

Peasant Revolt in France and England: a Comparison

By C. S. L. DAVIES

PROFESSOR Mousnier's *Fureurs Paysannes*, published in 1967, is now available in English with a rather less lively title.¹ It is an attempt to broaden the controversy on the nature of French peasant revolts that has raged since the publication of Boris Porchnev's book in 1948, by comparing revolts in seventeenth-century France, Russia, and China.² For France, these consist of the *Croquants* of Saintonge, Augoumois, and Poitou in 1636 and of Périgord in 1637, the *Nu-Pieds* of Normandy in 1639, and the *Torrébens* of Brittany in 1675. For Russia, he examines peasant involvement in the dynastic struggles known as the "Time of Troubles" at the beginning of the seventeenth century, most notably that led by the ex-slave Bolotnikov; and the revolt of Stenka Razin, a Cossack who won considerable support from the peasantry of the Russian interior during the years 1667-71. The Chinese example is provided by the revolts led by Li Tzu-cheng and Chang Hsien-chung which in the 1640's paralysed the Ming régime and opened the way for the Manchu conquest.

Professor Mousnier is eager to stress that his own expertise is confined to France. Comparisons on this inter-continental scale are useful in suggesting questions to be asked. One wonders, though, whether they are meaningful comparisons, since the circumstances of the three societies were so very different. They

had, after all, little contact with each other, so that merely chronological coincidence is not in itself significant. Fortunately an excellent review from the standpoint of the three countries concerned is available by a *troika* of American historians.³ My purpose is rather to attempt to see how far Professor Mousnier's typology of peasant revolt is applicable to England. He has specifically refrained from making this particular comparison because another book of the same series is to deal with England. But since that work is concerned with the Puritan Revolution which, considered as a "peasant revolt" was in a sense the revolt that never was, I feel justified in attempting the comparison although inevitably it is not possible to do more than treat a few general themes.⁴

Fundamental to Professor Mousnier's views on French society is his concept of a "society of orders" as against a "class society." Professor Porchnev held that France was "fundamentally feudal," that whatever the apparent conflicts between the military nobility and the royal officials the state was in essentials an instrument of the landowning class, and that peasant revolts, therefore, even when they began as protests against royal taxation, quickly developed into a generalized attack on property, leading to a rally by the propertied classes to the forces of repression. Mousnier, on the other hand, stresses far more the divi-

¹ Roland Mousnier, *Peasant Uprisings in Seventeenth Century France, Russia and China*, transl. Brian Pearce, as no. 1 in 'The Great Revolutions Series', Allen & Unwin, 1971. £4.50 cloth, £2.75 paperback.

² Boris Porchnev [Porshnev], *Les Soulèvements Populaires en France de 1623 à 1648*, Paris 1963. The Russian edition was published in 1948 and a German translation in 1954. For reviews of the controversy see Menna Prestwich in *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, LXXXI, 1966, pp. 565-72; J. H. M. Salmon, 'Venal Office and Popular Sedition in France', *Past and Present*, no. 37, 1967, pp. 21-43; and R. Mandrou in *Revue Historique*, vol. 242, 1969, pp. 29-40. For a useful survey of peasant revolts in Europe generally in the period 1550-1660, see Henry Kamen, *The Iron Century*, 1971, ch. 10.

³ M. O. Gately, A. Lloyd Moote, and J. E. Wills, Jr, 'Seventeenth Century Peasant "Furies": some Problems of Comparative History', *Past and Present*, no. 51, 1971, pp. 63-80.

⁴ I have used some of the material I presented in an attempt to analyse English peasant revolts for French historians published in *Annales E.S.C.*, vol. 24, 1969, pp. 24-60.

sions among the privileged group.¹ Fortunately we need not now consider how far these two concepts are in fact opposed or how far they merely complement each other, as far as the general structure of society is concerned. The practical result, from the point of view of peasant movements, is that Mousnier stresses far more than Porchnev the importance of "vertical" as opposed to "horizontal" loyalties. On the one hand, the lord felt obligations to his peasants. On the other, peasants were inclined to trust and follow their lords. Local feeling was strong, outsiders distrusted. The privileges of a particular town, of a historic province, could be asserted against the centralizing tendencies of the monarchy, embodied in the tax collector. "Peasant revolt" in a class sense was rare; so-called peasant revolts were caused by noble incitement, or at least connivance, and were often in fact led by nobles; the peasants demanded no fundamental change in the social structure but merely the return of the good old customs; and these customs were so localized, so particular, that a combination of the peasants of different provinces into a national revolt was unlikely, even unthinkable.

Any general exposition of Professor Mousnier's views is bound to over-simplify them. He is not denying the existence of peasant revolts; he sees a radical difference between, say, the Norman *Nu-pieds* of 1639 and the initiatives of *Parlements* and of nobles during the Frondes. Connivance, rather than corporate leadership, is what he stresses as the contribution of the upper orders. Nobles did lead peasant revolts, but they tended to be exceptional individuals, such as La Mothe la Forest, leader of the Périgord revolt of 1637, rather than the nobility of the province as a whole.² Nevertheless, noble influence and the peasant's respect for the social order are shown in the programmes of rebels and in their objectives;

their hostility was directed primarily against tax-collectors.³ Mousnier concedes that revolts could sometimes escalate into more general attacks on the social order; for instance in Brittany in 1675. But where Porchnev sees such escalation as natural, the surfacing of normally repressed class antagonisms, Mousnier looks to exceptional conditions; in this case, a nobility unusually poor who, because of their exceptional judicial privileges, united the rôles of lord and of government agent in the eyes of the peasantry.

When they actually describe what happened, there is far less difference between the accounts of Porchnev and of Mousnier than their theoretical constructs might lead us to expect. By comparison, their analyses seem somewhat mechanistic attempts to force complex social realities into predetermined theoretical moulds. Several criticisms, however, can be made of Mousnier's approach in this book. Although he is the author of a comprehensive *questionnaire* for the use of students of revolts, his analysis of causes is surprisingly unsystematic; it is not always possible to discover, for instance, the fiscal situation in a given year, the state of the harvest, the geographical and social structure of the affected area, essential biographical information about leaders (even La Mothe la Forest), and so on.⁴ The evidence for involvement by individual nobles as leaders stems (inevitably) from reports of government agents, who were possibly inclined to underestimate the possibility of popular initiative and to look for a scapegoat among the respectable classes. Moreover, in picking on the seventeenth century Mousnier has, possibly, selected a period peculiarly favourable to his interpretation. By contrast the social disturbances which accompanied the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth century (a period curiously neglected by French social historians) reveal an acutely class-conscious

¹ *Peasant Uprisings*, pp. 1-31; for a general discussion of the applicability of Professor Mousnier's classification see R. Mousnier (ed.), *Problèmes de Stratification Sociale* (Actes du Colloque International, 1966), Paris, 1968.

² *Peasant Uprisings*, ch. 4; cf. Porchnev, pp. 76-80.

³ Cf. the similarity of aim between the peasants of Angoumois, who revolted in 1636, and the nobility of the same region, as shown in their *cahier* for the projected Estates-General of 1649.—R. Mousnier, J.-P. Labatut, J. Durand (eds.), *Problèmes de Stratification Sociale, Deux Cahiers de la Noblesse . . . 1649-51*, Paris, 1965.

⁴ For the questionnaire see P. Deyon, 'Recherches sur les Soulèvements Populaires en France de 1483 à 1787', *Revue du Nord*, xliv, 1962, pp. 281-90. Although designed for French revolts it is a valuable aide-mémoire for analysis of peasant movements elsewhere.

peasantry prepared to deny landlords their dues and clergy their tithes.¹

Nevertheless, Professor Mousnier's stress on vertical solidarities is surely right and provides a useful working hypothesis for the student of popular revolt; revolts may not always have been instigated by the upper-classes, or even by maverick individual noblemen, but where they were not there were special circumstances which need explanation. To approach the problem from the other angle, of a class-conscious but repressed peasantry taking every opportunity to manifest their grievances, is very much less fruitful.

What, then, can be learnt from a comparison of French and English revolts? Any comparison of the number of revolts raises awkward questions of definition but it is clear that peasant revolts were far commoner in France. Of the English revolts that in Norfolk in 1549 was clearly a peasant revolt. The northern rebellion of 1569 almost as clearly was not, in that it was directly and openly instigated by the normal leaders of northern society, the Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland. More tricky, however, are events like the Pilgrimage of Grace, in which ostensible peasant initiative was surreptitiously encouraged by noblemen and gentlemen, or the western revolts of 1497 and 1549 in which a number of lesser gentry (and in the former case, a peer, Lord Audley) were involved in the leadership. But even extending the definition of peasant revolts to include major risings which were independent of the normal leaders of local society, the tally in England for the Tudor and Stuart periods is hardly more than eight or nine.² Of course, there were a huge number of riots of various sorts, some of which were on quite a considerable scale. But the relative

immunity of England was strikingly shown by the events of the 1640's. The English Civil War though accompanied by innumerable riots and demolitions of fences, saw no fully fledged peasant rebellions, unless the activities of the Clubmen qualify; indeed, one of the most remarkable features of the Puritan Revolution was the failure of the English countryman to achieve, or even by and large to demand an improvement in his tenurial status, in sharp contrasts to the French peasant of 1789. Even allowing for the difference in size of the two countries (the population of France in the seventeenth century was about four times that of England), the differing incidence of revolt is remarkable.

There is a temptation to explain this difference in terms of a generally higher standard of living in England, and to quote in support of this a long line of English commentators from the fifteenth-century Chief Justice Fortescue onwards. This argument could take either of two interconnected forms: it could be held that a generally higher standard of living reduced the propensity to revolt or, more specifically, that subsistence crises due to bad harvests were less frequent in England and so the chance of a revolt of sheer desperation was reduced.

This latter theory was tentatively advanced by Lawrence Stone in the context of an argument about the supposed greater rate of agricultural change in England.³ The impression derived from the parish registers so far examined by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure would seem to support this argument; bad harvests filled the graveyards less dramatically in England than in the classic case of Pierre Goubert's Beauvaisis.⁴ Whether or not this result was

¹ E. le Roy Ladurie, *Les Paysans de Languedoc*, Paris, 1966, pp. 393-414; Salmon *loc. cit.*; Porchnev, pp. 47-8.

² These include the revolt of 1497; the troubles in 1525 in Kent and East Anglia; the complex of revolts known as the Pilgrimage of Grace; the two revolts in 1549; the Midland revolt of 1607; and the troubles which afflicted Wiltshire, Dorset, and Gloucestershire in 1628-31 and the Fenland in the 1630's, and the 'Clubmen' riots in the English Civil War. Conceivably Monmouth's rebellion has some claim to be considered a peasant revolt, and there were plainly other marginal cases, such as the opposition to the draining of the Fens or to the abolition of border-tenure. The 1525 troubles were largely the work of the rural clothworkers rather than of peasants as such.

³ Lawrence Stone, introduction to R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, new edn., New York, 1967, p. xiv.

⁴ Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, 2nd edn, 1971, ch. 5; E. A. Wrigley, *Population and History*, 1969, ch. 3; cf. Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730*, Paris, 1960.

due to greater English agricultural productivity or to other factors, such as better transport facilities or methods of poor relief, is not clear. Certainly fluctuations in grain prices seem to have been as acute in the London region as in the Paris area until about 1660, though after that date the Londoner was less severely affected by a bad harvest than the Parisian.¹ Moreover, the relationship between peasant revolt and harvest failure is more complicated than might be thought. The Beauvaisis, in spite of the subsistence crises which Professor Goubert describes so vividly, saw no revolts. Indeed, as we shall see, the great arable plains of Northern and Eastern France were distinctly less disturbed than the Western *bocage*, even though in the *bocage* there was less reliance on a single crop. In England the tally of revolts does not coincide very well with years of bad harvest: such notorious years as 1555-7 or 1594-8, for instance, did not see peasant revolts as such, though they may have seen an increase in rioting.² Nor can the revolts of 1549 and 1607, though they broke out in years of rising grain prices, be ascribed to desperation *tout court*. To quote Professor Hobsbawm, "When people are really hungry they are too busy seeking food to do much else; or else they die."³

It seems, then, unlikely that less murderous famines were a prime reason for England's relative immunity from revolt. But the wider possibility remains that a generally richer peasantry was less inclined to revolt than a poorer one. Given, however, the phenomenon of the "revolt of rising expectations" (finding its classic exposition in De Tocqueville's study of the causes of the French Revolution), such an explanation would hardly command respect *a priori*; while to

prove it empirically would be almost impossible, at least in the present state of knowledge, because of the wide regional variation in both countries, because of the difficulty of calculating the profits of agriculture, the respective level of dues, rents, tithes, the effect of different inheritance systems, and so on. About one point, however, English commentators were generally agreed: their belief that the prime reason for the poverty of the French peasant was the burden of royal taxation.⁴

Taxation was the most important single cause of peasant revolt in seventeenth-century France. It was a crushing, and during the worst period of revolts a rapidly increasing, burden. By 1648 the *taille* was four times what it had been in 1632; and a host of other taxes had been introduced or extended as well.⁵ The missionary Jean Eudes complained in 1648 "the inhabitants do not dare come [to church] for fear of falling into the hands of . . . the collectors of the *taille*, who arrest them even at the altars to take them off to prison."⁶ Even more important, taxation was an issue which could unite, temporarily at least, the opposition of a whole province against the remote authority of Paris. Nobles, although exempt taxation themselves, might resent the interference of government agents or find themselves unable to collect dues from an over-burdened peasantry. Taxation, moreover, could unite the peasantry and the urban classes. By contrast, protest about increased seigneurial dues and so on would tend to be diffuse, fragmentary, concerned with particulars. The relative immunity of the English lower classes from taxation was, then, a major reason for their quiescence.

Of course, there were major revolts about taxation in England. The Cornish revolt of 1497 was one such. The combination of the

¹ J. Meuvret, 'Les Oscillations des Prix des Céréales au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles en Angleterre et dans les Pays du Bassin Parisien', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, xvi, 1969, pp. 540-54.

² The attempt by Bartholomew Steere to raise a revolt among Oxfordshire peasants in 1597 was an abject failure. (See E. F. Gay, 'The Midland Revolt and the Inquisitions of Depopulation of 1607', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, n.s. xviii, 1904, Appendix I; also *Cal. State Papers, Domestic*, 1595-7, pp. 342-5.)

³ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester 1959, p. 79. For a tentative suggestion on the economic background of 1549 and 1607 see my article in *Annales E.S.C.*, *supra*.

⁴ E.g. Sir George Carew, *Relation of the State of France, 1609*, ed. T. Birch, in *An Historical View*, 1592-1617, 1749, pp. 461-8.

⁵ *Peasant Uprisings*, p. 307.

⁶ Quoted by D. Julia in *Revue Historique*, 241, 1969, p. 464, from C. B. du Chesnay, *Les Missions de St. Jean Eudes*, Paris, 1967.

parliamentary taxation of 1523 and the subsequent "Amicable Grant" of 1525 produced considerable resistance, notably in Suffolk.¹ Taxation, though this time it affected only a small proportion of the population, played its part in that generalized distrust of the central government, the belief that Henry VIII intended to despoil the whole fabric of northern society, which brought about the Pilgrimage of Grace.² The Duke of Somerset's sheep-tax, ironically designed to defend the arable peasant against enclosing landlords, was a contributory factor in the revolt in the pastoral West Country in 1549.³ Otherwise, however, taxation afflicted only a small minority. Professor Hoskins has calculated that in Elizabeth's reign "only about one household in every eleven or twelve at Wigston paid any direct taxation."⁴ Not until the introduction of excise duty during the Civil War were the lower classes afflicted again by taxation (though in practice, of course, the monopolies system amounted to the same thing); and while excise caused a good deal of rioting, especially in 1646-7, its incidence was presumably less burdensome on the rural population with whom we are at the moment concerned. (The depredations of soldiers, whether legal or illegal, was a variant on taxation and provoked the Clubman riots.) Even a tax on salt in 1694 failed to produce any equivalent to the ferocious opposition to extensions of the *gabelle* in France.⁵ The fiscal difference is, indeed, one of the major factors in the differing social evolution of England and most European countries, one to which English historians have paid relatively little attention.

A second cause for the greater frequency of French revolts was the greater strength of regional autonomy. Most of them took place

in areas such as Normandy, Brittany, or Languedoc, which conserved a good deal of the apparatus of provincial autonomy: their own assembly, their own judicial system dependent on a provincial *Parlement*, and so on.⁶ Again the contrast with England is by no means absolute. Obviously local feeling, the distrust of outsiders, and especially of the metropolis, was intense. The degree of regionalism of local self-sufficiency is shown by the behaviour of the East Anglian rebels in 1549 in pitching their camp on Mousehold Heath, near Norwich, improvising their own system of government for Norfolk and part of Suffolk, and petitioning Protector Somerset rather than marching on London; possibly in conscious imitation of their predecessors of 1381. And, of course, distrust of outsiders was not a purely peasant characteristic but a significant prejudice on the part of county establishments, revealed in the resentment impartially shown towards Charles I's Privy Council and Cromwell's Major-Generals. Regional feeling was, clearly, strong in the north and the revolts of 1536 and 1569 are a reflection of this.

Nevertheless, we are concerned with relatives, not absolutes. The English regions did not have their own legal system or the vestiges of representative assemblies, as the French *pays d'état* had. The councils of Wales and the North were instruments of central control rather than of local autonomy. While the provincial French *parlements* had been founded for much the same reasons, they tended to become, through the need to protect the vested interests of their officials against later waves of centralization, symbols of local autonomy; this happened only to a limited extent in England.⁷ The English Parliament was obviously a much

¹ See Anthony Fletcher, *Tudor Rebellions*, 1968, pp. 17-20.

² C. S. L. Davies, 'The Pilgrimage of Grace Reconsidered', *Past and Present*, 41, 1968, p. 60.

³ M. W. Beresford, 'The Poll Tax and Census of Sheep, 1549', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, 1, 1953, pp. 9-18, II, 1954, pp. 15-29.

⁴ W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, 1957, p. 177.

⁵ Edward Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance, 1558-1825*, Manchester, 1934, ch. 4-5, esp. pp. 177-8.

⁶ Though certainly not all: particularly disturbed areas were Poitou and Saintonge and Angoumois which retained few vestiges of autonomy.

⁷ Cf. the petition of the York authorities in 1641 to retain the Council of the North (R. Reid, *The King's Council in the North*, 1921, p. 448). Of course the situation is different if one looks at the British Isles instead of England. But the political and social institutions of Ireland and Scotland were so different that revolts like those of 1638 and 1641 are more comparable to the Catalan and Portuguese revolts than to noble-tolerated peasant revolts in France. The Scottish Covenanters in the reign of Charles II may be worth considering from the

stronger institution than the French Estates-General. This produced the paradox that opposition to the crown, even when based on dislike of centralization, could take a concerted national form in England which was impossible in France. All this seems a long way from the question of peasant revolts. It is, however, relevant. In England the gentry could organize its opposition nationally; no other group could. (Laslett is able to call England a "one-class society" by adopting ability to organize on a national level as one of his criteria for a class.)¹ The gentry, therefore, would be less inclined to encourage or connive at local peasant rebellion. An additional consideration here would be the greater social mobility among the upper group of English society and a corresponding lessening of these disputes between different groups of the privileged which were so powerful a feature of French politics up to and including the Frondes. By French standards the occasional support given by English gentlemen against excisemen or the rivalries of the landed and moneyed interests was relatively small beer.

Although peasant revolts were less frequent in England, when they did occur they correspond for the most part to the 'Mousnier pattern', in involving a fair degree of gentry or noble inspiration or at least active connivance. One of the most perceptive of English political writers held that "common people are of slow motion, if they be not excited by the greater sort; and the greater sort are of small strength, except the multitude be apt and ready to move of themselves."² The 1497 Cornish revolt was principally concerned with taxation, and a number of lesser gentry and those on the fringe of gentility, as well as Lord

Audley, were among the leaders. The Cornish rebels in 1549 were led by two gentlemen of property, Humphry Arundell of Helland and John Winslade, in a revolt to prevent the introduction of a Protestant liturgy.³ The Pilgrimage of Grace clearly owed a good deal to encouragement and connivance by the nobility and gentry, and was concerned less with specifically peasant grievances than with resistance to what was felt to be an attack on the whole way of life of a society; the peasant bands insisted that gentlemen should be their captains and even (at least the gentry subsequently said) forced them to be so.⁴ The troubles in the West Country of 1628-31 and the Fenland riots were clearly concerned with immediate peasant grievances. In both cases, however, gentlemen were involved: Sir Baynham Throckmorton, for instance, encouraged the rioters in the Forest of Dean, while "Mr. Castle of Glatton," a J.P., took part in the Fenland riots (as did a certain Oliver Cromwell, then a poor gentleman).⁵

An occasional variant on this pattern was the revolt by peasants, with little or no gentry participation, on behalf of some claimant to the throne: the willingness of a large number of Cornish peasants, after their defeat in 1497, to fight for Perkin Warbeck, or the rallying of Somerset men to Monmouth in 1685, are of this pattern. France seems to provide no analogy to this, but Russian peasants, in the exceptionally hard conditions of the early seventeenth century, were prepared to take as their leaders a series of impostors claiming to be the rightful Tsar.⁶ In these very exceptional cases the glamour of an exalted leader compensated, at least in part, for lack of more solid support from the leaders of local society.⁷

peasant-revolt angle; but what is apparent from works like that of Mousnier is that peasant-revolt is no *sui generis*, easily distinguishable from "upper-class" or "national" revolts, but that there is a continuous spectrum ranging from peasant revolt to aristocratic *coup d'état* in which any dividing line is drawn arbitrarily.

¹ *The World We Have Lost*, ch. 2.

² Francis Bacon, essay 'Of Seditions and Troubles'.

³ A. L. Rowse, *Tudor Cornwall*, 1941, ch. vi, xi.

⁴ See Davies, *loc. cit.*; M. E. James, 'Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England: the Lincolnshire Rebellion, 1536', *Past and Present*, 48, 1970, pp. 1-78.

⁵ Kerridge, *loc. cit.*; D. G. C. Allan, 'The Rising in the West, 1628-31', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser., v, 1952-3, pp. 76-85; H. C. Darby, *The Draining of the Fens* 2nd ed., Cambridge, 1956, esp. pp. 55-6; Joan Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, 1957, ch. 5.

⁶ *Peasant Uprisings*, ch. viii.

⁷ A curious variation of the same phenomenon was the ability of a fake Earl of Devon to gain support in Kent in the 1830's on an anti-aristocratic platform. See P. G. Rogers, *Battle in Bossenden Wood*, Oxford, 1961.

All these examples, except possibly the Pilgrimage of Grace, are of leadership by individual gentlemen rather than by the upper reaches of local society as a whole. Such leadership did not prevent, for instance, the western rebels in 1549 demanding a restriction on the number of servants gentlemen could employ.¹ It does, however, suggest the general conformity of English experience to Professor Mousnier's vision of society.

Against this, however, there seem to be two stubborn exceptions: the revolts in Norfolk in 1549 and in the East Midlands in 1607. Even here, the issue is not absolutely clear-cut. The 1607 revolt has not been investigated in depth, except for the single Leicestershire village involved.² In so far as gentry can be blamed it seems to be for their tardiness in putting down the revolts. (James I, like French politicians of the period, assumed that the county authorities had the prime responsibility for the breakdown of order.)³ It may be that investigation would show that the forces of order were paralysed by particular inter-gentry feuds. As for Ket, many of the leaders were on the verge of gentility. Robert Ket himself was a tanner, a substantial businessman who had built up a considerable landed estate; his first involvement with the rebels was when they attacked his enclosure fences; like many gentlemen he managed to divert this into an attack on the fences of an enemy, John Flowerdew.⁴ That "peasant leaders" were not always what they seem is shown by the case of John Wynter, accused of leading a band of rebels to imprison Francis Bedingfield and extort £12 from him; Wynter, as it subsequently appeared, had a wife with a claim against Bedingfield to the manor of Hesteley in Suffolk as the heir of her

father William Bishop.⁵ In two respects, too, the rebellion was influenced by the political situation in the upper-ranks of society: by the belief that the Duke of Somerset was on the side of the rebels, as exemplified by his sending out commissioners to enquire into illegal enclosures; and by the fact that the greatest magnate in the county, the Duke of Norfolk (who had played a key role in quietening taxation riots in Essex and Suffolk in 1525) was in prison, the Bishop of Norwich was peculiarly ineffective and, apparently, the county gentry left inert by lack of leadership.⁶

Even so, this hardly adds up to positive incitement or even connivance by the gentry; and these two revolts constitute rather large exceptions to the general picture.

Interestingly enough, they are also rather exceptional when considered geographically. For seventeenth-century France, Professor Mousnier stresses that revolts "occurred with few exceptions to the west and south-west of a line through Normandy, Anjou, Touraine and the Bourbonnais, as far as the Dauphiné." The geography of social disturbance during the Wars of Religion had been similar. Broadly speaking the line corresponded to the division between "the region of open, oblong fields" (in the North and East) and that of "enclosed and irregularly shaped ones." The "rebellious" areas were those of smaller holdings (up to a maximum of 30 hectares or 75 acres), often held on a share-cropping basis, poor soil, and two-field rotations. Mousnier seems to equate here two very different geographical areas, the *bocage* of the west and the hill areas of Languedoc, Dauphiné, and Provence and, to a certain extent, Limousin. By contrast the "obedient" areas comprised the great rolling

¹ F. Rose-Troup, *The Western Rebellion of 1549*, 1913, pp. 220-2.

² L. A. Parker, 'The Agricultural Revolution at Cotesbach', *Trans. of the Leics. Arch. Soc.*, xxiv, 1948, pp. 41-76.

³ "Withstande ther begynninges, or else yt will be your faultes," James admonished the J.P.s in 1608, with an ominous reference to the troubles of 1607.—W. P. Baildon (ed.), *Les Reportes del Cases in Camera Stellata*, 1593 to 1609, 1894, pp. 368-9.

⁴ F. W. Russell, *Ket's Rebellion in Norfolk*, 1859, pp. 27-30; L. M. Kett, *The Ketts of Norfolk*, 1921, pp. 53-7.

⁵ P.R.O., C1/1200/13-14; W. A. Copinger, *The Manors of Suffolk*, 7 vols, 1905-11, pp. 309-10. If William Bishop is the same man as was listed as worth £6 in goods in 1524 at Thornton, he must have been self-made.—S. H. A. Hervey (ed.), *The Subsidy Return for 1524*, Suffolk Green Books, x, 1910, p. 176.

⁶ S. T. Bindoff, *Ket's Rebellion* Historical Association, 1949, pp. 14-15. The very term "revolt", though inescapable, is in a sense misleading in that the prime purpose of dissident peasants was to appeal for justice to the king (cf. M. E. James, *loc. cit.*; *Peasant Uprisings*, p. 59). Only support of a rival claimant to the throne or, occasionally, an appeal from the authority of the king to God could legitimize resistance.

plains of the north and east; holdings were larger (up to 60–70 hectares, or 150–175 acres), held on a cash basis, with better soil and three-field rotations.¹ In the “disobedient” area cultivation was largely on an individual basis and settlement dispersed: in the north and east, on the other hand, more cohesive village communities cultivated common-fields and were largely under the influence of large peasants, *coqs de village*, who often farmed the seigneurial dues. These structural differences were not the only ones. Proximity to Paris, the presence on the northern and eastern frontiers of royal armies, the greater ease of guerilla warfare in *bocage* or mountain country than in open plains, were all important. But the contrast in social structure would seem the most significant difference.²

To some extent the same is true of England. The inclination of pastoral regions to independence, their greater liability to riot, has become firmly established among historians in recent years; manorialization was weaker, village communities were less hierarchical, and in that sense, less “organic,” and were further weakened by the scattered nature of a good deal of the settlement.³ On the other hand, some of the more striking and important of the English peasant revolts happened in mixed farming areas rather than pastoral ones. The Pilgrimage of Grace involved the East Riding and the Lincolnshire wold sheep-corn areas as much as it did the wild regions of the Lake District, of Richmond and Craven. Ket’s Rebellion, though it began in wood-pasture area at Wymondham, rapidly spread to the rest of Norfolk except the Breckland; its pro-

gramme was very much concerned with the threat by lords of the manor to the traditional economy of the sheep-corn areas. The Midland revolt showed a similar reaction by the clay-vale peasantry of Leicester, Warwick, and Northampton to a similar threat.

There is an apparent paradox here: sheep-corn areas with a relatively high degree of manorialization generated a reasonably “class-conscious” peasant revolt, whereas in both England and France in pastoral regions revolts tended to conform more to the classic pattern of gentry inspiration, in spite of weaker manorial structure. It may be that a society dominated by large peasants, by *coqs de village*, was better able to generate a cohesive movement than the freer, but more scattered, more socially equal inhabitants of pastoral regions. After all, even in France, peasant revolt was not always confined to Mousnier’s “disobedient region.” To take two widely differing examples, the Jacquerie of 1356 centered on the area north of Paris (including the, in seventeenth-century terms, extremely “obedient” Beauvaisis), while the peasant movement of 1789 was as fierce in the plains of the north and east as in the rest of France. (Indeed, much of Mousnier’s “disobedient” area was to be the centre of royalist resistance to the Revolution.) Revolts in open-field, nucleated village areas may have been much less frequent; equally they seem to have been correspondingly more dangerous when they did occur.⁴

Leaving aside these speculations about France, however, can we conclude that Professor Mousnier’s society of orders is totally inapplicable to English mixed farming regions?

¹ *Peasant Uprisings*, pp. 332–4. For the suggestion about the Wars of Religion (though with a warning of the inadequate state of research on the subject) see J. M. H. Salmon, *loc. cit.* For a description of French farming regions see Pierre Goubert in *Histoire Economique et Sociale de la France* (eds., F. Braudel and E. Labrousse), II, Paris, 1970, pp. 104–18.

² Goubert raises the point that the inhabitants of the *bocage*, at least, may have been better off than those of the north-eastern plains due to less pressure of population, more intensive grazing, availability of timber, and so on. The point, however, would seem to be the familiar one of greater social and economic equality in wood-pasture areas and a more hierarchical peasant society in mixed-farming ones.

³ Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales 1500–1640*, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 109–12; see also Thirsk, ‘Seventeenth-Century Agriculture and Social Change’, *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xviii, 1970, Supplement, pp. 148–77; E. Kerridge, ‘The Revolts against Charles I in Wiltshire’, *Wilts. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Mag.*, LVII, 1958–60, pp. 64–75; P. A. J. Pettit, *The Royal Forests of Northamptonshire*, Northants Record Soc, xxiii, 1968.

⁴ It may be worth pointing out that Marx’s dismissal of the possibility of collective action by the peasant class (“formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes”) applies to the individualist peasant of the post-1789 period and is specifically contrasted with the possibility of collective action in *ancien régime* conditions.—*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

This would be a mistake. Ket's revolt certainly shows that rebellion could take place without gentry leadership. But it also demonstrates, very vividly, the degree to which rebellious peasants remained orderly and eschewed revolutionary ideas. And this was probably because of the continued dominance within the revolt of the yeomen or richer husbandmen who were the natural leaders of parochial life, both because of their economic position, and because of their occupancy of such offices as constable, churchwarden, and so on.

Sir John Cheke, instructing the rebels on the "Hurt of Sedition" directed his argument at substantial men: "if ye will in other things breake all order, by what reason would ye be obeyed of yours as servantes."¹ So too, a year before, Sir Thomas Seymour had advised that a would-be conspirator should "trust not too much to the gentlemen for they have somewhat to lose: but . . . make much of the head yeomen and franklins of the country, specially those that be ringleaders, for they be men that be best able to persuade the multitudes, and may best bring the number."² Richard Carew believed that in Cornwall in 1549 "the constables' command and example drew many . . . into that extremest breach of duty."³ As long as such men kept control the revolutionary tendency of popular revolt would be kept in check.

This dominance is apparent from the programme of the Norfolk rebels.⁴ Along with a mass of demands which would benefit the peasantry in general (the level of rents and dues, the rights of lords on commons, the restriction of rabbits and doves, free fishing, and so on), are two which particularly concerned the rich peasant. One clause demanded that

lords of the manor should not sell the wardship of their tenants; presumably there was only temptation to do so if the child was reasonably wealthy. Another demanded that men with less than £40 a year should not be eligible for the office of King's escheator. Since £40 a year is elsewhere taken as the dividing line between gentry and others, presumably the purpose of this clause was to protect substantial men, on the verge of gentility, from a burdensome office which gentlemen might normally expect to shoulder. What is a more striking tribute, however, to the dominance of "respectable" elements is the fact that the proletariat of Norwich, the second largest town in the country, afflicted with a considerable problem of poverty due to the decline of the urban cloth industry, apparently exerted no influence on the programme; nor would one have any inkling from the programme that Norfolk was one of the main centres of rural cloth-making.⁵

Also remarkable was the ability of these natural leaders of rural society, along with the city authorities, to keep order. While captured gentlemen were tried at the rebel camp at Mousehold Heath, none were killed or even tortured by the rebels. Matthew Parker, then Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, was able to escape from the rebels with a bad fright but nothing worse after preaching to them a sermon on disobedience. Even when co-operation between the rebel leaders and the civic authorities broke down when the latter were discovered plotting with the government, Augustine Stiward, an ex-mayor, because "hee had allways ben a good and modest man . . . beloved of poore and rich" kept effective order in the city except among "the most

¹ *The Hurt of Sedition*, 1549, repr. 1569, sig. I. ² Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³ *Survey of Cornwall*, quoted Rowse, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁴ Printed in Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-56; reprinted in A. E. Bland, P. A. Brown, and R. H. Tawney (eds.), *English Economic History: Select Documents*, 1914, pp. 247-50, and in Anthony Fletcher *op. cit.*, pp. 142-4. The programme itself presents several puzzles. It is known from one copy only (Brit. Mus. Harl. MS. 304 fols. 75-7); the clauses are haphazardly arranged and incorporate drafting changes. Nevertheless the document is drawn up in a good hand, probably by Thomas Godsalue, a captured gentleman, and signed by Ket, Thomas Cod, Mayor of Norwich, and Thomas Aldrich, ex-Mayor (cf. Bindoff, *op. cit.*). Presumably the document is the one presented to Somerset shortly before 27 July (N. Pocock, *Troubles connected with the Prayer Book of 1549*, Camden Soc. n.s., vol. 37, 1884, p. 28) but it seems probable that it was produced by a somewhat disorderly committee. To assume, as Fletcher does (p. 73), that it was a thought-out programme on the part of Ket himself is misleading.

⁵ The programme was drawn up in the early stages of the revolt when the city authorities were co-operating with the rebels in order to damp things down; but that they succeeded in doing so is surely remarkable.

vagrant and vagabond persons." Later still the rebels entered the city in triumph after defeating a royal army. Stiward was accused of treachery and his shop was looted. But when "a servant of Master Smith of Huntingfields had sharply told them that for robbing and spoiling, they should all be hanged" many of Stiward's goods were returned by contrite rioters and Stiward continued to keep order in the city. The testimony here comes from Nicholas Sotherton, himself a member of the Norwich oligarchy whose account aims to magnify rebel disorder.¹ All this is in sharp contrast with, for instance, events at Agen in Languedoc in 1635, when an anti-gabelle riot involved the decapitation of the archer Tichanne and the dragging of his body through the town; the cudgelling to death of the 'sieur d'Espales', the exhibition of the hands and feet of the canon Guillaume du Périer while his body was eaten by dogs; the tearing out of the eyes of the son of Guillaume de Maures by a woman; and other horrors.² Such excesses were practised in England only by the forces of order, not by the rebels. One of the few exceptions was the lynching of the Bishop of Lincoln's chancellor, John Raynes, by the Lincolnshire rebels in 1536.³

The priest as well as the wealthy peasant was a figure of authority in the village; and he too, by and large, retained his authority in times of rebellion. Movements inspired by conservative religious sentiment, like the Pilgrimage of Grace or the Western Rebellion of 1549, show this in obvious form. But so, too, does the part played by the clergy in other more "secular" protests. A "Puritan minister," for instance, was probably behind the manifesto of the Warwickshire "diggers" in 1607, with its

erudite reference to the possibility of a "fearful dearth" like that of "King Edward the seconds tyme, when people were forced to eat Catts and Doggs flesh, & women to eate theyr owne children."⁴

The Norfolk rebels seem once again to constitute an exception here with their demands that priests were not to purchase lands, that non-preaching clergy were to be deprived of their benefices, and that tithes were to be reduced to a tenth of their present level. Doubtless these demands are the articulation of age-old resentments about the performance of their duty by the clergy. That they should have been expressed, however, seems probably due to the influence on the rebels, through channels not yet traced, of the twelve articles of the German peasants in 1525. Articles I and II of these demanded an elected pastor to teach the Gospels; he has to be supported from the tithe, which was also, however, to be used for poor-relief and to pay the peasant's land tax.⁵

The Ket programme was, moreover, wholly exceptional in this. One very striking feature of English peasant movements is, indeed, the general absence of protests about the principle of tithe (as against resentment at the way it was sometimes levied, especially by laymen farming ecclesiastical revenues); the major exception was in the heady days of Civil War and Interregnum when resentment about tithes could be supported by respectable theological opinion. This passivity *viz-à-viz* the authority of the church parallels the French experience: there too peasants rarely questioned the principle of tithe except during the Wars of Religion.⁶

So far, then, we have seen that English peasants were prepared on occasion to be

¹ Brit. Mus. Harl. MS. 1576, fols. 251-9. ² Le Roy Ladurie, *op. cit.*, pp. 503-4.

³ M. H. and R. Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, Cambridge, 1915, I, pp. 101-2.

⁴ For the manifesto see F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *Ballads from MSS* (Ballad Soc. 1868-72), I, p. 37; see also *H.M.C. Cecil* XIX, p. 150 (Dorset-Salisbury, 6 June 1607). The historical reference seems to be from Stow (*Annales*, 1600 edn, pp. 335-6).

⁵ See Friedrich Engels, *The Peasants War in Germany*, English edn, 1927, pp. 157-63. The one appeal to general principles in the Norfolk programme, "that all bondmen may be made free for God made all free with his precious blood-letting," is clearly derived from the third of the German articles.

⁶ R. Mandrou, *Classes et Luittes de Classe en France au Début du XVII^e Siècle*, Florence, 1965, p. 75; Le Roy Ladurie, *op. cit.*, pp. 393, 495; however, the peasants in Poitou in 1636 came near to the Norfolk rebels in 1549 and the Swabian ones of 1525 in demanding that tithe be entrusted to elected officials and used to pay a resident priest, for the upkeep of the church and for poor-relief, rather than lining the pocket of non-resident clergy.—Mousnier (ed.), *Lettres et Mémoires adressées au Chancelier Séguier, 1633-49*, Paris, 1964, II, pp. 1105-7; *Peasant Uprisings*, pp. 63-4.

somewhat more independent of the gentry than the "Mousnier model" might suggest; but that, even when the upper levels of society were removed, an essentially hierarchic organization continued. The dominance of the yeomanry could, for a while at least, continue even in the absence of the gentry and this resulted in programmes which were essentially reformist, demanding the restoration of vanished peasant rights rather than a fundamental reorganization of society.

Of course, as Professor Mousnier's American critics point out, the fact that peasant programmes were reformist does not mean that their adoption would have made little difference: "conservative" resistance might have "revolutionary" implications.¹ Fulfilment of the programme of the Norfolk rebels would in Professor Bindoff's words "have clipped the wings of rural capitalism;"² by stabilizing rents and dues in an inflationary age it would have brought about the decline of aristocracy and gentry with a vengeance. Nor should we assume, as Mousnier tends to, that the political results of peasant violence were minimal. It seems reasonable to assume that violence and threat of violence had its effect on the policies of government and of landowners. The disturbances of Wolsey's time may well have been responsible (in conjunction, of course, with the less pressing military needs of England compared to France) for the ending of the attempt to impose the subsidy on a large proportion of the population. Fear of riot was probably important in restricting the scope of the excise in 1647, while in 1733 popular pressure allied with Parliamentary opposition to prevent Walpole's intended extension of the excise.³ Obviously, fear of disturbance was

one motive, at least, for a good deal of the government's social policy, from the discouragement of pasture to the attempt to moderate food prices in years of dearth. So, too, it may be that the pace of enclosure and rack-renting was slowed down by popular resistance. Francis Tresham abandoned a scheme to improve the value of his father's property at Great Houghton in 1604 because "you could not remove all the tennantes without much clamor."⁴ It may be, as Professor Mousnier believes, that peasant revolt as such accomplished little; but the resort to violence in defence of existing rights, of which revolt was a development, could not be ignored.

Basically, then, English peasant violence was a fierce and, arguably, effective method of protecting ancient rights rather than an expression of class hatred. Yet this contrasts with the impression of peasant revolt which was widespread at the time. As Christopher Hill points out, the prevailing literary convention was to depict peasant protest in terms of destruction of the existing social order: to take one example only, Shakespeare makes Jack Cade propose the burning of all legal records "and henceforward all things shall be in common."⁵ It seems a reasonable assumption that such conventions reflected a real class bitterness. To take a single example, John Walker was accused of saying in Norwich in 1540 "... as many as wyll not tirm to us, let us kylle them, ye evyn ther chylthern in the cradelles; for yt were a good thinge yf ther were so many jentylmen in Norffolk as ther be whyt bulles."⁶ A clear tradition of class hostility may be traced in popular songs and in prophecies as well as in threats made from time to time by "Jake of the North" or "Jack of the Style."⁷

¹ Gately, Moote and Wills, *loc. cit.*, p. 72. ² *Ket's Rebellion*, p. 9.

³ J. H. Plumb, *Sir Robert Walpole*, II, 1960, ch. 7.

⁴ M. E. Finch, *The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families 1540-1640*, Northants. Record Soc., XIX, 1956, p. 89.

⁵ Christopher Hill, 'The Many-Headed Monster in Late Tudor and Early Stuart Political Thinking' *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: Essays in honour of Garrett Mattingly*, ed. C. H. Carter, 1966, pp. 296-324. Presumably deliberately, Shakespeare imported scenes from the 1381 revolt into his picture of Cade, who is depicted by Holinshed in an essentially "reformist" light. Cf. Brents Stirling, *The Populace in Shakespeare*, New York, 1949, pp. 22-5.

⁶ Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁷ Eg. C. H. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, 5 vols., Cambridge, 1842-1908, II, pp. 40-2; V, pp. 286-7. The use of such names should not, however, be taken as an apparent reminiscence of 1381, since they were commonly used for "persons unknown" in courts of law.—F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life; Disorder*, Chelmsford, 1970, pp. 155-6.

Rebellion provided an opportunity of asserting self-respect and working off the hostility and frustration of men whose humility was too often taken for granted:¹ as, for instance, when the commons of Horncastle, Lincolnshire, struck at the horse of Sir William Sandon "and said he could go a-foot as they did."²

Class hatred, however, must be distinguished from class war. The most characteristic accent in these expressions of resentment is one of bitter, hopeless acceptance of the status quo. Even John Walker's blood-curdling threats were couched in terms of "... as many as wyll not tirm to us ..."; only after refusal of the gentry to help the peasants to attain their just rights could one contemplate violence against them. In normal conditions equality was not something to be actively hoped for or worked towards, but only a remote possibility, if and when society could be fashioned anew in a totally different world. If, on the other hand, a totally different world was within range, was not as distant a proposition as might normally be imagined, class hatred might become politically significant. Hence, of course, the importance of what seem to us irrational elements, such as prophecy, in suggesting that radical change might not be so far distant after all; and, perhaps, that the change was not in fact that radical, but respectably rooted in the distant past or legitimated by the "real" king, such as the supposedly surviving Edward VI who haunted Elizabeth's reign.³ Hence, too, the importance of millenarianism, of the belief that the end of the world was at hand.⁴ Neither prophecy nor the millennium necessarily implied a social revolution; but, merely because they implied that present society was not immutable, they

made it possible for men to imagine an alternative; and one in which, in very different ways, either all men would be free and equal, or at least, that the present unfair ordering of society would be changed so that the last would be first and the first last.⁵ Not surprisingly, governments were anxious to prevent the spread of subversive prophecy and, naturally, were sensitive to the dangers of radical religion.⁶

In more mundane conditions, however, it seems as if the yeomanry could keep radical demands in check and, though prepared to assert the rights of the peasantry against innovation, to contain any fundamental challenge to the concept of hierarchical society. Such challenges tended, indeed, to occur in the later stages of revolt when disintegration was setting in as men began to believe that their fellows were preparing to sell them out. The difficulty of keeping peasant revolts in being was frequently mentioned by contemporary commentators.⁷ Perhaps this accounts for the degree of complacency, of willingness to make use of popular dissatisfaction displayed by many of the upper classes. Indeed, the extent of near panic, of fear of the lower orders, may have been exaggerated by some recent historians.⁸ Allegations that the social order was in danger may often have represented not the genuine fears of government but a useful means of propaganda, designed to drive a wedge between the "respectable" elements in rebellion and their fellows. Sir John Cheke's allegation, for instance, that the Norfolk rebellion was stirring up "uprores of people, hurly burlies of vagabonds, routes of robbers" was plainly of this type.⁹ Robert Crowley, discussing the Norfolk rebellion, charged the

¹ A point well made by Robert Mandrou in 'Vingt ans après', a review article on the Porchnev-Mousnier controversy, *Revue Historique*, 242, 1969, pp. 29-40.

² Davies, *loc. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

³ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 1971, ch. XIII.

⁴ W. M. Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion 1603-60*, 1969; and see Bernard Capp, 'Godly Rule and English Millenarianism', *Past and Present*, 52, 1971, pp. 106-7.

⁵ For the possibility of religion producing a fiercely anti-aristocratic revolt, even in the French context, see the millenarian revolt of the "Camisards" in Languedoc from 1702 to 1705 (Le Roy Ladurie, *op. cit.*, pp. 605-29).

⁶ Acts against prophecy: 33 Hen. VIII, c. 14; 3 & 4 Edw. VI, c. 15; 5 Eliz. I, c. 15.

⁷ E.g. the "second" stage of the Yorkshire Pilgrimage of Grace, when the commons thought they had been betrayed by the gentry (though still led by a "maverick" gentleman, Sir Francis Bigod: see A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558*, 1959, ch. iii).

⁸ E.g. Hill, *loc. cit.*; M. Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints*, Cambridge, Mass., 1965.

⁹ *Hurt of Sedition*, sigs. Dii, Hii.

possessing classes with introducing a false note of communism to evade the real issue.¹ It may be that Shakespeare himself was making the same point when, in *Coriolanus*, a reasonable, non-revolutionary plebian demand for a more just distribution of grain during the dearth was answered by the patrician Menenius with an irrelevant exposition of the organic theory of society.² "Take but degree away, untune that string And hark what discord follows" was, after all, not so much what Elizabethans believed but what the authorities would have liked them to believe.

That the Elizabethan gentry were less panic-stricken than is often supposed is shown by the reply to a questionnaire sent out by the Privy Council in, significantly, 1569, about the creation of a cadre of hand-gunners to supplement the militia and the security problems which this might lead to. Eight counties took the point about the dangers of arming the lower-orders and made constructive suggestions. However, eleven counties including, oddly, Norfolk, thought that no problem would arise on this score. The commissioners of musters in Kent thought that all men should have the right to shoot, and that arquebuses could be kept in private houses. The commissioners in Warwickshire, indeed, missed the point completely, thinking that the Council's anxieties were on the score of poaching and hastened to reassure it. In the event the scheme fell through but because it would have cost too much not because it was a danger to the social system.³

All in all, then, the Mousnier thesis is a useful working hypothesis as far as English peasant society is concerned. Applied unimaginatively

or rigidly it can mislead. Because the upper ranks of society are better documented than the lower it is much easier to discover possible motives from their activities, to suggest that their grievances were the "real" causes of revolts, and to consider the latter largely in terms of prompting from above.⁴ There could be peasant revolt, apparently, without direct gentry incitement. But even so what is remarkable is the extent to which the normal assumptions of society were carried forward into the rebellion itself and manifested in its leadership and in its programmes. Of course, it would be foolish to maintain that the gentry had nothing to fear; those who responded so complacently in 1569 may have been mistakenly short-sighted. Revolts tended to become more radical as they progressed (and in doing so, to lose their original cohesion and become less effective). Exceptional circumstances could also bring about more radical demands, most notably during the Puritan Revolution. Even here, however, what is remarkable is how little response revolutionary movements, whether political or religious, evoked in the countryside; and how little support there seems to have been even for moderate practical reforms such as a change in the tenurial system.⁵ It may be that the habit of deference, not merely to the gentry, but to the leading figures in village society, was too deeply entrenched to be shaken even in the wholly exceptional circumstances of the years 1647-9; and that those latter were already too enmeshed in the tenant-farmer system, too intent possibly on taking their profits in these years of bad harvest, to grasp the opportunity to re-establish a true peasant economy in England.

¹ R. H. Tawney and E. Power (eds.), *Tudor Economic Documents*, 1924, III, pp. 57-60.

² Act I, sc. i.

³ For the scheme see L. Boynton, *The Elizabethan Militia*, 1967, pp. 60-2. The replies are to be found scattered through P.R.O. S.P. 12/54 and 12/58; also in Brit. Mus. Harl. MS., vols. 286 and 309. The questionnaire is in Harl. MS., vol. 309, fols. 101-4, 109-110. The reply from Warwick is S.P. 12/54, fols. 96-7; from Kent S.P. 12/59, fols. 1-4. Thomas Wyatt had thought it necessary to counter similar objections to a militia scheme in 1549: "Without ordre they rise without ordre they are quieted and all there blase ys soone up soone downe . . . like disordered sheepe they com to the feelde and like Calves are they knocked downe."—D. M. Loades (ed.), *Papers of George Wyatt* (Camden 4th ser., v, 1968).

⁴ I consider that M. E. James's admirably learned and perceptive article on the Lincolnshire revolt of 1536, cited above, can be criticized in these terms.

⁵ Rural radicalism may have been traditionally underestimated; see Keith Thomas, 'Another Digger Broadside', *Past and Present*, 42, 1969, pp. 57-68; and Christopher Hill's review of a Russian work by M. A. Barg, *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xvi, pt. 2, 1968, pp. 75-6. But the point remains that there was nothing in England to compare with the effect of 1789 on the French peasantry.