome, and embracing the strange mysticism and dreamy beauty of the East, has forgotten both its father and its mother, and stands alone triumphant, the loveliest, brightest, and gayest of all the creations of the human mind and hand. It has a literature of its own too, somewhat akin to its art, yet inferior to it, and lacking its unity, since there is a double stream in it. On the one hand, the Court poet, the gentleman, Chaucer, with his Italianising metre, and his formal recognition of the classical stories; on which, indeed, he builds a superstructure of the quaintest and most unadulterated mediævalism, as gay and bright as the architecture which his eyes beheld and his pen pictured for us, so clear, defined, and elegant; a sunny world even amidst its violence and passing troubles, like those of a happy child, the worst of them an amusement rather than a grief to the onlookers; a world that scarcely needed hope in its eager life of adventure and love, amidst the sunlit blossoming meadows, and green woods, and white begilded manor houses. A kindly and human

Chaucer's muse is Chaucer's, nevertheless, interested in and amused by all life, but of her very nature devoid of strong aspirations for the future; and that all the more, since, though the strong devotion and fierce piety of the ruder Middle Ages had by this time waned, and the Church was more often lightly mocked than either feared or loved, still the *habitus* of looking on this life as part of another yet remained: the world is fair and full of adventure; kind men and true and noble are in it to make one happy; fools also to laugh at, and rascals to be resisted, yet not wholly condemned; and when this world is over we shall still go on living in another which is a part of this picture. Note all, and be as merry as you may, never forgetting that you are alive and that it is good to live.

That is the spirit of Chaucer's poetry; but alongside of it existed yet the ballad poetry of the people, wholly untouched by courtly elegance and classical pedantry; rude in art but never coarse, true to the back-bone; instinct with indignation against wrong, and thereby expressing the hope that was in it; a protest of the poor against the rich, especially in those songs of the Foresters, which have been called the mediæval epic of revolt; no more gloomy than the gentleman's poetry, yet cheerful from courage, and not content. Half-a-dozen stanzas of it are worth a cart-load of the whining introspective lyrics of to-day; and he who, when he has mastered the slight differences of language from our own daily speech, is not moved by it, does not understand what true poetry means nor what its aim is.

There is a third element in the literature of this time which you may call Lollard poetry, the great example of which is William Langland's 'Piers Plowman.' It is no bad corrective to Chaucer, and in *form* at least belongs wholly to the popular side; but it seems to me to show symptoms of the spirit of the rising middle class, and casts before it the shadow of the new master that was coming forward for the workman's oppression. But I must leave what more I have to say on this subject of the art and

literature of the fourteenth century for another occasion. In what I have just said, I only wanted to point out to you that the Middle Ages had by this time come to the fullest growth; and that they could give expression, which was all their own, to the ideas and life of the time. That time was in a sense brilliant and progressive, and the life of the worker was better than it ever had been, and might compare with advantage with what it became in after periods and with what it is now; and indeed, looking back upon it, there are some minds and some moods that cannot help regretting it, and are not particularly scared by the idea of its violence and lack of accurate knowledge of scientific details; but, however, one thing is clear to us now, the kind of thing which never is clear to most people living in such periods, namely, that whatever it was, it could not last but must change into something else.

The complete feudalism of the fourteenth century fell, as systems always fall, by its own corruption, by development of the seeds of change, some which indeed had lain asleep during centuries, to wake up into activity long after the events which had created them were forgotten.

The feudal system was naturally one of open war; and the alliances, marriages, and other dealings family with family, made by the kings and potentates, were always leading them into war by giving them legal claims, or at least claims that could be legally pleaded, to the domains of other lords, who took advantage of their being on the spot, of their strength in men or money, or their popularity with the baronage, to give immediate effect to their claims. Such a war was that by which Edward I. drew on England the enmity of the Scotch; and such again was the great war which Edward III. entered into with France. You must not suppose that there was anything in this war of a national, far less of a race character. The last series of wars before this time I am now speaking of in which race feeling counted for much was the Crusades. This French war, I say, was neither national, racial, or

tribal; it was the private business of a lord of the manor claiming what he considered his legal rights of another lord who had, as he thought, usurped them; and this claim his loyal feudatories were bound to take up for him; loyalty to a feudal superior, not patriotism to a country, was the virtue which Edward III.'s soldiers had to offer if they had any call to be virtuous in that respect. This war once started was hard to drop, partly because of the success that Edward had, falling as he did on France with the force of a country so much more homogeneous than it; and no doubt it was a war very disastrous to both countries, and so may be reckoned as amongst the causes which broke up the feudal system. But the real causes lay much deeper than that. The system was not capable of expansion in production; it was, in fact, as long as its integrity remained untouched, an army fed by slaves, who could not be properly and closely exploited; its free men proper might do something else in their leisure, and so produce art and literature, but their true business as members of a conquering tribe, their concerted business, was to fight. There was, indeed, a fringe of people between the serf and the free noble who produced the matters of handicraft which were needed for the latter, but deliberately, and as we should now think, wastefully; and as these craftsmen and traders began to grow into importance and to push themselves, as they could not help doing, into the feudal hierarchy, as they acquired *status*, so the sickness of the feudal system increased on it, and the shadow of the coming commercialism fell upon it. That any set of people who could claim to be other than the property of free men should not have definite rights differentiated sharply from those of other groups, was an idea that did not occur to the Middle Ages; therefore, as soon as men came into existence that were not serfs, and were not nobles, they had to struggle for *status* by organising themselves into associations that should come to be acknowledged members of the great feudal hierarchy; for indefinite and negative freedom was not allowed to any person in

those days; if you had not *status* you did not exist except as an outlaw. This is, briefly speaking, the motive power of necessity that lay behind the struggle of the town corporations and craft guilds to be free, a struggle which, though it was to result in the breaking up of the mediæval hierarchy, began by an appearance of strengthening it by adding to its members, increasing its power of production, and so making it more stable. About this struggle, and the kind of life which accompanied it, I may have to write another time, and so will not say more about it here. Except this, that it was much furthered by the change that gradually took place between the landlords and the class on whom all society rested, the serfs. These at first were men who had no more rights than chattel-slaves had, except that mostly, as part of the stock of the manor, they could not be sold off it; they had to do all the work of the manor, and to earn their own livelihood off it as they best could. But as the power of production increased, owing to better methods of working, and as the country got to be more settled, their task-work became easier of performance and their own land more productive to them; and that tendency to the definition and differentiation of rights, moreover, was at work for their benefit, and the custom of the manor defined what their services were, and they began to acquire rights. From that time they ceased to be pure serfs, and began to tend towards becoming tenants, at first paying purely and simply *service* for their holdings, but gradually commuting that service for fines and money payment—for rent, in short.

Towards the close of the fourteenth century, after the country had been depopulated by the Black Death, and impoverished by the long war, the feudal lords of these copyholders and tenants began to regret the slackness with which their predecessors had exploited their *property*, the serfs, and to consider that under the new commercial light which had begun to dawn upon them *they* could do it much better if they only had their property a little more in hand; but it was too late, for their property had acquired

rights, and therewithal had got strange visions into their heads of a time much better than that in which they lived, when even those rights should be supplanted by a condition of things in which the assertion of rights for any one set of men should no longer be needed, since all men should be free to enjoy the fruits of their own labour. Of that came the great episode of the Peasants' War, led by men like Wat Tyler, Jack Straw, and John Ball, who indeed, with those they led, suffered for daring to be before their time, for the revolt was put down with cruelty worthy of an Irish landlord or a sweating capitalist of the present day; but, nevertheless, serfdom came to an end in England, if not because of the revolt, yet because of the events that made it, and thereby a death-wound was inflicted on the feudal system. From that time onward the country, passing through the various troubles of a new French war of Henry Vth's time, and the War of the Roses, did not heed these faction fights much. The workmen grew in prosperity, but also they began to rise into a new class, and form a class underneath the old working men, and to lay the foundations of capitalistic production. England got carried into the rising current of commercialism, and the rich men and landlords to turn their attention to the production of profit instead of the production of livelihood; the gildless journeyman and the landless labourer slowly came into existence; the landlord got rid of his tenants all he could, turned tillage into pasture, and sweated the pastures to death in his eagerness for wool, which for him meant money and the breeding of money; till at last the place of the serf, which had stood empty, as it were, during a certain transition period, during which the non-capitalistic production was expanding up to its utmost limit, was filled by the proletarian working for the service of a master in a new fashion, a fashion which exploited and (woe worth the while!) exploits him very much more completely than the customs of the manor of the feudal period. I hope to be able hereafter to go into the question of the life and production of the workman of the

earlier period. At present I will make an end by saying that the feudal serf worked hard, and lived poorly, and produced a rough livelihood for his master; whereas the modern workman, working harder still, and living little if any better than the serf, produces for his master a state of luxury of which the old lord of the manor never dreamed. The workman's powers of production are multiplied a thousandfold; his own livelihood remains pretty much where it was. The balance goes to his master and the crowd of useless, draggle-tailed knaves and fools who pander to his idiotic sham desires, and who, under the pretentious title of the intellectual part of the middle classes, have in their turn taken the place of the mediæval jester. Truly, if the Positivist motto, "Live for others," be taken in stark literality, the modern workman should be a good and wise man, since he has no chance of living for himself! And yet, I wish he were wiser still; wise enough to make an end of the preaching of "Live *on* others," which is the motto set forth by commercialism to her favoured children.

Yet in one thing the modern proletarian has an advantage over the mediæval serf, and that advantage is a world in itself. Many a century lay between the serf and successful revolt, and though he tried it many a time and never lost heart, yet the coming change which his martyrdom helped on was not to be for him yet, but for the new masters of his successors. With us it is different. A few years of wearisome struggle against apathy and ignorance; a year or two of growing hope—and then who knows? Perhaps a few months, or perhaps a few days of the open struggle with brute force, with the mask off its face, and the sword in its hand, and then we are over the bar. Who knows, I say? Yet this we know, that ahead of us, with nothing betwixt except such incidents as are necessary to its development, lies the inevitable social revolution, which will bring about the end of mastery and the triumph of fellowship.