

CHAPTER XXX.

Nationality of the English.—Landing of King Edward in Normandy.—The March to the Somme.—Passage of the Somme at Blanchetaque.—Position of the English at Cressy.—The Battle.—The Victory.—Cressy the Victory of the Yeomen.—Scotland.—Battle of Nevil's Cross.—The Siege of Calais.—The Six Burgesses of Calais.—English Colony founded at Calais.—The Order of the Garter.—Windsor.—The Great Pestilence.—Statute of Labourers; Scale of Wages.—Second Statute; Labourers confined to one locality.

EDWARD III. assumed the title of king of France in 1337, and in 1340 he quartered the arms of France with those of England. Upon his coins he was king of England and France. In that year a statute was passed which shews how completely the feeling of nationality had now possessed the race of Englishmen, and how jealous they were of the independence of their island. "Know ye," says Edward, "that whereas some people do think that by reason that the realm of France is devolved to us as right heir of the same, and forasmuch as we be king of France, our realm of England should be put in subjection of the king and of the realm of France in time to come. * * * * We will, and grant, and stablish, that our said realm of England, nor the people of the same, of what estate or condition they be, shall not in any time to come be put in subjection nor in obeisance of us, nor of our heirs and successors, as kings of France." * All the supposed pre-eminence of the French race over the English had been obliterated in the amalgamation of three centuries. In 1362, it was enacted that all pleas in the courts "shall be pleaded, shewed, defended, answered, debated, and judged in the English tongue," and not in the French tongue, "which is much unknown in the said realm." † The English people, speaking the English tongue, had become inspired with the passion for continental dominion. Under the Norman kings and the Norman barons, they had been made to feel the yoke of the conquerors. They would now go forth themselves to conquest. There was a great issue to be tried, in a daring adventure for the possession of the noble land that their king demanded as his own. Edward was called by his rival Philip, "the wool-merchant." The growers

* Statutes of the Realm, 14 Ed. III.

† *Ibid.*, 36 Ed. III.

of wool, the dealers of the staple, would go forth with bow and bill to encounter, at any odds, the chivalry of France. On the 10th of July, 1346, ten thousand archers of England were lodged on the sands near Cape La Hougue. As if the circumstances of the Norman conquest were to be parodied, Froissart says, "The king issued out of his ship, and the first foot that he set on the ground, he fell so rudely that the blood burst out of his nose. The knights that were about him took him up and said, 'Sir, for God's sake, enter again into your ship, and come not a land this day, for this is but an evil sign for us.' Then the king answered quickly, and said, 'Wherefore? This is a good token for me, for the land desireth to have me,' of the which answer all his men were right joyful."

The march of the invading army was in perfect conformity with the usual mode of making war in the feudal times. To desolate the country, to burn the towns if they resisted, to plunder the inhabitants even when they peacefully submitted; these were the aspects in which king Edward and his English presented themselves to the people over whom he claimed to rule. Keeping near the coast, they arrived at Barfleur, which was given up "for fear of death;" gold and silver and jewels were found, and "so much riches that the boys and villans of the host set nothing by good furred gowns." On they marched to Cherbourg, "a great and rich town, but into the castle they could not come, it was so strong." From Cherbourg they proceeded to Carenton, where the castle was taken by assault. During this progress along the sands and marshes of the coast, the fleet kept in view; and the captured burgesses that were worth ransom were sent on board. In this manner the army reached Caen. They entered the city; those who were ready to meet them in the field flying to their homes, when they saw the English advancing in three battalions, "with their banners and standards waving in the wind, and the archers which they had not been accustomed to see." But the people of the city cast down stones and timber and iron upon the English who had entered their streets, and killed and wounded five hundred of them. The king was wroth, and would have sacked and burnt the whole place, but he was better advised; and after three days marched forward, having won "great riches." Edward was now fully committed to the dangers of his adventure; for he sent his ships home, laden with plunder and prisoners. From Caen, he rode in the same order as before, "brenning and exiling the country," till he reached

Evreux; and thence marched to Louviers, avoiding the castles and walled towns. His object was to cross the Seine at Rouen, and then march to Calais, expecting to be joined by an army of Flemings. But Philip was at Rouen before him, and was encamped on the right bank of the river, having destroyed the bridge of boats. Below Rouen the passage of the Seine was too difficult to be attempted; and the English army was therefore led along the left bank by Vernon and Mantes, to Poissy,—a march of more than sixty miles. The bridge here was partially destroyed. The position of the English was now one of extreme peril. They were separated by two great rivers, the Seine and the Somme, from their Flemish auxiliaries; and Philip was collecting a great force as he proceeded towards Paris in a parallel march on the right bank of the Seine. There was no course but that of fronting the danger. Part of Edward's host marched on to St. Germain, and even to Neuilly: and the people of Paris "were not well assured of themselves, for it was not as then closed." King Philip caused all the penthouses of the city to be pulled down, and took up a position at St. Denis. Meanwhile, the English had repaired the bridge of Poissy, the broken arches and joists of which lay in the river; and Edward rested in the nunnery at Poissy, "and kept there the feast of our lady, in August; and sat in his robes of scarlet, furred with ermine." He then crossed the bridge at Poissy; while Philip, at St. Denis, was preparing to resist an attack upon Paris. The course of the English was now direct by Beauvais, on to the Somme, through Poix. But Philip had made a rapid march upon Amiens, detachments of his men at arms having preceded him along the right bank of the Somme, guarding every ford, and breaking down every bridge. The main body of his army was gradually shutting up the invaders in the nook between the Somme and the sea. Edward had reached Airaines; and he had sent out his marshals with three thousand archers and men at arms to find some passage. At Pecquigny they were boldly met, and again at Pont de Remy, and could accomplish nothing. They returned to Airaines and made their report, and "the king of England was right pensive." The English marched out of Airaines in the morning, and the French entered the town at noon.

In haste the English had departed from Airaines. When the French marched in, the meat was on the spits, the bread was in the oven, the tables were spread for dinner, the wine-tuns were at hand. There was no time for feasting. Rapidly they marched to

Oisemont, where the king took up his quarters. The marshals had ridden to the gates of Abbeville and onward to St. Valery. The bridge of Abbeville was within the walls; the Somme widened and was more dangerous as it neared the sea. Prisoners of the country were brought in to Edward; and he "right courteously demanded of them if there were any amongst them that knew any passage beneath Abbeville." If any man would show such a passage, he, and twenty of his company should be quit of his ransom. In the hour of his need, help came from one of those humble men that the tyrannous host had made war upon in their corn-fields and hovels. "A varlet called Gobyn Agace stepped forth and said to the king, Sir, I promise you on the jeopardy of my head I shall bring you to such a place." It was a passage a little above Abbeville, hard in the bottom with white stones, then called Blanchetaque. Here the river was tidal; and Agace said, that when the flood was gone the stream was so low that it might be passed without danger. The king slept not much that night. At midnight his trumpet was sounded; and at daybreak of that morning or August, the host had departed from Oisemont, led by Gobyn Agace to the much-desired ford. At the sun-rising they had reached it. But the flood was up; and they waited till the hour of prime,—the first canonical hour of prayer—until the tide ebbed. But a great company of horse and foot, to the number of twelve thousand, had been gathered under the command of a Norman baron, Sir Godemar du Fay, on the right bank of the river. The French and English struggled in the ford; and the Genoese of Philip's army did great trouble with their crossbows; but the archers of Edward shot so wholly together that at length the way was cleared, and Sir Godemar du Fay was discomfited and fled. The king having crossed, he thanked God for his army's escape from their great peril; and dismissed Gobyn Agace with a present of a hundred nobles and a horse. The army then marched on, and lodged in the fields near Cressy. The king of France heard that the afternoon flood had come in at Blanchetaque; and so he rested that night at Abbeville.

It was Friday, the 25th of August, when the English army crossed at Blanchetaque. Leaving the valley, they would reach the fertile open country between the Somme and the Authie, "plentiful of wines and other vitale." Edward knew how closely the French king was following him to fight; and he said, "Let us take here some plot of ground, for we will go no farther till we have seen our enemies." Dr. Lingard says,—“With his motives

we are not acquainted; but he must have had some powerful inducement to hazard an engagement with such a disparity of force." His motive was probably not the fanciful one that he should fight on his mother's heritage of Ponthieu, as Froissart records; but that he saw "a plot of ground somewhat to his advantage." The village of Cressy, now containing about sixteen hundred inhabitants, is in the valley of the little river the Maye; and behind it the ground gently rises into a broad ridge, whose elevation commands the country through which the French army would advance from above or below Abbeville. About midnight Edward lay down to rest; and he rose betimes in the morning and heard mass with the prince, his son. Then he commanded all the men to draw near the field which he had appointed. He caused a park, or enclosure, to be made by the wood-side, behind his host; and there all the horses and carriages were brought, for every man was to fight on foot. The forest of Cressy, which is now bounded by the Maye, then probably extended towards the ground upon which Edward had taken his position. The English army was formed in three battalions, the first being under the nominal command of the Prince of Wales, who had with him Warwick, and Chandos, and other valiant knights. It consisted of eight hundred men-at-arms, two thousand archers, and a thousand Welsh. The second battalion had eight hundred men-at-arms and twelve hundred archers. The third battalion, of seven hundred men-at-arms and two thousand archers, occupied the summit of the hill, under the command of the king. It has been doubted whether these numbers, as given by Froissart, are not taken too low. The chronicler records that four thousand men-at-arms and ten thousand archers, besides the Welsh and Irish, landed at La Hogue. We find the four thousand men-at-arms diminished at Cressy to two thousand three hundred; and the archers to five thousand two hundred. After the marchings and fightings, the hunger and the intemperance, of seven weeks, we can easily believe that only about half the number were left. At nine o'clock of the morning of the 26th of August, this little army, having eaten and drunk, lay down, each man on the earth, with his bow and his sallet (helmet) beside him; and patiently waited the coming of an enemy ten times their number.

On the same Saturday, the French king and his host, who had crossed the Somme by the bridge of Abbeville, marched betimes out of that town; and when they had advanced two leagues, approaching towards the English, four knights went forward to



QUEEN PHILIPPA AT THE FEET OF THE KING. — Vol. i. 518.

reconnoitre. The roads were crowded with country people, who cried—"Let us slay them all." The four knights saw the little army motionless on the ground, ready for battle; and they returned and exhorted Philip to rest for that day, for it would be late before they could set their ranks in order. The command was given to halt; but the horsemen in the rear continued to press forward, and those in front, resolved to have the glory of a victory, rode in advance till they saw the battalions of Edward on the high ground, and then suddenly turning back threw the unmanageable multitude into confusion. The Genoese archers, weary of their long march on foot, were unwilling to fight that day; but the king of France became excited amidst the tumult about him, and commanded them to begin the battle. These soldiers, fifteen thousand in number, according to Froissart, were tardily coming up to the battle field, when the sky suddenly became darkened. There was a partial eclipse of the sun, and then a storm of rain and thunder. At five o'clock in the evening the sun again shone out in autumnal splendour; and the Genoese were close to the English. Froissart describes this battle as "the battle between La Broye and Cressy." On the road from Abbeville to La Broye the table-land of Cressy is to the north-west, as seen from Froyelles. As we saw it from that point at five o'clock of a summer afternoon, when the sun was westering, we felt the accuracy of Froissart's narrative, that when the air began to wax clear, and the sun shone fair and bright, "it was right in the Frenchmen's eyen and on the Englishmen's backs." With this disadvantage the Genoese approached, with their cross-bows wound up. They made a great leap and cry; but the English stirred not. A second and a third time they leapt and uttered a fell cry; but the English stirred not. The Genoese at last shot fiercely. Then stepped forth the English archers one pace, and their arrows flew so wholly and so thick that it seemed snow. The cross-bow men fled; and the French king crying out, "slay these rascals," the men of arms dashed in amongst them, and cut them down. Again the English yeomen drew their bow-strings; and the terrible shafts slew horse and men, the French knights and the poor Italians, and the press was so thick that one over-threw another. Some order at length was restored in the French ranks. The English archers stirred not from their position. At whatever point the French came on they saw "a great hedge before them." The earl of Alençon and the earl of Flanders led their men in some order to skirt the archers, and they joined

battle with the Prince of Wales's battalion. The king of France tried to reach them when he saw their banners, but there was the great hedge of archers to interrupt his progress. Once only was the issue of this dread fight doubtful. The king, says Foissart, stood "on a little windmill-hill" with his reserve. On the highest point of the ridge is a knoll about fifteen feet above the general level, with an ancient circular stone windmill upon it. Tradition says it is the spot where Edward stood; and there is nothing in the character of the ground to make one doubt the accuracy of this tradition. There is no other "little windmill hill," though there are many windmills around. The one window of the mill commands the road from Abbeville to La Broye.* There then, when the battle was at the hottest, a knight came to the king, and said that Warwick, and Oxford, and the Prince of Wales, were fiercely fought withal, and were sore handled, and they desired aid from him and his men. Then the king asked if his son were dead or hurt, or felled to the earth; and the knight answered "No." "Say then to them that sent you," replied the king, "that they suffer him this day to win his spurs, and ask me not for aid while my son is alive." This was the spirit of chivalry rather than the caution of sound generalship. It was in the same spirit that the king of Bohemia, who was nearly blind, told his men to lead him so far forward that he might strike one stroke with his sword; and they all tied the reins of their bridles each to the other, that they should not lose him in the press; and they were all slain, the king in the midst. On a cross-road from Cressy to Fontaines-sur-Maye, which was probably in the midst of the battle-field, is a rude cross, where tradition says the blind old man was buried. Before that autumn sun was set the work was done. Alençon was killed, and the count of Flanders; Aumarle, and Loraine, and Louis of Blois, and Auxerre, and St. Pol. Earls and knights, who had come out of the gates of Abbeville that morning in gallant array, with trumpet and banner, were slaughtered or had fled. But "the Englishmen never departed from their battles for chasing of any man, but kept still their field, and ever defended themselves against all such as came to assail them." Before evensong time the French king had not threescore men about him." And then John of Hainault took the king's horse by the bridle, and led him away, till he came to the

* The mill itself, though damaged by long exposure, is of that peculiar fine circular masonry which may be seen in towers of the fourteenth century, of which the Caesar's tower, now the Bell tower, at Windsor is an example.

castle of La Broye; and the king called out in the darkness that they should "open the gate quickly, for this is the fortune of France." There the king stayed not, but rode through the night to Amiens. Upon the field of Cressy torches were lighted, for it was very dark; and Edward the king came down from the little hill, and went to his son, and kissed him, and said, "Fair son, God give you good perseverance. Ye are my good son, that have thus acquitted you nobly. Ye are worthy to keep a realm." And the prince inclined himself to the earth, honouring the king his father. Thus ended the great day of Cressy—a day of terrible slaughter—preceded by weeks of devastation, and followed up by years of contest and suffering. But it was a day on which the steady courage that was the result of the comparatively free condition of the yeomen of England, was first asserted on a great scale. From that time the feudal pretension of the iron-clad knights to be the only soldiers was practically at an end. The battles of England were thenceforth to be won by bow and bill. When the ancient weapons were exchanged for the matchlock and the pike, and these again for the rifle and the bayonet, the same spirit which made every yeoman in that field of Cressy stir not one foot, whilst the great plain before them was filled with ten times their number of men-at-arms, has carried their descendants through many a desperate struggle, and showed from age to age "the majesty with which the British soldier fights."

The slaughter of Cressy was not completed on that last Saturday evening of August, 1346. On the Sunday morning there was a heavy fog; and an English detachment of five hundred lances, and two thousand archers went out to scour the country. They fed in with two separate French forces, which they almost annihilated. The heralds of the English went over the great battle-field, and reported that they had found the bodies of eleven princes, eighty bannerets, twelve hundred knights, and thirty thousand inferior persons. On Monday the king departed for Montreuil; and on Thursday the 31st his army sat down before Calais, to commence the memorable siege, which lasted till the August of 1347.

The absence of king Edward in France presented a favourable opportunity to the Scots for a hostile demonstration against England of a formidable character. David II., the son of the great Bruce, had been four years in Scotland, after his long residence at the court of France. He was ready to attend to the suggestions of his friend king Philip as his truest policy. He resolved, there-

fore, upon an invasion of England, whilst Edward was besieging Calais, and Derby was winning battles in Gascony. In the beginning of October, David entered Cumberland; took the fortress called "the pyle of Liddell;" and with no exception to the ordinary course of cruelty and devastation, beheaded its governor, and went on into the bishopric of Durham, slaughtering and plundering. But an English army had assembled at Auckland, under the great Norman barons and the military prelates, with which army was queen Philippa. She went from rank to rank "desiring them to do their devoir—to defend the honour of her lord." At Nevill's Cross the armies met. The battle was won by the English archers. The Scots, with their "great axes, sharp and hard," presented in their close array a fatal mark for the unerring bowmen, of whom, according to Roger Ascham, there was a Scottish proverb, "That every English archer beareth under his girdle twenty-four Scots." David fought with great bravery, and was at last taken prisoner by John Coupland, a squire of Northumberland. He was conducted to London, and lodged in the Tower.

Three days before the festival of All Saints, queen Philippa joined her lord at Calais. She took with her a great company of ladies; and there was feast and revelry around those beleaguered walls. King Edward was conducting his operations by the slow but certain process of blockade. He warred not against the devoted town with scaling ladder and catapult, nor with the formidable machines which the discovery of gunpowder is held to have called into use at this period. The French king was approaching with a great host to raise the siege. The nobles, and knights, and men-at-arms that had escaped the slaughter or captivity of Cressy, had been re-organized. Edward would not put the issue of the war upon another battle in the open field. He rendered Calais inaccessible. His fleet blockaded the coast; he established his army in a new town of huts, which rose outside the wall; he threw up entrenchments strongly guarded. The French governor had turned out of the town every inhabitant who had not an independent supply of provisions for several months. Seventeen hundred men, women, and children, thus dispossessed of their homes, approached the English camp. They received each a meal, and two pieces of silver, and went their forlorn course into the highways. Five hundred more unhappy beings were afterwards thrust out, and perished between the walls of Calais and the English lines. At the Whitsuntide of 1347, king Philip hoisted the oriflamme, and

led a hundred and fifty thousand men to Whitsand. The approach to Calais by the coast was a dangerous undertaking; for a large fleet, with archers in every vessel, was ready to guard the shore. The other road through the marshes was secured by strong defences, especially at the bridge at Neuillet. For six weeks Philip remained inactive, having sent a cartel to Edward to come forth and fight; and he then took his way to Amiens, and gave every man leave to depart. The governor of Calais immediately hung out the flag of England and asked to capitulate. The garrison had suffered every extremity of misery, having eaten their horses and their dogs. All hope of relief was gone. Edward demanded that they should surrender at discretion. The scene which followed is one which dwells on the mind of every reader of history, when the details of battles and negotiations are passed away, and have left no impression. The story of the six burgesses of Calais and queen Philippa has been told by Froissart with surpassing dramatic power; and no scepticism of those who fancy that history should reject whatever has the interest of romance, ought to prevent us repeating it, as closely as we can in his own words, with needful condensation.

Sir John of Vienne, the governor of Calais, stands upon the wall of the town, and makes a sign that he would speak with some one of the English host. Thither come to him Sir Walter Manny, and another knight; and the governor makes his request that king Edward would take the town and castle, and all the goods therein, and let them depart. But Sir Walter Manny said that he knew something of the king's mind, which was, that all should submit themselves to his pure will, to ransom such as he pleaseth, and to put to death such as he listeth. Sir John of Vienne answered, that though they had endured much pain, they would endure as much more, rather than consent that the worst lad in the town should have any more evil than the greatest of them all. Sir Walter went back to the king, and, after much debate, the king resolved that all the grace he would award was, that six chief burgesses of the town should come out bare-headed, bare-footed, and bare-legged, and in their shirts, with halters about their necks; and, with the keys of the town and castle in their hands, thus yield themselves purely to his will, and the rest he would take to mercy. Sir John of Vienne stood again upon the wall to receive the king's answer. He then went into the market-place, and sounded the common bell, and told his sad report, and the people wept, and he himself wept piteously.

Then stood forth the richest burghess of all the town, Eustace de St. Pierre, and said, that to save the residue of the people he would be the first to put his life in jeopardy. When he had thus spoken, every man worshipped him, and divers kneeled down at his feet with sore weeping. Then another honest burghess, John Dayre, rose and said, I will keep company with my gossip Eustace. And James of Wyssant, and Peter his brother, and two others, declared the same. Then they went out of the gate, apparelled as the king desired, and stood between the gate and the barriers. And the captain delivered them to Sir Walter Manny, and told him they were the most notable burghesses of all the town, and begged him to pray the king to have mercy on them; and Sir Walter said, I shall do the best for them I can. And the six burghesses knelt before the king, and held up their hands, and said, We submit ourselves clearly unto your will and pleasure, to save the residue of the people of Calais, who have suffered much pain. The earls, and barons, and others who were there, wept for pity; but the king looked felly on them, for greatly he hated the people of Calais; and he commanded their heads to be struck off, and would hear no man in their behalf for mercy. Then the queen being great with child, kneeled down, and said: Gentle sir, since I passed the sea in much peril, I have desired nothing of you; therefore now I require of you, in the honour of the Son of the Virgin Mary, and for the love of me, that you will take mercy of these six burghesses. The king beheld the queen, and stood still awhile in a study, and then said,—Ah, dame, I would you had been now in some other place; but I cannot deny you. I give these men to you, to do your pleasure with them. And the six burghesses were brought into the queen's chamber, newly clothed; and she gave them to eat at their leisure; and bestowed upon each six nobles; and caused them to be taken through the host in safety, and set at liberty. This is the relation of Froissart. Some historians would infer that the king was not in earnest in threatening to put the burghesses to death. We take the story as we find it; not believing that it can be improved by any prosaic explanation.

After the surrender of Calais, an armistice was entered into between the rival kings. Within a week after he had taken possession of the town, Edward addressed a precept to the authorities of the principal places of England, commanding them to proclaim that any of his subjects, whether merchants or otherwise, who should come with their goods to the town of Calais, should be provided

with habitations at such a rent as might content them, and might dwell there securely with their families in the enjoyment of all their liberties and privileges.* The king desired to found an English colony in this town, which he had won from France at such a heavy cost. For two centuries Calais remained in possession of the English crown; and the people attached the greatest importance to its occupation; believing that, whilst England was mistress of this nearest port of communication, the keys of France hung at her girdle.

Edward returned to England in October. The victory of Cressy had produced no actual result in the great controversy between the two kingdoms beyond the acquisition of Calais; but the character of the king, and the character of the nation, were elevated. The yeoman had taken his proper position side by side with the knight. Cressy became a rallying cry whenever Englishmen thought of battle and dominion. The false ambition engendered a true heroism. Edward was naturally ready to associate the memory of his great victory with the ostentation of chivalry. He had summoned illustrious knights to a feast of the Round Table at Windsor, before his invasion of France. He now solemnly established the statutes of the Order of the Garter. In 1349 there was high festival at Windsor; when the king and twenty-five companions of the Order, "all clothed in mantles of fine woollen cloth of blue colour, powdered with garters, and each wearing the great collar of the Order," went in solemn procession to the chapel of St. George, where the ceremonies of installation were performed. St. George, the archbishop of Alexandria—whose ecclesiastical career of violence and rapacity had been forgotten after the lapse of seven centuries, when the Crusaders adopted him for their saint—St. George the victorious, with all those fabulous accomplishments which made him the dragon-slayer and virgin-deliverer, became the patron of the Order of the Garter, and the tutelary saint of England. The "Black Book" of the Order, written in the days of Henry VIII., says, that St. George in a dream inspired the lion-hearted Richard to buckle a leather on the legs of each of his most favoured companions in arms; and that Edward therefore made the Garter the badge of his knightly order—a symbol of fellowship in chivalry. The romantic legends connect the emblem of the Order with the story which Froissart tells, "how the king of England was in amours with the Countess of Salisbury;" and how the noble woman

* *Fœdera*, vol. iii. part i. p. 130.

repressed his unhallowed passion. "Evil be to him that evil thinks," says the legend, became the motto of the Order, when the king picked up the garter of her whose "fresh beauty and goodly demeanour" were ever in his remembrance. It is "a vain and idle romance," say some solemn narrators; as if chivalry were not a perfect succession of vain and idle romances. To test the usages of such times by the thoughts and manners of our own, is to pass over what is characteristic of the feudal age, in which the fierce passions, the daring adventures, the constant restlessness of men without intellectual pursuits, were associated in their few peaceful seasons with an almost childish love of luxurious gratification and senseless pageantry; and when the real courtesy which sought to do honour to the brave and the fair was mixed up with exaggerated compliments and frivolous conceits. Writers who apply a moral scale derived from the present to these exhibitions of the past, speak of Edward as cowardly when he stood on the windmill-hill at Cressy, while his son was fighting below him; and of the Black Prince, as assuming the pride which apes humility, when he waited at Poitiers on his royal prisoner at supper. Very truly has a great historian said, "How many pages are written to explain events wholly conforming to the spirit of their age! Whereas, if we left the facts on their true theatre, living, as it were, in the midst of the circumstances which surrounded them, our imagination would receive natural impressions of actions and characters."*

Edward III. had a strong affection for Windsor. In a letter to the pope, in which he claims certain privileges for the college which he had there established within his castle, he speaks of it as a place in which he had his birth.† In the same letter he claims similar privileges for his canonical establishment in his palace of Westminster. In the palace of Westminster was the famous chapel of Saint Stephen, completed with unusual magnificence in 1347—the gem of English art, on which "was lavished all that the metropolis could produce most exquisite in the arts of design; and this not in architecture only, but the best works of sculpture, and the highest class of painting were put into requisition for its adornment."‡ In the reign of Edward VI. the sculptured arches and the painted walls were boarded over, and the chapel of the English kings, as beautiful as the Saint Chapelle of Paris, now so exquisitely restored,

* Barante, "Ducs de Bourgogne," Preface, p. 13.

† "In quo maternus uterus nos exudit." *Fœdera*, vol. iii. part i. p. 342.

‡ Fergusson, "Handbook of Architecture," vol. ii. p. 870.

was made the House of Commons. At the union with Ireland the old wainscoting was taken down, and the curious paintings, then revealed to a tasteless generation, were destroyed. The fire of 1834 completed the ruin. Windsor had a better fate. Edward III., when relieved from the pressure of the French war, applied himself to the enlargement of his birth-place. The old castle, with the exception of three towers on the west, which still remain, was pulled down, and a new castle, over which the standard of England has floated for five centuries, was erected during his reign. In his twenty-third regnal year, 1349, his letters-patent went forth to press hewers of stone, carpenters, and other artificers; and the same principle of impressing workmen was put in force during twenty years. William of Wykeham was his chief architect. The system of impressment offers an illustration of the condition of the people; and is one among the many proofs of the semi-slavery that was attempted to be imposed when the English were fast passing out of a state of serfdom.

When any general misfortune with which a people is visited becomes an epoch from which their legal instruments are dated, we may form an accurate notion of the intensity of the infliction. In this reign there were three terrible visitations of pestilence. The first and the greatest lasted from the 31st of May to the 29th of September, 1349; * and in this year we find many charters and other documents dated, not as the twenty-third of Edward III., but as the year of the Great Pestilence. Within a month after the jousts and tournaments, the banquets and dances of Windsor, the land was suddenly stricken with what was called the Black Plague. According to the best accredited accounts this disease originated in Upper India and China, in 1346; and gradually spreading through Asia, in four years comprehended nearly all Europe. In 1348 Italy was afflicted with the pest, at the same season as England in the succeeding year. Boccaccio, in his introduction to the Decameron, has given the most vivid description of this visitation. He tells us of the rich shutting themselves up in their houses, passing their time in such pleasures as they could obtain; of the licentious abandoning themselves to every intemperance; of the almost general heartlessness with which even the family ties were disregarded, whilst individuals thought only of their own safety.

* This term is given by Sir H. Nicolas, upon the authority of Sir Richard St. George, Clarenceux King of Arms in the time of Charles I. It differs from other accounts, which make the duration of the pestilence much longer.

He tells, too, of the condition of the lowest class, who died by thousands without any aid or solace in their deserted poverty. In England the pestilence, according to a Register of the Abbey of Gloucester, left scarcely a third part of the population remaining. This is probably an exaggeration. The proportionate account of destruction recorded in Italy was three out of five, of all sexes, ages, and conditions. The effects of this plague are to be traced in the acts of the English government. The great and rich, according to the general testimony, escaped the immediate consequences of the epidemic. But their lands went out of cultivation from the want of labourers; and those who could carry away their capital fled to other countries. On the 1st of December, 1349, the king issued a precept to the mayors and bailiffs of all the ports, stating that no small portion of the people being dead of the pestilence, and the treasury of the kingdom being greatly exhausted, it had been notified to him, that many persons were quitting the country with their wealth, which, if tolerated, would leave the land equally destitute of men and money; and upon these grounds he directs that no man be suffered to leave the kingdom, except he be a merchant, notary, or messenger.* But the black plague left still more enduring effects than the great mortality—soon to be repaired by hasty marriages—or the emigration, thus forcibly arrested. It produced "The Statute of Labourers"—an arbitrary Act, whose principles, however gradually mitigated, pervaded the relations of employer and servant long after the days of feudal despotism, and which still cling to our institutions in the Law of Settlement. The statute was one of unmitigated selfishness. But it appears to be an universal law of such visitations, in times which looked upon them only as manifestations of the Divine wrath, and not of the mercy which was to bring good out of evil, that they rendered the powerful more oppressive, the rich more greedy, and the sensual more abandoned. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The author of the "Continuation of the Chronicle of William de Nangis" says, speaking of the continent, that after the pestilence men became more covetous and litigious—charity growing more cold, and iniquity and ignorance more abounding. There were few left to teach the young. The generation was demoralised.

The preamble of this remarkable statute states the exigency which demanded it, without any of those attempts to conceal a real motive which modern legislation sometimes resorts to: "Be-

* *Fœdera*, vol. iii. part ii. p. 191.

cause a great part of the people, and especially of workmen and servants, late died of the pestilence, many seeing the necessity of masters, and great scarcity of servants, will not serve unless they may receive excessive wages." The workmen and servants were practically aware of the natural law which regulates wages,—their dependence upon the number of labourers seeking employment. The government set their ordinances in opposition to that natural law. It was enacted that every able-bodied man and woman, not being a merchant, or exercising any craft, or having estate or land, should be bounden to serve, whenever required so to do, at the wages accustomed to be given in the twentieth year of the king, and in five or six common years next before. And that if any man or woman, whether free or bond, should be required to serve at such customary wages, and would not, he or she should be committed to the next gaol. It also enacted that labourers departing from their service should be imprisoned; and that those masters who consented to give the higher wages should be liable to be mulcted in double the amount paid or promised. The statute then goes on to apply the same regulations to all artificers,—saddlers, skippers, white-tawers, cordwainers, tailors, smiths, carpenters, masons, tylers, shipwrights, carters. But to balance the low wages against the price of commodities, it was also enacted, that butchers, fishmongers, brewers, bakers, poulterers, and all sellers of victual, shall be bound to sell the same for a reasonable price. It was moreover enacted, that no person should give alms to such as might be able to labour, or presume to favour such in their sloth, under pain of imprisonment. But the laws of nature were too strong for the laws of policy. Two years after, we have another statute, which recites that, "it is given the king to understand in this present parliament, that the said servants, having no regard to the said ordinances, but to their ease and singular covetise, do withdraw themselves to serve great men and others, unless they have livery, and wages to the double and treble of what they were wont to take before." A scale of wages is then set forth for labourers in husbandry; and the wages of carpenters, masons, tylers, and others concerned in building, are also fixed. The principle of confining the labourer to one locality is established by enacting, with the exception of the inhabitants of Stafford, Lancaster, Derby, Craven, and of the Welsh and Scotch marches,—who may come and go to other places in harvest time,—"that none of them go out of the town where he dwelleth in the winter, to

serve the summer, if he may serve in the same town." The first "Statute of Labourers," in what regards a fixed rate of wages, could not have been enforced without a limitation of the area in which the labourer should seek employment, as defined by the second Statute. That law of God which plants in the heart of man the desire to ameliorate his condition, had gradually, without the sanction of any written law, put an end to the property of one human being in another, to a considerable degree, when this Statute of Labourers was enacted. Had the pestilence come a century earlier, when the distinctions between the bondman and the free were in far higher efficiency, no laws for regulating wages, or for binding the labourer to the soil, would have been needed. When the slave had died in the common visitation, the master would have lost the services of the man, but he would have had one mouth less to feed. His land would have been untilled, and he must have borne the infliction, as if it were a murrain of his cattle. The pestilence came when labour and capital had become exchangers. But those who had been used to command labour upon their own terms were impatient of the inevitable alteration, when the pestilence exhibited to the free labourers the natural advantage of their reduced numbers. They demanded a free exchange of their property with the other property of food and money. A free exchange, says the statute of Edward, is "to the great damage of the great men, and impoverishing of all the commonalty." But no selfish legislation could wholly prevent this free exchange. A struggle was then begun, which, however gradually relieved from dire oppression and desperate bitterness, is not yet ended. The chains of the serf of the fourteenth century dropt off; but his descendant was still kept manacled in some form or other till the nineteenth; and the faint mark of the collar is still upon his neck.

But, however we must regard this attempt to limit the rate of wages by statute as unjust and inefficient, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there was a serious difficulty for the legislature of Edward III. to surmount in some way. The act of parliament says that the labourers withdrew themselves from service unless they had wages to the double or treble of that they were wont to take before. This averment is confirmed by Knyghton, a chronicler of the time, who mentions as exorbitant wages the payment of a shilling a-day, with his food, to a mower, and eightpence a-day, with food, to a reaper. The shilling a-day was equal

to fifteen shillings of present money; and if that rate could have been maintained for all husbandry operations, the land must have gone out of cultivation for a time, till the balance of capital and labour had been restored by an equalisation of the amount of land to be tilled, and the number of labourers prepared to till it. The parliament stepped in with its rude tyrannical remedy to repress the other tyranny. The statute said that a mower should receive fivepence. According to the same law, which also regulates the payment by wheat or money, at the will of the employer, fivepence was equal to half a bushel of wheat. The average produce of wheat per acre was then less than six bushels.* The extravagant demands of the labourers of the time of Edward III. had no relation to the just proportion that must ever subsist between the rate of wages and the commercial value of the produce out of which the labour is to be paid, and the capital maintained in its efficiency. It was not a time when such questions could be understood by the interested parties on either side. They are not understood even now. The same rude contest has gone on in many forms to our own day—a contest which no legislation can settle, however powerful it may have been, at various times, and some not far distant, to step in with stern repression or weak compromise. The contest will never be wholly settled till a just estimate is formed by every member of the social system of the relative value of every other worker in the field of industry.

* Callum's 'Hawsted,' speaking of the year 1390; page 219.