



A Comparison of the Effects of the Black Death on the Economic Organization of France and England

Author(s): Helen Robbins

Source: *Journal of Political Economy*, Aug., 1928, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Aug., 1928), pp. 447-479

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1822539>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Political Economy*

JSTOR

A COMPARISON OF THE EFFECTS OF THE BLACK DEATH ON THE ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION OF FRANCE AND ENGLAND¹

IN 1348 that plague later known as the Black Death made its appearance in Italy and swept over the continent leaving desolation in its wake. The loss of life was considerable, although the great numbers suggested by contemporary chroniclers have a fabulous ring to them.² A detailed account of the

¹The writer wishes to acknowledge the valuable bibliographical suggestions of Professor James Westfall Thompson of the Department of History of the University of Chicago. Mr. Henry J. Bittermann, of the Department of Economics, was kind enough to give the writer the benefit of his criticism.

²Despite the unanimity with which contemporary accounts state that anywhere from one-half to one-fourth of the population was carried off by the Black Death, it is virtually impossible to arrive at a sound conclusion respecting the changes in population caused thereby. The numbers commonly quoted seem incredible (cf. Arthur Johnson, *The Disappearance of the Small Landowner* [Oxford, 1909], p. 18, n. 2). E. Levasseur (*Histoire des classes ouvrières*, I, 522) gives the population of France in 1328 as sixty million with a density of from 70 to 130 per square kilometer. On the face of it, it seems rather dubious that the "state of the industrial arts" in the fourteenth century could offer even a bare subsistence to so large a population whose chief means of support were largely agricultural, despite evidence of the growth of private fortunes and of the existence of wealthy bankers such as the Bardi in England. We are confronted by a second problem, however, in the almost universal assertions that an extremely large portion of the population was swept away by the plague. To cite a few characteristic instances, the *Chronique de S. Denis* (cit. Devic and Vaissette, *Histoire du Languedoc*, IV, 267) states that the mortality in Provence was so great that only one-sixth of the population was left. Froissart was more moderate. "Si fu ceste cose commence par grant humilité, et pour prier à Nostre Seigneur qu'il vosist refraindre son ire et cesser ses verges; car en ce temps, par tout le monde generalement, une maladie, que on clame epydimi, couroit: dont bien la tierce partie dou monde morut" (*Chroniques* [Paris, 1873], IV, 100). In England we have an equally desolate picture. According to Robert of Avesbury, "Eodem die mortis xx, xl, lx, et multotiens multo plura corpora defunctorum simul in eadem fovea tradebantur ecclesiasticae sepulturae . . . in novo tunc facto cimiterio juxta Smethfeld plus quam cc. corpora defunctorum, praeter corpora quae in aliis cimiteriis civitatis ejusdem sepeliebantur, quasi diebus singulis sepulta fuerunt" (*Chronica R. de Avesbury, Rolls Series*, XCIII, 407). Henry Knighton says, "Tunc pestis dolorosa penetravit maritima per Southamptonam et venit Bristol-

plague would not be in keeping with so specialized a study; but we may note that not a country in Europe escaped its destructive influence,³ although some countries are said to have suffered

lam, et moriebantur quasi tota valitudo villae quasi subita morte praeoccupati, nam pauci erant qui lectum occupabant ultra iij dies vel duos dies aut dimidium diem" (*Chronicon Henrici Knighton*, II, *Rolls Series* XCII, 61). It is very difficult not to accept as valid such testimony when it comes not only from France and England but from Germany and Italy as well (cf. J. F. C. Hecker, *Der Schwarze Tod in vierzehnten Jahrhundert* [Berlin, 1832]; Boccaccio, *Décameron* [Paris, 1846], 1-5). Petrarch, in one of his best pieces of verse, said that the world was almost depopulated, that cities were without inhabitants, that the fields lay fallow, covered with corpses. But it is equally difficult to conceive of a civilization depleted by a half, a third, or even a fourth of its numbers being capable of struggling to its feet and continuing along its way, even though greatly modified as to form. With half the population gone, how could armies have been raised with which to fight the Hundred Years' War which was raging at the time? Who would have plowed the fields and threshed the grain by which man lived? A study of the figures given by J. E. Thorold Rogers (*History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, I, 228-34) for the price of wheat alone shows comparatively little variation from year to year except in years of famine or of plague. For example, the price of wheat in 1348, according to his averages, was 4s. 2d. the quarter. It rose to 10s. 2d. in 1351, falling again to 4s. 2d. in 1353. Approximately the same fluctuation may be noted in the work of G. d'Avenel (*Histoire économique de la propriété, des salaires, des denrées, et de tous les prix en général depuis l'an 1200 jusqu'en l'an 1800* [Paris, 1894], II, 898-99). Were half the population, or a third, or a fourth swept away, it seems quite unlikely, the amount of money in circulation remaining constant, that in five short years the price of wheat should have returned to its former level. Even though there were fewer mouths to feed, there were also fewer hands to work. And with relatively a greater number of coins in circulation with the reduction in population, prices might have been expected to have remained at a relatively high level. It is all largely conjectural, of course, but on the whole, the most accurate account is probably one similar to that contained in the *Chronique de Jean le Bel* (Jules Viard and Eugène Déprez, editors, Paris, 1904), II, 185: "L'an de grace mil CCCXLIX commença la maladie de la boche que les physiciens appellent epydémie, de quoy grande mortalité s'ensuit par l'universel monde, aussy bien entre les Sarrazins que les Chrestiens." C. G. Coulton in his review of the third volume of Hilaire Belloc's *History of England* (*The Nation and Athenaeum*, XLII [March 10, 1928], 853) substantially upholds the point of view that the numbers cited have been grossly exaggerated.

*The best contemporary account is that of Guy de Chauliac, medical adviser to the Avignonese Popes, whose account (*La Grande Chirurgie* [Paris, 1890, E. Nicaise, editor], pp. 167-73), being that of an eyewitness, is of an extremely detailed nature. Some idea of the extent of the plague may be gained from the following list of eminent men and women dying from the infection: Knut and Hoken, half-brothers to King Magnus of Sweden (1350); Alphonso XI of Spain

more than others.⁴ Needless to say, the effects of such devastation were far reaching.⁵ Rich and poor, alike, were stricken. The clergy died like flies.⁶ So great was the mortality that Pope

(1350); Bonne, Duchess of Normandy and mother of Charles V of France (1349); Jeanne of Burgundy, first wife of Philip VI of France (1349); the Russian Grand Duke Simeon Ivanovitch the Proud (1352); the physician Gentile di Foligno (1348); the rhetorician, Bruno Cassini (1348); Giovanni Villani (1348); the painters Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1348); the Minister General of the Franciscan Order, Gerhard Odo (1348); the great lawyer, Johannes Andreae (1348); the Archbishop of Spalato, Cucuri (1348); the Bishop of Paris, Fulques de Chanac (1349); the Bishop of Lübeck, John IV (1350). Cf. also Johannes Nohl, *The Black Death* (London, 1926). The year of the death of William Occam (1349) would suggest that he, too, was a victim; although there is nothing but the date to substantiate it. Chaucer (b. 1340) escaped.

⁴For example, Hecker did not believe the mortality in Germany to have been as great as elsewhere. Italy, Florence in particular, is said to have suffered tremendously (Boccaccio, 1-5). Dénifle (*La guerre de cent ans et la désolation des églises, monastères, et hopitaux en France* [Paris, 1899], II, Pt. I, 58) apparently believes that France also suffered greatly. "Éclatant au moment où le clergé et le peuple avait déjà été plongés par la guerre et par l'extrême dépréciation de la monnaie dans une grande misère, la peste noire apparut plus horrible en France que dans les autres contrées." This statement of Dénifle's suggests that more information as to the effects of the Black Death elsewhere might lead to similar conclusions with respect to the other countries. The desolation of Florence comes to us through the powerful images conjured by Boccaccio. Yet apart from the artistry of his description one other fact must be noted. Had the Venetian chronicles, for example, been as complete as the Florentine, there is no reason to believe that the same impression would not have been given of Venice. As to Germany, Hecker, writing in 1832, was unable to take advantage of the town chronicles later edited in part by Hegel. It is not impossible that a fuller knowledge there would also have resulted in a similar picture of devastation.

⁵In Traill's *Social England*, II, 241, there is a rather pregnant remark to the effect that the most disastrous result of the Black Death in England was that the seeds of the plague remained. There were recurrences in 1361, 1368-69, 1375, 1382, and 1390-91. The same was true in France. At no time, however, were the effects so devastating as in 1348, doubtless because of the increasing development of resistance to the infection in the course of the recurrence of the disease. For this reason no attempt has been made to estimate the effect of any but the first epidemic.

⁶F. A. Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries* (London, 1888), p. 3. As further evidence of this, we find that in Norwich 863 livings were vacant in one year, "the clergy dying so fast that they were obliged to admit numbers of youths that had only devoted themselves for clerks, by being shaven to be rectors of parishes" (R. Hindry Mason, *A History of Norfolk* [London, 1884], I, 78). In France the story is a similar one. Abbé Raymond, of the Benedictine

Clement VI was forced to grant full remission of sins to those dying of the plague.⁷ The immediate effects of the Black Death were a tremendous loss of man-power and a drop in the price level because of the suddenly glutted markets. Furs, silks, tapestries, luxuries of all kinds fell within the purchasing power of the poor, and there followed a wild orgy of expenditure and debauchery.⁸ But this condition of luxury soon passed. Those who survived found themselves personally richer than before; but other factors had been at work which nullified largely the value of this suddenly acquired wealth. The mortality and the ensuing famine brought misery in their train; and it is the popular supposition that this misery had far-reaching, permanent effects on the economic organization of England and France that we propose to examine.

EFFECTS ON THE PRICE LEVEL

MONEY PRICES

The high degree of mortality had as an indirect result a serious effect on money prices. The grain rotted in the fields for

Abbey of Sorèze, in writing to Pope Clement VI, says that "in monasterio est defectus maximum monachorum, quia propter istas mortalitates non sunt ibi monachi qui deserviant . . . in divinis (*Suppl. Clem. VI, No. 16, fol. 29, November 19, 1348, cit. Dénifle, 61*). How far one may take the death-rate among the clergy as indicative of the general mortality is problematical, however, there being a number of considerations which would point to a special situation existing among them. There is the possibility that in ministering to the stricken they may have fallen victims to the plague in greater numbers than the laity. Gasquet apparently lays the phenomenon of a high death-rate to the fact that they were gathered together in great numbers (yet the sanitary conditions in the crowded poor districts of the towns could hardly have been poorer breeding places for the epidemic). A third conjecture lies in the decline of monasticism in the fourteenth century. The monks existent were more likely to be elderly men, the profession no longer attracting to it large numbers of youths. Consequently the deaths among the regular clergy might well be due to the lack of resistance of old age rather than to external conditions. The same argument could be applied to the large number of deaths in the hierarchy. And therefore the high death-rate among the clergy would scarcely be indicative of the spread and extent of the plague.

⁷ Knighton, p. 61; Boccaccio, 3-5. Cf. also *Chronicon de Walsingham, Rolls Series, LXIV, 27-28*.

⁸ Boccaccio, 4; Nohl, *passim*.

want of men to harvest it. The price of food was doubled.⁹ In considering first the effects in England, we see that wheat rose steadily in price from an average of 4s. 2d. in 1348 to an average of 10s. 2d. in 1351.¹⁰ The prices of livestock and poultry fell, however, during the years 1348–51.¹¹ Yet after 1352 the price level was higher for meat and poultry than it had been during the preceding fifty years, and was maintained at a relatively greater height. The reason for this variation in the prices of the two types of commodities is clear enough. During the plague years “sheep and cattle went wandering over fields and through crops, and there was no one to drive or gather them.”¹² However,

⁹ In this and the following discussions of prices, statements made will be based on the works of Thorold Rogers, E. Levasseur, and G. d’Avenel, who reduced the prices as quoted in the original documents to shillings and francs in modern money by comparing the relation of the weights of the coins. An interesting article based on the account rolls of the Bishopric of Winchester, somewhat fuller than the work of Rogers and more modern in its approach, is that of W. H. Beveridge, “The Yield and Price of Corn in the Middle Ages,” *Economic Journal* (Economic History Series No. 2, May, 1927), pp. 155–68.

¹⁰ Cf. Rogers, I, 208–9, 228–34. At Oxford in 1350 wheat sold in April at 11s. 6d.; at Elham, at 12s. The same price is attained at Ken (Devonshire). The lowest prices are found in the north of England, but the sales are small. Barley is also dear, rising at Elham from 4s. in November to 7s. in March. At Oxford it sold in May at 7s. 8d., the highest price reached. Considerable sales were effected at Ixmynge at similar rates. Oats were very dear, reaching 5s. 4d. in one locality—the average being about 3d. per quarter in normal times—and were cheap only in the north. Rye, except at Gamlingay, was dear. The prices continued very high in 1351, wheat reaching the height of 14s. 8d. at Walford, a place where prices are generally low. It is not until 1353 that there is a drop to anywhere near normal.

¹¹ The following table will possibly make the situation more clear:

	1347		1348		1349		1350		1351		1352	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Oxen	13	8	10	6	6	9	9	8	13	1	12	8
Cattle	9	0	9	6	6	6	9	8	9	5	9	11
Mutton	1	5	1	1	0	9	1	0	1	3	1	8
Capons	0	2	0	3	0	4	0	3	0	3	0	4
Hens	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	2

Cf. Rogers, I, 342–60.

¹² “Et oves et boves per campos et inter segetes vagabantur errantes, et non erat qui eas agendo fugaret aut colligeret, sed in sulcis deviis et sepibus morte

the fact that the prices of livestock rose after 1352 and maintained a high price throughout the greater part of the century would suggest the following explanation. The great mortality which affected mankind in the famine and the plague was accompanied by simultaneous murrains in cattle and sheep, pigs, and domestic poultry, and thus, although the loss was not felt so severely at the time of the first plague because the waste of human life seriously checked the demand for farm produce, the devastation must have been considerable during the later visitations of the great pestilence, the ravages of which must have been greater because of the extraordinary drought which characterized the autumn and summer of 1361-62.

The same phenomena are found in France during the years 1348-52. There are other factors, however, which tended to aggravate conditions. In the first place the plague had been preceded by a cruel famine resulting from swarms of migratory locusts and mice which devoured practically everything but the vines.¹³ And in the second place, the Hundred Years' War had been in progress for more than a decade, and it was France that was ravaged and not England.¹⁴ The loss of life and the devastation attending the war were aggravated still further by a series of hard winters, droughts, famines, and recurrences of the plague

perierunt numero incomputabili per universas regiones prae defectu custodis, quia tantus defectus extitit servorum et famulorum quod non erat quis qui sciret quid facere deberet" (Knighton, p. 62). Also, "A man could have a horse, which before was worth 40s. for 6s. 8d.; a fat ox for 4s.; a sheep for 3d.; a cow for 12s.; a heifer for 2d.; a big pig for 5d.; a fat wether for 4d.; a lamb for 2d.; a stone of wool for 9d" (*ibid.*).

¹³ *Histoire du Languedoc*, IX, 608; Nohl, p. 60; Déglise, *Etudes sur la condition de la classe agricole et l'état de l'agriculture en Normandie au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1903), p. 640.

¹⁴ The devastation caused by the Hundred Years' War can hardly be overestimated. Not only was fire accepted as a legitimate weapon, both sides burning everything before them, but the incredible activity of the armies of the period plunged the country into untold insecurity (cf. Dénifle, pp. 1-2). Normandy, Picardy, Artois, Ile-de-France, and Champagne suffered most cruelly, Burgundy and the central provinces alone seeming to have been exempt from the ravages of the war (Levasseur, *Histoire*, I, 533).

which took their toll as well.¹⁵ Consequently it is difficult to ascertain those changes which have the plague only as their cause. And although we find certain definite phenomena present which are similar to those in England, it must be borne in mind that there were other contributing factors which cannot be discounted.¹⁶ However, as in England, the price of wheat rose during the period. The average price per hectolitre rose from 7 fr. 94 in 1347 to 30 fr. 12 in 1350.¹⁷ Instead of remaining at a relatively

¹⁵ The following table may throw some light on the subject :

1304	. . . .	Famine
1305	. . . .	Famine
1310	. . . .	Famine
1315	. . . .	Famine
*1316-17	. . . .	Long and rigorous winter
*1325	. . . .	Series of droughts
*1330	. . . .	Drought. Vines froze
1330-34	. . . .	Famine
*1334	. . . .	Famine. Many deaths
*1342	. . . .	Seine overflowed
1344	. . . .	Famine
1348	. . . .	Black Death
1349-51	. . . .	Famine due to uncultivated fields
1358-59	. . . .	Famine
1360	. . . .	Famine
1363	. . . .	Hard winter
1371	. . . .	Famine
1374	. . . .	Famine
1375	. . . .	Famine
1390	. . . .	Famine
1410	. . . .	Famine

* Years marked by asterisks are taken from Délisle, pp. 639-41, and hold only for Normandy. The others, taken from Levasseur, *Les Prix* (Paris, 1893), pp. 111 ff., are probably intended for Paris.

A hectolitre of wheat which was worth 6 fr. 70 in Paris from 1325-50 was worth an average of 9 fr. in the period 1351-75, 44 fr. being paid in 1360. The price for 1350-51 was 35 fr. 58 in Paris.

¹⁶ The lack of annual figures for the period is a serious obstacle. D'Avenel's statistics (*Histoire*, Vols. II-VI), on which Levasseur relies (*Les Prix*), are apt to be inaccurate because of their spasmodic character. There does not seem to have been the same continuity in the records kept that is so noticeable in England; and the chief interest of the chroniclers, as is quite natural, was in the Hundred Years' War.

¹⁷ Cf. D'Avenel, II, 898-99. The highest prices for the period were in the Ile-de-France (13 fr. 31), Lorraine (20 fr.), Languedoc (16 fr. 55), and the Franche-Comté (53 fr. 92). Cf. n. 15. The price of food generally rose from 33 sous a day for the average laborer to 44 sous (Levasseur, *Les Prix*, p. 71).

high level, as in England, during the remainder of the century, the price of wheat in France fluctuated considerably, reaching a high point generally only in those years when the plague again broke out, or in famine years;¹⁸ but attaining no such constant

¹⁸ The highest prices per hectolitre of wheat in the fourteenth century, the average being about 5 fr. in the other years :

	Francs	Centimes
1304 (famine)	17	53
1311 (year after famine of 1310)	10	10
1313	25	16
1315 (famine)	12	35
1316 (bad winter)	21	64
1322	11	45
1324	10	70
1346	11	00
1348 (Black Death)	11	15
1350 (Black Death)	30	12
1351 (Black Death)	16	66
1358-59 (famine)	14	9
1361 (plague)	13	45
1363 (plague)	15	57
1369 (plague)	12	75
1371 (plague)	21	32
1374 (famine)	15	41

Cf. n. 15 for the dates of the other years of disasters which, since they apparently did not affect the price of wheat generally, were local in character in all probability.

It is possible that there is some correlation between the high price of wheat in England and the shift to urban centers on the part of the population. In France the apparent depopulation of the territory involved in the Hundred Years' War makes any generalization more than usually dangerous. Paris, which in the thirteenth century apparently had a population of about 200,000 inhabitants, seemed almost a deserted city in the fifteenth century. Only 30 guilds out of 3,200 remained in Provens in the fifteenth century. Rouen, Tournus, Arras, Laon, Rheims, Troyes, Langres, Carcassonne, Montpellier, all flourishing cities in the early fourteenth century, were in the same state of depopulation and poverty a century later. To realize how general such a state was, it is only necessary to consult the ordinances of the end of the fourteenth century (cf. *Anciennes lois françaises*, Vols. IV, V, VI) to remark the many times the kings had been obliged to publish orders with respect to the reclamation of towns. We have letters, for example, ordering the universal sale of "les lieux vides et inhabités, afin d'en acquitter les impôts" (June 8, 1456). A few years after the end of the Hundred Years' War, the States General complained to the King of "la sterilité dont souffroit la province depuis trois ans, le tiers du peuple ayant manqué de pain, les ravages de la peste et de la mortalité, en sorte que depuis dix ans le tiers des habitants avait péri" (*Histoire du Languedoc*, V, 21). The same complaint is

level as in England of the period. The explanation for such vacillation is fairly obvious, granting a certain amount of validity to M. d'Avenel's figures, which is sometimes difficult to do. In a country as disturbed as was France in the fourteenth century one could hardly expect a definite movement in any one direction in the price of wheat. The price of livestock also fluctuated unevenly, due in all probability to the depredations of the war and the various recurrences of the plague. Thus from 1301 to 1325 there was a rise in the average price of beef and veal per head, a fall in the price of sheep, while that of pigs did not vary. From 1326 to 1350 the price of beef fell, but that of sheep, veal, and pigs rose. From 1351 to 1375 beef and pigs rose, veal and sheep fell. And from 1376 to 1400 there was a fall in beef, veal, and pigs, while lamb rose 10 centimes a head.¹⁹ The lack of any yearly figures makes it impossible to follow the curve of these prices in any detail. We can only note the beginning of the Hundred Years' War and consider the plague as of secondary importance in the determination of price levels in the middle of the fourteenth century.²⁰ On the whole, however, we may note a

made in 1467 and 1471 (*ibid.*, V, 34, 52). Levasseur (*Histoire*, I, 532) notes that "dans le Roussillon, en 1366 les seigneurs sont obligés de réunir trois ou quatre domaines en un seul, par suite des invasions de . . . gens de guerre." All of which gives some indication of the degree of desolation following and concurrent with the war.

¹⁹ The following table gives the figures :

DATES	*BEEF		VEAL		MUTTON		PIGS		POULTRY	
	fr.	c.	fr.	c.	fr.	c.	fr.	c.	fr.	c.
1301-25	o	31	o	04	o	25	o	31	o	38
1326-50	o	27	o	35	o	39	o	57	o	67
1351-75	o	21	o	29	o	26	o	35	o	51
1376-00	o	21	o	29	o	24	o	49	o	47
1401-25	o	27	o	32	o	25	o	48	o	39
1426-50	o	33	o	32	o	44	o	40	o	36
1451-75	o	14	o	17	o	17	o	21	o	28
1476-00	o	18	o	21	o	21	o	24	o	21
1501-25	o	22	o	26	o	22	o	32	o	28
1526-50	o	26	o	28	o	31	o	50	o	34
1551-75	o	30	o	33	o	38	o	60	o	38
1576-00	o	42	o	46	o	51	o	68	o	71

* Beef, veal, mutton, and pigs are per kilogram. Poultry is taken by the head. Data from D'Avenel, IV, 587 and 591.

²⁰ An interesting phenomenon in the variation of price levels is the fall in the price of poultry, which did not recover its former level until 1575. The reason for this variation is obscure. Probably the sustained low price is due to the

general rise in food prices following the great mortality both in France and in England, excepting the fluctuations in the price of meat in France, which, because of the lack of statistics, we cannot explore as to cause.

VALUE OF MONEY

We have seen that the loss of man-power contributed to a rise in the price level. In an attempt to ascertain the permanent effect of the Black Death thereon, however, we must turn to the general price situation both preceding and following the plague. In considering the fourteenth century it at once becomes evident that prices had been rising generally from 1200, and that they continued so to rise until roughly about 1400, when a period of falling prices set in, lasting approximately until 1475, when they again followed an upward trend.²¹ Thus, while the years of the Black Death are characterized by exceedingly high prices for

low cost of grains in conjunction with the possibility of relatively greater power of resistance to the infection on the part of the fowl. Unfortunately we have no statistics on the death-rate of poultry during the period; but while mention is made (Levasseur, *passim*) of the toll taken of cattle and sheep, nothing is said of the poultry losses. It is conjectural in the extreme, of course, to assume that fowl could resist the plague with greater ease than cattle. But it would seem fairly probable to assume, in view of the large number of human deaths, that the supply remained relatively constant while demand decreased, thus causing continued low prices, rather than to assume that it was a shift in the demand for poultry due to a change in taste. The only other possibility might be that there was a permanent increase in the supply—which again would argue a relatively greater hardness of the poultry—because a greater number of families were able to raise their own fowl than were able to raise sheep, pigs, or cattle, a highly conjectural assumption in view of the extreme degree of mortality.

²¹ The following table, taken from D'Avenel, *Histoire*, I, 27, shows what he believed to be the relative value of money, taking that of 1894 as 1.

1201-25	4½	} Period of rising prices
1226-1300	4	
1301-50	3½	
1351-75	3	
1376-1400	4	} Period of falling prices
1401-25	4½	
1426-50	4	
1451-75	6	
1476-1500	5	} Period of rising prices
1501-25	4	
1526-50	3	
1551-75	2	
1576-1600	2	

Cf. also Levasseur, *Les Prix*, and Rogers, Vol. I.

foodstuffs, the plague of 1348–51 cannot be said with assurance to have had any permanent effect on the price level itself. In other words, the devastation so caused seems not to have been of such fundamental importance as to modify the price level of the period.²² And since the price level in general is a function of the quantity of money in circulation at any given period, it would be best to ascertain if possible the condition of the currency during the fourteenth century.²³

Speaking generally, we find that from the ninth to the middle of the twelfth century the production of silver steadily increased.²⁴ From 1200 to approximately 1450 the production of silver decreased, apparently because the surface mines available had been exhausted and because abortive attempts to mine by hydraulic pressure had flooded many otherwise productive mines. It was not until the second half of the fifteenth century that silver production again increased with the discovery of new mines in Sweden, Germany, Bohemia, and the Tyrol, and subsequently with the importation of precious metals from America. Unfortunately it is well-nigh impossible to ascertain the amount of money in circulation in France and in England because of the insufficient data available. Up to 1361 French currency was in a perpetual state of change.²⁵ From 1369 to 1375 constituted a

²² It will doubtless be remarked that the writer has assumed that the price level for food is representative of the general price level, an assumption justified, if at all, by the fact that Western Europe was largely agricultural.

²³ In the following discussion a fairly rigid quantity theory of money is assumed.

²⁴ For a discussion of the production of silver in the Middle Ages, and estimates of the amount in circulation, see "Silber and Silbergeld," by Lexis, in the *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaft*, III (4th ed.), pp. 471–73; also Adolf Soetbeer, *Edelmetall-Produktion und Werthverhältniss zwischen Gold und Silber*, Supplement 57, A. Petermann's *Mittheilungen aus Justus Perthes' Geographischen Anstalt*. A good general account may be found in Sombart, *Der moderne Kapitalismus* (Munich, 1922, 5th ed.), Part II, 522–24.

²⁵ From the beginning of the reign of Philip of Valois (1328–50) the king upset the monetary system, fixed the price of merchandise, and abolished loans at interest. In *Anciennes lois françaises*, Vol. IV, which is one of a series of the most important laws and ordinances issued under each French ruler from Carolingian times, there are given twenty-two laws between 1328 and 1355 thus modifying the currency. The latter date taken was purely arbitrary, since similar changes took place under John II. How many others the editors did not consider

period of relatively stable currency, at which time it has been estimated that 24,160 marks of king's silver were coined, of which the greater portion was circulated as pieces worth 5 denarii *tournois*. But there is little definite information to be found, so that for an explanation of the period of rising prices in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in France other factors must be considered.

So far as the thirteenth century is concerned, France was exceedingly prosperous. A great number of acres were cleared; the gradual suppression of serfdom created the small proprietor; the early guild organization ameliorated the condition of the workers and increased the amount of manufactured goods. Assuming the amount of money in circulation to remain the same—an assumption which in all probability is not justified, but which must be made because of insufficient data—a period in which the production of goods increases should be accompanied by a fall in the price level. Throughout the thirteenth century we have, on the contrary, a rising price level. The most probable explanation, i.e., a reduction of the amount of fine silver in the coins, seems to coincide with the facts. For if the production of goods increased and the amount of silver produced decreased, and prices rose, then, the amount of money in circulation remaining the same, the amount of fine silver in the coins probably decreased faster than the rate of production. This seems to have been the case for the period 1200–1337. From 1337 to roughly 1400 the century is disturbed by the Hundred Years' War. It was accompanied by a decrease in the production of goods. The production of silver continued to be small.²⁶ Prices

of sufficient importance to include can be ascertained by referring to *Documents inédits, Revue de documents relatifs à l'histoire des monnaies* (L. F. J. C. de Sauley), Vol. I. The reign of John II (1350–64) was even more marked by frequent debasement of the coinage. Picot, in his *Histoire des états généraux* (Paris, 1872), I, 3, notes one year of John's reign in which the purchasing power of the silver mark, which contained normally 245 grams of fine silver, fell to a third of its previous level between May and December.

²⁶ A striking testimonial of the small silver production may be found in the almost universal development of bimetallic standards of coinage in the fourteenth century. Cf. Ruding, *Annals of the Coinage* (London, 1840), Vol. II; "Silber und Silbergeld," *Handwörterbuch*, Vol. VII.

still continued to rise. The amount of money in circulation remaining the same, this is a normal set of conditions even if the amount of bullion content of the standard coin had remained unchanged. Such a decrease in the amount of silver in the coins is in itself an explanation for the rise in prices throughout the fourteenth century in France, leaving aside any consideration of the effects of the Black Death itself, beyond the spasmodic changes for the actual years 1348-51.

The English situation was not dissimilar to that in France. Briefly to recapitulate, the period 1200-1400 was generally one of rising prices accompanied by a decrease in the amount of silver produced. This apparent contradiction is again accountable in England by a debasement of coinage and by a decrease in the production of goods. Throughout the fourteenth century there occurred a series of famines in England of a far more general character than in France.²⁷ To balance this, however, it must be remarked that England was in no wise subject to such vast devastation by war as was France. It is difficult to ascertain the proportion by which the production of goods was decreased in England as compared with the decrease in France. But the relatively steady movement of prices in England as compared with the vacillation in France would lead one to believe, *caeteris paribus*, that production in England was not affected as seriously as in France. There were changes in the currency, however. The legal weight of the coins diminished progressively from 1300²⁸

1315-16	Famine, universal. Wheat, 14s. 11d. the quarter in 1315; 16s. in 1316.
1321	Semifamine. Wheat at 11s.
1325	Universal drought
1331	Drought
1344	Drought
1348	Black Death
1351	Universal famine. Wheat at 10s. 2d.
1362	Drought
1369	Famine. Wheat at 11s. 10d.
1374	Drought
1377	Drought

Cf. Rogers, I, 30; 194 ff.

²⁸ 28 Edward III. Cf. pp. 10 and 11 of Ruding for tables to this effect.

to the middle of the reign of Elizabeth;²⁹ and there were three changes made in the amount of silver contained in the coinage during the reign of Edward III.³⁰

Thus it seems fairly evident that, although the loss of manpower in 1348-51 occasioned a rise in prices, the Black Death did not have a permanent effect on the price level either in France or in England. There were other factors, namely, the decrease in the production both of goods and of silver, accompanied by a debasement of coinage, which had contributed largely to a rise in prices throughout the fourteenth century. Hence the momentary rise in prices in the years 1348-51 was an accentuation of the current tendency rather than an isolated phenomenon.

²⁹ 43 Elizabeth.

³⁰ Edward's attempt to keep the English coinage at full value is notable. Numerous attempts were made to prevent the precious metals from being carried out of the kingdom to be sold for profit in foreign countries. The number of the ordinances so passed in itself bespeaks the difficulty of enforcing them: 1331 (*Rolls of Parliament*, II, 62); 1336 (*ibid.*); 1341 (cf. Ruding, p. 213); 1342 (*ibid.*, p. 214); 1353 (*ibid.*, p. 226; also *Rolls of Parliament*, II, 228); 1353 (Ruding, p. 228); 1355 (*ibid.*, p. 229); 1362 (*Rolls*, II, 271); 1363 (Ruding, p. 230); 1364 (*ibid.*); 1366 (Ruding, p. 232); 1367 (*ibid.*). The chapter on coins in Traill's *Social England* attributes the new coinage of 1351 to the flood of base coins brought in by foreign traders. Edward even forbade the payment of Peter's pence at Rome in gold and silver ("... nec thesauros regni extra mare asportaret." Knighton, p. 28). However, in 1345 (18 Edward III), the pound sterling was debased about $8\frac{5}{10}\frac{8}{7}\frac{6}{3}$ per cent by coining the tower pound of sterling silver into 22s. 2d. in tale, the standard before that having been 20s. to the tower pound. In 1347 the tower pound was coined into 22s. 6d. in tale, thus further debasing it by $1\frac{4}{10}\frac{0}{7}$ per cent. In 1354 it was coined into 25s. in tale, a further deterioration of $8\frac{2}{3}$ per cent (cf. Earl of Liverpool, *The Coins of the Realm* [London, 1880], p. 39). The chronicles of the time note the various institutions of new moneys (Walsingham, p. 16; Knighton, p. 30), and Walsingham notes the rise in prices following: "Willelmus de Edyngton, Wyntonensis episcopus, regni thesaurus et vir magnae prudentiae, et qui plus dilexit regis commodum quam communitatis, excognitavit et fecit insculpi novam monetam, scilicet grossum et dimidium grossum. Sed haec erant minoris ponderis quam correspondens summa sterlingorum; quae res fuit exposit occasio, quod victualia sive mercimonia fuere per totam Angliam magis cara. Operarii vero, et artifices ac servientes, proinde calliodes et fraudulentiores solito sunt effect. Contra quorum superbiam, astutiam, et nequitiam et avaritiam, ordinata sunt statuta . . . sed parum aut nihil communibus profecerunt" (p. 29). In this connection the *Traictie de la première invention des monnoies*, by Nicole Oresme (M. L. Wolowski, ed., Paris, 1864), about 1382, is of interest in pointing out the fact that the deterioration of coinage would only drive good money from circulation.

VALUE OF LAND

The dearth of laborers, although it resulted in a formidable rise in food prices, caused a fall in the value of land which had a profound influence on the economic organization of England. Seebohm³¹ goes so far as to say that the depopulation permanently reduced the value of land for agricultural purposes.³² The effect of this fall in value on manorial economy was profound and will be discussed in connection with labor conditions.

³¹ "The Black Death and Its Place in English History," *Fortnightly Review*, II, 276.

³² The following table is quoted by him (p. 269) from Clutterbeck's *History of Hertfordshire*. It was compiled from the assizes preserved in the Tower taken at the death of landowners for purposes of taxation. By and large it seems to show a gradual falling off in demand for land, although not to the extent he would indicate. The figures show the assessed value per acre.

	Pence		Pence
1268	9	1348 (Black Death) . . . . .	...
1271	12	1359	9¼
1274	12	1368	10½
1285	6-7½	1381	9¼
1291	9	1417	6
1313	12	1422	4
1330	6-8½	1429	4
1331	8½	1432	6
1336	11½	1446	8
1338	11½		

To this might be added 1500-1510, 5-6½*d.* (Northampton and Huntingdon). The average price from 1268 to 1338, basing the calculations on the above table, was 9.95*d.* per acre; that from 1348 to 1446, 3.775*d.* per acre. It should be noticed, however, that the drop in value dates from 1381 rather than from 1348. And while a categorical statement is impossible, it would seem more probable that the general situation resulting in the Peasants' Revolt, and the inclosures of the fifteenth century, were of greater importance than the events, say, from 1348 to 1381.

Unfortunately, Rogers does not discuss the price of land. Knighton, however, gives us some evidence of the conditions which probably led to a drop in land value: "Post praedictam pestilentiam multa aedificia tam majora quam minora in omnibus civitatibus, burgis et villis collapsa sunt et ad terram penitus diruta prae defectu habitatoris; similiter multae villulae et hamilettae desolatae sunt nulla in eis relicta domo, sed mortuis omnibus qui in eis habitarent, ut verisimile erat quod multae tales villulae non essent habitandae pro perpetuo. In hie-me sequenti, tanta erat penuria servorum in omnibus agendis quod vix, ut homo credebat, retroactis temporibus tanta carentia fuerat, nam bestiae et universa pecora quae homo habebat, circumquaque vagabant absque pastore, et singula quaeque quae homo habebat sine custode" (pp. 64-65).

The same phenomenon is visible in France; but probably it is not due directly to the Black Death. We notice that the fall both in price of land and in revenue derived therefrom dates from the period 1326-50 rather than from 1350-75.³³ In other words, in France the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) seems to be more of a determining factor than any depopulation due to the plague. The value of land began to fall in France in the quarter-century in which the war began, and rose in the twenty-five years after peace had been declared. It is true, of course, that there is a perceptible drop from 1350 to 1375; but it is a drop only of arable and woodlands, pasture and vine lands rising greatly in price. This might argue that such lands as the latter were in demand during the period 1326-75 for provisioning the troops and for fodder for horses. In any case it seems clear that the war was more of a disruptive factor than the plague.³⁴

EFFECTS ON LABOR AND WAGES

We have sketched thus far the apparent effects of the Black Death on commodity prices and on the value of land. The effects on labor and wages were more far-reaching. Labor was completely disorganized. The plague opened the door to many new kinds of employment. Clerks became merchants; former workmen, employers and contractors; farm laborers, gentlemen farmers.

³³ The following table was constructed by Levasseur (*Histoire*, I, 524, n. 2) from D'Avenel (*Histoire*, I, 495-701):

PRICE AND REVENUES OF LAND IN FRANCS PER HECTARE

PERIODS	ARABLE LAND		PASTURE		VINES		WOODS	
	Pr.	Rev.	Pr.	Rev.	Pr.	Rev.	Pr.	Rev.
1301-25	222	22 00						
1326-50	108	10 80	235	23	463	46	52	5
1351-75	83	8 30	337	33	140	14	84	8
1376-1400	98	9 80	484	48	420	42	53	4
1401-25	89	8 90	136	13	376	37	60	5
1426-50	68	6 80	139	13	218	21	15	1 50
1451-75	48	4 80	218	21	127	12	15	1 50
1476-1500	97	8 10	123	10	228	19	55	4

³⁴ Cf. Dénifle, Vol. II, Part I.

The old nobility largely passed away, leaving their titles and lands to the kings, who gave them away to new families. Thus a new nobility arose in Europe, a *parvenu* nobility characterized by the bad manners and love of display that attracted the attention of the chroniclers.

But far more important was the rise in wages.³⁵ In England wages were doubled, the increase in some districts being even greater.³⁶ Although task work does not seem to have been affected in 1348, in 1349 the rates were panic or compulsion ones. The wages in the eastern, middle, and southern counties for that year are unparalleled, not only before, but afterward, except in one place in 1370 where sixpence was paid for harvesting wheat and twopence for oats. Threshing will be taken as being the most significant type of labor, for in England it was always cheapest due to the fact that it could be carried on indoors and thus performed in that land of uncertain weather when other work was impossible.³⁷ Up to the time of the Great Plague, threshing was paid at steady, and on the whole low, rates. But directly afterward the wages were doubled. The increase due to the plague is 32 per cent for the threshing of wheat, 38 per cent for barley, 111 per cent for oats in the eastern counties. In the middle counties the percentages of rise are 40, 69, 111; in the south, 33, 38; 75; in the west, 26, 41, 44; in the north, 32, 43, and 100. The in-

³⁵ For a discussion of the extent to which wages were paid in money, see the treatment of the commutation of villeinage, p. 466.

³⁶ Rogers, p. 260. Farm laborers, guild workmen, domestic servants, even priests struck for higher wages: "In autumn sequenti non potuit quis habere unum messorum minori pretio quam viij denariis cum cibo; unum falcatorem quam xij denariis cum cibo. Quam ob causam multae segetes perierunt in campis prae defectu collectoris; sed in anno pestilentiae, ut supra dictum est, de aliis rebus tanta abundantia erat omnis generis bladorum quod nullus de eis quasi curavit. . . . Vix posset homo habere unum capellanum infra x. libras vel x. marcas ministrare alicui ecclesiae, ut ubi homo posset habere unum capellanum pro v. aut iv. marcas vel pro ij. marcas cum mensa, quando copia extitit sacerdotum ante pestilentiam, vix erat in isto tempore qui acceptare vellet unam vicariam ad xx. libras aut xx. marcas" (Knighton, pp. 62-63).

³⁷ Cf. Rogers, I, 304-8.

vidence of the plague was more or less general, but apparently it affected less heavily the more thinly populated districts than it did those of denser population. On the whole, the rise was least in the western counties.

The sudden fall in the market value of land and the sudden rise in the market value of labor had a number of important results. The landlord class was hard hit. The landowners had large amounts of land thrown on their hands which had to be worked in addition to their own demesnes. Many of them were forced to make abatements of rent and services³⁸ in order to keep their tenantry, numbers of the old landowners who still held to the old method of farming being forced to hire laborers whether they wished to or not. This brings us to the commutation of villeinage and to the innovation of farming by lease as possible results of the Black Death.

As to the first, Seeböhm,³⁹ Johnson,⁴⁰ and Page⁴¹ seem to conclude that before 1348 very little progress had been made in the commutation of villeinage, the latter two inferring that a

³⁸ "Insuper et magnates regni, et alii minores domini qui tenentes habebant, perdonarunt redditum de redditu ne tenentes abirent prae defectu servorum et caristia rerum. Quidam medietatem redditus, . . . quidam per tres, et quidam per unum, prout poterant cum ei convenire. . . . Similiter qui habebant de tenentibus per diaetas totius anni, ut assolet de nativis, oportebat eos relaxare et remittere talia opera, et aut penitus perdonare aut sub laxiori modo in parvo reddito ponere, ne nimia et irrecuperabilis ruina fieret domorum, et terra ubique totaliter remaneret inculta" (Knighton, p. 65). Cf. also J. W. Thompson, "The Aftermath of the Black Death and the Aftermath of the Great War," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXVI, 565 ff.

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 278.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁴¹ T. W. Page, "The End of Villeinage in England," *Publications of the American Economic Association*, Series 3, I, No. 2, 291. Page shows from the bailiffs' accounts and court rolls from eighty-one manors between 1325 and 1350 that on 44 the villeins did practically all the work on the demesne; on 22, about half of it; on 9, a small amount; while only on 6 were the services entirely commuted. Similar records from 53 of these, together with other records made from 71 additional manors dating from 1350 to 1380, show an increase in commutation. Of the 53 manors there were now 17 on which the villeins did practically all the work; 15 did one-half; on 11 services were slight, and on 10 they were entirely commuted. For the 71 added manors, the figures are 30, 26, 10, and 5, in the same order. From this Page concludes that before 1348 very little progress

money economy did not prevail in the agricultural regions. Passing by the obvious use of money in the Crusades and as payments made at Rome and at the royal treasury by the clergy, it is apparent in the manorial records that the demesne produce also was sold for cash in the market. Bailiffs' yearly accounts always enumerate as an important item of income the corn, hay, grass, or stock sold, and give minute details as to price.⁴² It is true that the produce of monastic, cathedral, and ecclesiastical manors was consumed directly for the most part;⁴³ but on most manors considerable money receipts from sales were eventually paid over by the bailiff after expenses had been discharged. Gray finds⁴⁴ that the manorial valuation in the bailiffs' rolls was divided into three parts in the fourteenth century. The value in money of the messuage, arable land, pasture, and woodland of the demesne was noted. Secondly, the money rents were cited,⁴⁵ as well as the perquisites of the court and the income from the manorial mill. And thirdly, the *opera* were listed. He goes on to cite as typical of those manors where the services were uncom-

had been made in commuting services, while after 1348 commutation went on rapidly. However, the data from which these generalizations were made are highly inadequate. His scattered manors average only two to the county. And the addition of the new records in the middle of his calculations would hardly add to the accuracy of his result.

⁴² H. L. Gray, "The Commutation of Villein Services in England before the Black Death," *English Historical Review*, XXIX, 626.

⁴³ This fact possibly accounts for the conclusions of Page and Johnson, whose figures are almost entirely those taken from the records of ecclesiastical manors (cf. Johnson, p. 31).

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 631.

⁴⁵ Free tenants always paid such a rent, rarely doing labor. Customary tenants paid a rent of assize in addition to the manual labor done, and paid an *auxilium* in addition. Apparently as early as the reign of Henry III (1216-72) the substitution of a free class working for wages was being made. Compulsory labor is proverbially ineffective, and apparently it was more to the self-interest of the average manorial lord to commute the services for a money payment and to engage his former villeins as hired laborers, thus gaining permanent servants who worked better and who could be employed when and where necessary. An added advantage was a money income, since ready money—for which there seemed a growing need—had not been as available when the rents were paid in labor.

mutated the bailiff's rolls for a manor of Borley in Essex for the year 1308⁴⁶ and for the manor of Framlingham for the year 1326,⁴⁷ with the following results:

MANOR OF BORLEY

	Pounds	Shillings
Demesne	26	13
Assize	4	12 (customary tenants) 32 (freemen)
Mill and fishery	3	00
Perquisite of the court	1	00
Opera	7	08 ($\frac{1}{6}$ of the total valuation of the manor)

MANOR OF FRAMLINGHAM

	Pounds	Shillings
Demesne (grain and corn, £96; wood, £25; stock, £13)	134	00
Rent of assize	30	17 (customary tenants) 00 (freemen)
Mill and fair	23	00
Perquisite of the court	6	14
Rents from without manor	39	00
Opera	23	04 (Less than $\frac{1}{10}$ of the total val- uation of the manor)

Thus it seems fairly clear that even on manors where services were uncommuted a money economy was in effect. And consequently the conclusions both of Johnson and of Page seem to have been based on inadequate evidence, so far as the type of economy in agricultural England is concerned.

As to the actual commutation of services before 1348, the evidence submitted by Gray would indicate an extreme degree of commutation before 1348.⁴⁸ In one-half of the 309 manors in question, services were non-existent or very slight. In one-sixth of them only were full services rendered, and in one-third, partial services. There is, of course, considerable variation from county

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 631.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ The following table, compiled by Gray (p. 633), shows the distribution of commutation throughout England between 1333 and 1342. Group 1 are those

to county, the burden of manual labor increasing in most south-eastern counties. The manors in the first two classifications predominated in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, and Sussex; but those in the latter two, in Cambridgeshire, Buckingham, Middlesex, and Hampshire, practically balance them evenly. Farther to the west they yielded to the rent-paying manors until in Devonshire they almost disappeared. As to the monastic manors, the situation apparently did not differ greatly from that in the lay estates.⁴⁰ Thus we see that in the fifty years before the

manors where practically all services were rendered. Group 2 are those where substantial services were rendered. Group 3 are those where the services were very light. Group 4, where no services were rendered.

County*	4	3	2	1
North				
Northumberland.....	13	0	0	0
Cumberland.....	12	0	0	0
Westmoreland.....	12	0	0	0
Lancashire.....	9	0	0	0
Yorkshire.....	36	4	0	0
Rutland.....	2	1	1	0
Leicestershire.....	7	1	1	0
Warwickshire.....	11	2	0	0
Worcestershire.....	7	0	0	0
Shropshire.....	6	0	0	0
Herefordshire.....	11	2	2	0
Lincolnshire.....	37	3	3	6
South				
Norfolk.....	2	5	13	2
Suffolk.....	2	1	8	7
Essex.....	8	6	11	11
Hertfordshire.....	2	3	4	4
Sussex.....	6	4	9	5
Cambridgeshire.....	5	1	3	2
Buckinghamshire.....	8	1	9	0
Surrey.....	6	0	2	0
Bedfordshire.....	8	2	1	0
Huntingdonshire.....	3	0	0	1
Northamptonshire.....	6	3	2	3
Oxfordshire.....	8	2	5	1
Berkshire.....	2	6	1	0
Wiltshire.....	10	6	3	7
Somerset.....	6	2	3	0
Dorset.....	4	0	3	0
Devon.....	3	2	2	0
Middlesex.....	0	2	3	0
Hampshire.....	9	6	10	13
Gloucestershire.....	13	0	1	7

* In Kent the *opera* were abolished, as in the Northwest.

⁴⁰ There were 67 monastic manors in the northern and western counties. Of these, upon 40 no *opera* were rendered; upon 27, slight services; upon 6, substantial services; upon 2 (the manors of Selby Abbey), services were uncommuted in 1320. Apart from eight exceptions, the situation upon monastic estates of the northwest did not differ greatly from that of the lay estates there. The eight were as follows: two manors of Selby Abbey were in Class 1 (full services), one being in Class 2 (substantial services). The manors of the Hospitallers in North-

Black Death, services were very seldom rendered in the territory northwest of a line drawn between Boston and Gloucester. Southeast of that line services were the rule rather than the exception, as Gray points out, in those counties where the peasant revolt was the most violent.

Thus, if we accept Gray's figures for 739 manors, lay and ecclesiastic, as representative of the general English situation, by 1342 commutation of villeinage was complete on over half the manors; and on almost two-thirds it was either complete or very slight services were required. However, the number of serfs owing some or all services was comparatively large. And the conditions of this group were profoundly modified by the advent of the plague. The sudden reduction of the numbers of the villeins caused great dislocation. Labor, becoming much more valuable, learned its own power. Villeins owing services were either unwilling to perform them or were unable to, having fallen victims to the plague. The survivors deserted their holdings in large numbers, sometimes with leave on paying a fine, sometimes without leave, and joined the class of free laborers. In all such cases the land reverted to the lord, and as he could not find others who would perform the due labor services, nor force the surviving villeins to increase the amount of land held on villein tenure, nor

amptonshire, two in number, were in Class 2. And there were three in Lincolnshire in Class 2.

MANORS IN THE SOUTH

County	4	3	2	1
Norfolk.....	0	2	3	0
Suffolk.....	2	1	0	2
Essex.....	7	7	6	0
Hertfordshire.....	2	0	0	0
Sussex.....	1	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire.....	3	1	0	5
Buckinghamshire.....	3	2	1	1
Middlesex.....	2	0	1	0
Hampshire.....	4	4	1	2
Bedfordshire.....	2	3	0	0
Huntingdonshire.....	0	0	0	1
Northamptonshire.....	8	0	3	1
Oxfordshire.....	4	1	2	5
Berkshire.....	4	6	0	1
Wiltshire.....	11	3	3	2
Gloucestershire.....	3	2	1	1
Somerset.....	6	1	2	0
Dorset.....	5	1	5	1
Devon.....	2	1	6	0

increase the labor services, he was forced to one of two expedients. Either he had to take the land into his own hands or let it out to others on lease.⁵⁰ Thus on the one hand there occurred the gradual concentration of more and more land into the hands of a few landed proprietors, and on the other, an increase in the numbers of that part of the population dependent on daily wages. It would be interesting to trace this development down to the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 with a view to establishing the connection between it and the disintegration following 1348.⁵¹ But it seems best to turn now to France and draw a comparison between the effects noted in the two countries.

In France as in England prior to the fourteenth century a substantial number of serfs had been freed. One writer goes so far as to say that by the fourteenth century serfdom had practically disappeared.⁵² Such a statement may seem too general to be accurate; yet by and large it appears to be true. Emancipation of serfs began at an early date in France. Whereas the first grants of enfranchisement in England date from the reign of Henry III (1216-72), they can be found in France as early as the tenth century.⁵³ It should not be supposed, however, that serfs were liberated in any great numbers at so early a date. Serfdom was the rule for the majority of the peasants up to the end of the thirteenth century. There were provinces, however, where serfdom was on the decline in the eleventh century, notably Normandy, Touraine, and Brittany.⁵⁴ Under Louis VI (the

⁵⁰ For an excellent discussion of the transition from the old system to leasing of the land, see the article by Thorold Rogers, *Fortnightly Review*, III, 191.

⁵¹ It is doubtful that the Peasants' Revolt had a permanent effect, however, since it seems to have been joined largely by free laborers and townsmen and was probably caused far more by the Statute of Laborers, by the poll tax, and by the general discontent than by any special grievance of the villeins.

⁵² Franz Funck-Brentano, *Les origines de la guerre de cent ans* (Paris, 1896), p. 31.

⁵³ The most ancient grant is that made in 967 by the Abbé of St. Arnould to the inhabitants of Morville-sur-Seille, near Metz (Levasseur, *Histoire*, p. 231). Cf. also Délisle, p. 25; D'Avenel, I, 168-69.

⁵⁴ Achille Luchaire, *Manuel des institutions françaises* (Paris, 1892), p. 294. Cf. Délisle, *loc. cit.* Brutails (Jean-Auguste) concludes that serfdom was un-

Fat) the movement seems slowly to have taken shape.⁵⁵ Yet there were not many instances of enfranchisement until the reign of Philip Augustus (1180–1223), when serfs in great numbers seem to have been liberated.⁵⁶ Indeed, serfs apparently abandoned the land in such great numbers that certain local customs, particularly in Burgundy and in the Franche-Comté, permitted the serf to leave the fief provided he renounced all rights to his goods and warned the lord of his intention of leaving.⁵⁷ The movement increases throughout the twelfth and through the first half of the thirteenth century,⁵⁸ becoming so powerful that apparently the peasants were freed on the whole by the beginning of the Hundred Years' War.⁵⁹ Thus, even to a larger degree than in England, serfdom seems to have disappeared before the advent of the plague.

So also as in England, wages rose. Whereas the French

known in Roussillon. "Il y avait des nobles, des clercs, des bourgeois, des vilains libres ou soumis à des obligations plus ou moins dures, des esclaves, mais il n'y avait pas de serfs" (*Etude sur la condition des populations rurales du Roussillon au Moyen Age* [Paris, 1891], p. 205).

⁵⁵ Few royal serfs were freed by Louis VI (1081–1137), especially when it was simply a question of granting them their freedom. Only two such instances are marked in the annals of his reign (*Annales de la vie de Louis VI*, Nos. 79 and 444 [Paris, 1890], A. Luchaire, editor). But as sovereign, Louis confirmed the enfranchisement of a certain number of serfs (Nos. 351, 360, 441, 617). In 1125 Suger freed the serfs of St. Denis. Louis le Jeune freed those of Orléans in 1180, and also those of the suburbs.

⁵⁶ Achille Luchaire, *La société française au temps de Philippe-Auguste* (Paris, 1909), p. 439. Also A. Lecoy de la Marche, "Les classes populaires au treizième Siècle," *Le Correspondant*, CXXXVII (1884), 318–35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁵⁸ It must not be supposed that the nobles freed their serfs *pro salute animae, pietatis intuitu*. It was largely the growing need for money on the part of the nobles which occasioned the enfranchisement, the serf paying large sums for a privilege which not infrequently was more of a moral than a financial gain (cf. Luchaire, *Manuel*, pp. 319–26).

⁵⁹ ". . . Mais on peut dire que la classe servile, considérée dans son ensemble, se trouve, au moment où commence la guerre de Cent Ans, avoir accompli son évolution. Les paysans libres, assise fondamentale de notre tiers état, existent dès lors presque partout en majorité" (Luchaire, *Manuel*, p. 319). It should be noted, however, that despite this great movement toward enfranchisement, there were still parts of France where serfs were found down to 1789 (Levasseur, *Les Prix*, pp. 18–19).

journalier non-nourri was paid 60 centimes a day in the second half of the thirteenth century, from 1351 to 1375 his wages rose to 90 centimes.⁶⁰ The wages of the day worker *cum cibo* rose from 20 centimes in the second half of the thirteenth century to 45 centimes during the period 1351-75. Thus far the similarity holds, but no farther. For Jacques Bonhomme remained as a tiller of the soil while his English brother swelled the ranks of the wage-earners in the cities. While land in England was slowly being concentrated into the hands of a few, France was developing into a country of peasant proprietors.⁶¹

The question implicit in this variation is of course as to the reason why in England the Black Death apparently should have caused an influx of workers into the cities, with the attendant growth of large estates, whereas in France no such increase in the city population is noted, but, on the contrary, a fairly high degree of urban depopulation.⁶² There is always present the

⁶⁰ DAILY WAGES IN CENTIMES OF THE FRENCH WORKER*

WAGES IN CENTIMES		PERIOD	RELATION OF THE WAGES OF THE WORKER "NOURRI" TO THOSE OF THE WORKER "NON-NOURRI" (PERCENTAGE)	PROPORTION OF THE COST OF FOOD OF THE TOTAL WAGES ON BASIS OF 100 (PERCENTAGE)
"Nourri"	"Non-nourri"			
20.....	60	1251-75	66	33
30.....	67	1301-25	56	44
37.....	80	1326-50	54	46
45.....	90	1351-75	50	50
35.....	73	1376-1400	58	42
40.....	70	1401-25	43	57
37.....	65	1426-50	44	56
32.....	60	1451-75	47	53
30.....	58	1476-1500	49	51

* Taken from Levasseur, *Les Prix*, p. 73.

⁶¹ An interesting discussion of the French lease from the twelfth century is found in Délisle, pp. 27 ff., with typical examples included in an appendix, p. 651 ff.

It will be noticed that in the following discussion no mention is made of the law of primogeniture. Since with few exceptions it obtained in both countries in the period under consideration, its existence in the one country might be said to cancel the effect in the other, for purposes of comparison. One other factor which might be mentioned in connection with the coming discussion is that quality of the soil in France which makes intensive cultivation more profitable than extensive cultivation. Such a condition would naturally lead to small plots of land rather than large estates, and might account in part for the existence of the small landed proprietor in France rather than in England.

⁶² Cf. footnote 18.

Hundred Years' War as a partial explanation. But the cause lies deeper in all probability, and is to be found in the growing industrialization of England. It was Ashley⁶³ who first showed clearly the importance of the wool trade with Flanders. The wars of Edward III were largely commercial; for England was fast becoming a manufacturing country, particularly in the manufacture of cloth. The fourteenth century was the period when competition began to play more freely, when the domestic system of industry was slowly supplanting the old guild system. It was the period when the merchant prince began to accumulate great wealth—nascent capital, so to speak—a process aided by the expulsion of the Jews by Edward I and the failure of the Bardi and other Italian bankers under Edward III. In short, earlier than elsewhere, except in Flanders and Italy, money in England became the chief nexus between man and man. This is the evolution which was probably a more important cause for the breakdown of the manorial system in England than was the Black Death. Those results which acted to liberate a large portion of those villeins still owing services were contributory factors no doubt; and the shock and social dislocation caused by the plague probably prevented the reconstruction of the manorial system in the years which followed. But the roots of the matter go deeper into history. In the rapid development of trade in England the villein found an incentive to desert his fief long before 1348, being tempted by the relatively high wages offered in industry.⁶⁴ Those who stayed pressed for further commutation of their services; and the lords, although at first resisting, were forced to comply, soon realizing that it was to their ad-

⁶³ "The Early History of the English Woollen Industry," *Publications of the American Economic Association*, Series 1, Vol. II, No. 4. Cf. also Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce* (Cambridge, 1890-1903). It is interesting to note that the French historian Michelet also observed the importance of the wool trade with England, although he did not work it out in the detail which Ashley did.

⁶⁴ Frances G. Davenport (*The Economic Development of a Norfolk Manor, 1086-1565* [Cambridge, 1906]) seems to think that sufficient emphasis has not been given this desertion by the villeins. She indicates that the villeins of Fornsett Manor became weavers, hired laborers, tailors, smiths, shoemakers, and carpenters.

vantage to do so.⁶⁵ They saw that the old method of cultivating the demesne by compulsory labor was clumsy and ineffective; and as more and more they were leasing a greater part of their demesne, the labor became less necessary. Money payments became more profitable, and thus commutation went on apace.

The Black Death as such plays a correspondingly small rôle on the other side of the Channel. Prior to 1337, despite the oppressive legislation of the Valois, France was highly advanced economically. We have seen, as an example, the relatively early date at which enfranchisement of the serf had taken place. One has only to peruse the French Statute of Laborers, so-called,⁶⁶ to realize the extent of her industrial development. But no country, however well developed, can advance in the face of years of brigandage and devastation that marks any and every war. Had France been free from spoliation during the period of the Hundred Years' War the story might have been a different one. But a series of disasters, of which the plague was only one, stopped France midway in a development which, at the time of its arrest, was far in advance of the English attainments of the same period.

THE STATUTES OF LABORERS

An interesting parallel is the publication in 1351 both in France and in England of statutes attempting to regulate wages and prices, with about equal success. The English statute is as a matter of fact merely a recapitulation of proclamation made in 1349 while Parliament was still prorogued,⁶⁷ and is definitely an attempt to return to the status quo prior to the Black Death.⁶⁸ Whereas the Ordinance of 1349 provided in general terms that every person able in body under sixty years of age should be bound to serve anyone who required him, unless he had other

⁶⁵ Cf. Edward P. Cheyney, "The Disappearance of English Serfdom," *English Historical Review*, XV (1900), 29.

⁶⁶ *Anciennes lois françaises*, IV, 574.

⁶⁷ *Statutes at Large*, II, 31.

⁶⁸ "Come nadgairs contre la malice de servantz queux furent pareissouses et nient voillantz servir apres la pestilence sanz trop outrageouses lowers prendre feut ordine par nostre seigneur le Roi et par assent des prelatz nobles & autres de son conseil . . ." (*Statutes*, II, 31).

means of subsistence; that food should be sold at a reasonable price; and that alms should not be given to able-bodied beggars, the Statute itself goes into detail, fixing wages at what they had been in 1345,⁶⁹ and stating definitely the price to be paid agricultural laborers and artificers, and regulating, strangely enough, the price of shoes. The remaining three sections are devoted to provisions for the enforcement of the statute.⁷⁰

The French statute, passed in the February of 1351,⁷¹ deals entirely with the county of Paris and is far more complete and more general in its application. It not only arbitrarily fixed the price of merchandise and the scale of wages, but it attempted to batter down the guild organization in numerous instances to permit the entrance of a greater number of workers in the industries. Thus it not only required every able-bodied person without a means of subsistence to work and commanded that alms shall not be given to beggars able to work,⁷² as does the English ordinance of 1349; it not only regulates prices, wages, and the quantity of goods to be sold at the given prices;⁷³ but it regulates the profits to be taken by the middleman,⁷⁴ regulates the organization of the guilds,⁷⁵ and provides that pigs are not to be

⁶⁹ “. . . homes come femmes fussent tenez de servir recevantz salaries & gages accustumez es lieux ou ils ceveront servir lan du regne le dit nostre seigneur le Roi vintisme ou cynk ou sis annz devant . . .” (p. 31).

⁷⁰ It is interesting to note what two contemporary chroniclers have to say on the subject: “Eodem anno editum est statutum de servientibus, et ab eo die pejus servierunt magistris suis de die in diem quam ante fecerant; sed per justiciarios et alios ministros emolumentum regi semper accrevit, et dominigerium ad populum” (Knighton, p. 74). “Praeterea, statutum est ibidem, ut panni venales per totam Angliam sint in longitudine et latitudine sicut olim statutum apud Northamptonam; et quod omnia molendina et alia quaeque impedimenta navium, lemborum, et omnium aliarum vecturarum, per rivus aquarum, omnium in Anglia, tollantur et deleantur; quae omnia exposit, mediante pecunia et singulari dominorum amicitia, stare permittebantur ad communium detrimentum” (Walsingham, p. 30).

⁷¹ *Anciennes lois françaises*, IV, 574.

⁷² Chap. i, pp. 576-77.

⁷³ Chaps. ii-xliv, inclusive, pp. 578-617.

⁷⁴ Chaps. xlv, xlvi, liii, pp. 617-18, 620.

⁷⁵ Chaps. xlvii-lii; liv-lix, pp. 618-19; 620-22.

kept in the streets of Paris.⁷⁶ It seems clear that the major portion of the statute was an attempt to stop the rise in prices following the Black Death.⁷⁷ But the regulation of the guild organization is far more interesting in that it seems probable that John attributed the rise in prices in part to the small number of masters. He tried, therefore, to introduce great modifications into the system. Article 229 allowed a master to have any number of apprentices.⁷⁸ Article 228 even sought to make any type of work available for any worker by attempting to batter down the exclusive spirit of the guilds.⁷⁹ But the king's authority was powerless against the economic conditions and the customs of the time. The Parisian population had been decimated by the Black Death. Workers had become scarce, and no amount of legal regulation could succeed. As a matter of fact, the Ordinance of 1351 seems to have been so little observed by the workers, to have had such small effect on the economic organization of France, despite repeated attempts to enforce it,⁸⁰ that references to it in the pages of the economic historians of France are extremely scarce.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Chap. lxi, p. 623. Miscellaneous provisions are made in chaps. lx, lxii-lxv, pp. 621, 623-24.

⁷⁷ "Et seront payez de leur salaire le tiers plus qu'ils n'avoient avant la mortalité de l'épidémie" (chap. iv, p. 582). "Les fevres, et les mareschaux qui font bouës, picqs, scies, clefs . . . ne prendront, ou auront que le tiers plus outres ce qu'ils en prenoient avant la mortalité" (chap. xxxii, p. 611). Cf. also chap. xxxiii, p. 611; xlvi, p. 618; lii (Arts. 230 and 231), p. 619; lv (Art. 238), p. 621; lviii, p. 622. Otherwise the price is determined exactly or is termed "un prix raisonnable."

⁷⁸ Chap. lii, p. 619.

⁷⁹ Chap. li, p. 619.

⁸⁰ Cf. Ordinances of 1354 and 1356.

⁸¹ Levasseur (*Histoire*, I, 501 ff.) seems to have been the only historian of the period even to remark its existence. However, it must also be noted that the ordinance of 1351 was not unique in France. As early as 1304 the price of wheat was fixed by Philip IV (*Anciennes lois*, II, 825). Two years later he commanded that bread should not be sold at an exorbitant price, extending the order to wine and other provisions (*ibid.*, p. 830). So far as guild regulation is concerned the first instance goes back to Louis IX in 1260, when his "Établissements des métiers" listed 101 guilds and attempted to regulate the work done by each, specifying the various requirements (*ibid.*, I, 290). Philip IV permitted anyone to make or sell bread in Paris in 1305 (*ibid.*, II, 829).

The same difficulty of enforcement was found, apparently, in England. The increasing severity of the penalties provided for the enforcement of the statute is mute evidence of the inefficacy of the attempts. In 1357 the fines were given to the lords in order to encourage their imposition.⁸² In 1360 the penalties were made far more stringent.⁸³ Imprisonment was substituted for fines, and those who left their employment were declared outlaws and if caught were to be branded with an "F" for their falsity. The towns who thus sheltered them were fined £10. This last statute seems to have been one of sheer exasperation. The Statute of Laborers itself was not repealed until Elizabeth's reign,⁸⁴ but the lords seem finally to have realized that no amount of obstinacy on their part could triumph over a stubbornness born of necessity.⁸⁵ The one effect which the Statute of Laborers might be said to have had is to have increased the confusion of the period. The law of the king was introduced into the once sacred precincts of the manor. A vagrant serf could be forced to work for anyone who claimed him. His former owner could not reclaim him until the end of the enforced labor contract, and infinite collisions of rights based on manorial custom and those granted by the Statute must have arisen. It seems relatively clear that economic factors operating in the fourteenth century were of greater importance and brought greater pressure to bear than the plague of 1348-51.

How, then, may we evaluate the effect of the Black Death on the economic organization of France and England? It seems clear that with the exception of its influence on two factors of the economic organization in England, namely, the price of land and the commutation of the services of a large proportion of those villeins still owing them, its effects were not permanent.

⁸² *Statutes at Large* (1357), Cap. VI, p. 111.

⁸³ *Ibid.* (1360), Cap. IX, X, p. 139-40.

⁸⁴ 5 Elizabeth, Cap. 4.

⁸⁵ It is interesting to speculate on the result had Parliament fixed prices as well as wages. But as it was, enforcement was doomed to failure. Wages were fixed at the level they had attained five years before the plague, but prices continued to rise.

Steadily rising prices were already assured by the combination of factors in the fourteenth century. It is true, of course, that both in France and in England the price of food was doubled. Wheat rose sharply in both countries. In England the price of livestock fell during the years 1348-51, although after 1352 it rose, maintaining a high level throughout the greater part of the century. In France such prices fluctuated, a phenomenon apparently occasioned by the widespread disturbances accompanying the Hundred Years' War. But continued depreciation of the coinage in both countries, arising alike from the need of the French and English kings for bullion to finance their campaigns and from the decrease in production of silver, accompanied by the decrease in the production of goods, would have made for high prices during the century regardless of the after-effects of the plague. The prices of 1348-51 are clearly the result of the devastation following the Black Death; but they are high peaks in a steadily rising price level.

The effect of the Hundred Years' War as a prime determinant of the economic conditions in France rather than the Black Death is seen most clearly in the fall in the value of land in France during the second quarter of the century. Had the plague been of first importance we should have seen the same phenomenon as in England, a fall in the value of land in the third quarter of the century. But the disturbances of raids, devastation, plundering—all the companions of war—appear to have been of sufficient extent to occasion a definite fall in land values in France.

Again, when considering the movement of wages we must assume that the Black Death played the part of an accessory rather than of a principal factor both in France and in England, with the possible exception to be mentioned later. For both in France and in England wages had been rising steadily in the half-century preceding its advent. It is difficult to ascertain the exact cause for this rise. Doubtless in England the growing industrialization is responsible; for the city offered increasingly greater opportunities for making a living, and it is more than probable that landowners found themselves forced to meet the

demands of their laborers by increasing their wages and by commuting their services. Otherwise they would have found themselves with an even fewer number of workers on their lands. In France the Hundred Years' War again supplies an explanation for the rise of wages in the quarter of a century preceding the visitation of the plague. Here is a definite scarcity of labor. Terror or death took the laborer from his fields; and the landowner had to pay greater amounts in order to have his fields cultivated.

On the whole, the plague seems to have been almost incidental in France. It was an aggravation of an already desperate situation. But in a country overrun with the enemy, harassed by civil wars, devastated by fire and the sword, a plague is likely to fall into secondary importance. It was just one thing more to add to the miseries of the population and to abet the development of the strange hysteria of the times.

In England, however, we seem to find two fairly marked results of the visitation of the Black Death. It was largely responsible for the sudden drop in the value of land; and it was unquestionably the cause of numerous enfranchisements, whether forced or voluntary. The death of a certain percentage of the villeins, as well as of the lords of the demesne, coming as it did with unexpected suddenness, left many acres vacant, and the market for land was subjected to a temporary glut. The landowners surviving met the situation not infrequently by combining their deserted lands into great estates or by leasing them out to tenants who paid a money rent. But the drop in land values seems directly attributable to the Black Death and scarcely to any other operating factors of the period. As to the commutation of villeinage resulting from the plague, it should not be emphasized too much so far as the extent of the commutations is concerned. It seems fairly clear that for fifty years before the Black Death services were seldom rendered in the north-west of England. Southeast of the Boston-Gloucester line, however, we may say that services were the rule rather than the exception. And in this territory we find far more evidence of commutation of services after the Black Death than before. Yet again one must be cautious in attributing this development en-

tirely to the Black Death. The plague seems to have been the occasion for the commutation, and not its cause. The English villein, lured by the prospect of high wages in neighboring towns, must sooner or later have deserted his manor. The plague and the attendant disorder furnished him an excuse. And in so far as it furnished him an excuse for desertion, it played its part in the breakdown of the old manorial system. But the movement toward the towns had already received its impetus in the growing industrial development of England.

HELEN ROBBINS

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO