

ERNEST BAX

GERMAN SOCIETY AT
THE CLOSE OF THE
MIDDLE AGES

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Ernest Belfort Bax

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PREFACE

The work, of which the present volume is the first instalment, aims at giving English readers a general view of the social condition and the popular movements of Germany during the period known as that of the Reformation. In accordance with this plan, I have only touched incidentally upon the theological disputes then apparently uppermost in the thoughts of men, or upon the purely political side of things. They are dealt with merely in so far as they immediately strike across the path of social and internal affairs. The present volume, which has a more general character than its successors, deals with a period limited, roughly speaking, by the closing years of the fifteenth century on the one side, and by 1525, the year of the great Peasant rising, on the other. It contains a narrative of the earlier popular revolutionary movements at the close of the Middle Ages, the precursors of the Peasants' War; and it also deals with the underlying causes, economic, social and juridical, of the general disintegration of the time.

The next volume will treat more in detail the events of the years 1524 to 1526. The third will contain a history of the Anabaptist Movement in Central Europe from its rise at Zwickau in 1522 to its decline after the capture of Münster by the Archiepiscopal and Imperial troops in 1536. The reign of the Saints in Münster naturally forms the leading feature of this portion of the work.

As to the sources for the history of the Germany of this period, I have endeavoured to incorporate everything available that seemed to me important for the proper understanding of the time. The three chief general histories of the Reformation, Ranke's *Geschichte Deutschlands während der Reformations-Zeit*, Janssen's *Geschichte des Deutschen Volkes*, and Egelhaaf's *Deutsche Geschichte im sechszehnten Jahrhundert*, have, it is scarcely necessary to say, been laid under contribution. The standpoint of Ranke, whose history is detailed and in certain respects exhaustive, is that of general bourgeois Philistinism. Janssen represents the Ultramontane Catholic view; but, apart from its tendency, every one must admire the brilliant and in most cases accurate scholarship that characterises it. Egelhaaf's work may be regarded as the counterblast to Janssen's. Its point of view is that of "liberal," middle-class German Protestantism; but it also contains many hints and clues which may be followed up by the industrious historian.

To rewrite history in the light of the researches of the later decades of the nineteenth century will be the great task of

the next two or three generations. History has to be presented afresh on the basis of primitive communism with its tribal and village groups, with its sexual relations based on the *gens*, with its totemistic religious conceptions, and from the standpoint of a continuous development from these beginnings up to the individualism of the present day founded on the complete disruption of early society.

The average student of any historical period invariably reads into his interpretation the intellectual, moral and social atmosphere that lies nearest to him. He cannot strip away the intervening time-content between himself and the period in question. It is the most difficult of all exercises of the imagination, and to most men, indeed, impossible, to realise that the same words, names, customs and institutions connote totally different actualities in different stages of historic evolution. People fail to conjure up the altered perspective, and the unfamiliar background on which men lived, thought and felt in another age. Agamemnon, "King of Men," is to them Kaiser Wilhelm differently made up. Lykurgos is a cross between Pitt and Dr. Johnson. Cicero is a Sir Charles Russell who happened to live in the first century B.C. The formal continuity of names, notions or things hides from them the "true inwardness" of the rupture between the old and the new which has gradually accomplished itself. Change in human affairs is of course ceaseless; but it is only when it has reached a certain stage that it is borne in upon the consciousness of men in general, and, even

then, it is only the sharp summits above the changing horizon that they recognise. The ground out of which these spring is not seen, and hence the true bearing of the summits themselves is not understood.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF THE GERMAN REFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

The close of the fifteenth century had left the whole structure of mediæval Europe to all appearance intact. Statesmen and writers like Philip de Commines had apparently as little suspicion that the state of things they saw around them, in which they had grown up and of which they were representatives, was ever destined to pass away, as Lord Palmerston or any other statesman of the Cobden-Bright period had that the existing system of society, say in 1860, was at any time likely to suffer other changes than those of detail. Society was organised on the feudal hierarchy of status. In the first place, a noble class, spiritual and temporal, was opposed to a peasantry either wholly servile or but nominally free. In addition to this opposition of noble and peasant there was that of the township, which, in its corporate capacity, stood in the relation of lord to the

surrounding peasantry.

The township in Germany was of two kinds – first of all, there was the township that was "free of the Empire," that is, that held nominally from the Emperor himself (*Reichstadt*), and secondly, there was the township that was under the domination of an intermediate lord. The economic basis of the whole was still land; the status of a man or of a corporation was determined by the mode in which they held their land. "No land without a lord" was the principle of mediæval polity; just as "money has no master" is the basis of the bourgeois world with its self-made men. Every distinction of rank in the feudal system was still denoted for the most part by a special costume. It was a world of knights in armour, of ecclesiastics in vestments and stoles, of lawyers in robes, of princes in silk and velvet and cloth of gold, and of peasants in laced shoe, brown cloak, and cloth hat.

But although the whole feudal organisation was outwardly intact, the thinker who was watching the signs of the times would not have been long in arriving at the conclusion that feudalism was "played out," that the whole fabric of mediæval civilisation was becoming dry and withered, and had either already begun to disintegrate or was on the eve of doing so. Causes of change had within the past half-century been working underneath the surface of social life, and were rapidly undermining the whole structure. The growing use of fire-arms in war; the rapid multiplication of printed books; the spread of the new learning after the taking of Constantinople in 1453, and the subsequent diffusion of Greek

teachers throughout Europe; the surely and steadily increasing communication with the new world, and the consequent increase of the precious metals; and, last but not least, Vasco de Gama's discovery of the new trade route from the East by way of the Cape – all these were indications of the fact that the death-knell of the old order of things had been struck.

Notwithstanding the apparent outward integrity of the system based on land tenures, land was ceasing to be the only form of productive wealth. Hence it was losing the exclusive importance attaching to it in the earlier period of the Middle Ages. The first form of modern capitalism had already arisen. Large aggregations of capital in the hands of trading companies were becoming common. The Roman law was establishing itself in the place of the old customary tribal law which had hitherto prevailed in the manorial courts, serving in some sort as a bulwark against the caprice of the territorial lord; and this change facilitated the development of the bourgeois principle of private, as opposed to communal, property. In intellectual matters, though theology still maintained its supremacy as the chief subject of human interest, other interests were rapidly growing up alongside of it, the most prominent being the study of classical literature.

Besides these things, there was the dawning interest in nature, which took on, as a matter of course, a magical form in accordance with traditional and contemporary modes of thought. In fact, like the flicker of a dying candle in

its socket, the Middle Ages seemed at the beginning of the sixteenth century to exhibit all their own salient characteristics in an exaggerated and distorted form. The old feudal relations had degenerated into a blood-sucking oppression; the old rough brutality, into excogitated and elaborated cruelty (aptly illustrated in the collection of ingenious instruments preserved in the Torture-tower at Nürnberg); the old crude superstition, into a systematised magical theory of natural causes and effects; the old love of pageantry, into a lavish luxury and magnificence of which we have in the "field of the cloth of gold" the stock historical example; the old chivalry, into the mercenary bravery of the soldier, whose trade it was to fight, and who recognised only one virtue – to wit, animal courage. Again, all these exaggerated characteristics were mixed with new elements, which distorted them further, and which fore-shadowed a coming change, the ultimate issue of which would be their extinction and that of the life of which they were the signs.

The growing tendency towards centralisation and the consequent suppression or curtailment of the local autonomies of the Middle Ages in the interests of some kind of national government, of which the political careers of Louis XI. in France, of Edward IV. in England, and of Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain were such conspicuous instances, did not fail to affect in a lesser degree that loosely connected political system of German States known as the Holy Roman Empire. Maximilian's first Reichstag in 1495 caused to be issued an

imperial edict suppressing the right of private warfare claimed and exercised by the whole noble class from the princes of the Empire down to the meanest knight. In the same year the Imperial Chamber (*Reichskammer*) was established, and in 1501 the Imperial Aulic Council. Maximilian also organised a standing army of mercenary troops, called *Landesknechte*. Shortly afterwards Germany was divided into imperial districts called circles (*Kreise*), ultimately ten in number, all of which were under a *Reichsregiment*, which had at its disposal a military force for the punishment of disturbers of the peace. But the public opinion of the age, conjoined with the particular circumstances, political and economic, of central Europe, robbed the enactment in a great measure of its immediate effect. Highway plundering and even private war was still going on, to a considerable extent, far into the sixteenth century. Charles V. pursued the same line of policy; but it was not until after the suppression of the lower nobility in 1523, and finally of the peasants in 1526, that any material change took place; and then the centralisation, such as it was, was in favour of the princes, rather than of the imperial power, which, after Charles V.'s time, grew weaker and weaker. The speciality about the history of Germany is, that it has not known till our own day centralisation on a national or racial scale like England or France.

At the opening of the sixteenth century public opinion not merely sanctioned open plunder by the wearer of spurs and by the possessor of a stronghold, but regarded it as his special

prerogative, the exercise of which was honourable rather than disgraceful. The cities certainly resented their burghers being waylaid and robbed, and hanged the knights whenever they could; and something like a perpetual feud always existed between the wealthier cities and the knights who infested the trade routes leading to and from them. Still, these belligerent relations were taken as a matter of course; and no disgrace, in the modern sense, attached to the occupation of highway robbery.

In consequence of the impoverishment of the knights at this period, owing to causes with which we shall deal later, the trade or profession had recently received an accession of vigour, and at the same time was carried on more brutally and mercilessly than ever before. We will give some instances of the sort of occurrence which was by no means unusual. In the immediate neighbourhood of Nürnberg, which was *bien entendu* one of the chief seats of the imperial power, a robber-knight leader, named Hans Thomas von Absberg, was a standing menace. It was the custom of this ruffian, who had a large following, to plunder even the poorest who came from the city, and, not content with this, to mutilate his victims. In June, 1522, he fell upon a wretched craftsman, and with his own sword hacked off the poor fellow's right hand, notwithstanding that the man begged him upon his knees to take the left, and not destroy his means of earning his livelihood. The following August he, with his band, attacked a Nürnberg tanner, whose hand was similarly treated, one of his associates remarking that he was glad to set to work again, as

it was "a long time since they had done any business in hands". On the same occasion a cutler was dealt with after a similar fashion. The hands in these cases were collected and sent to the Bürgermeister of Nürnberg, with some such phrase as that the sender (Hans Thomas) would treat all so who came from the city. The princes themselves, when it suited their purpose, did not hesitate to offer an asylum to these knightly robbers. With Absberg were associated Georg von Giech and Hans Georg von Aufsess. Among other notable robber-knights of the time may be mentioned the Lord of Brandenstein and the Lord of Rosenberg. As illustrating the strictly professional character of the pursuit, and the brutally callous nature of the society practising it, we may narrate that Margaretha von Brandenstein was accustomed, it is recorded, to give the advice to the choice guests round her board that when a merchant failed to keep his promise to them, they should never hesitate to cut off *both* his hands. Even Franz von Sickingen, known sometimes as the "last flower of German chivalry," boasted of having among the intimate associates of his enterprise for the rehabilitation of knighthood many gentlemen who had been accustomed to "let their horses on the high road bite off the purses of wayfarers". So strong was the public opinion of the noble class as to the inviolability of the privilege of highway plunder that a monk, preaching one day in a cathedral and happening to attack it as unjustifiable, narrowly escaped death at the hands of some knights present amongst his congregation, who asserted that he had insulted

the prerogatives of their order. Whenever this form of knight-errantry was criticised, there were never wanting scholarly pens to defend it as a legitimate means of aristocratic livelihood; since a knight must live in suitable style, and this was often his only resource for obtaining the means thereto.

The free cities, which were subject only to imperial jurisdiction, were practically independent republics. Their organisation was a microcosm of that of the entire Empire. At the apex of the municipal society was the *Bürgermeister* and the so-called "Honorability" (*Ehrbarkeit*), which consisted of the patrician *gentes*, (in most cases) those families which were supposed to be descended from the original chartered freemen of the town, the old Mark-brethren. They comprised generally the richest families, and had monopolised the entire government of the city, together with the right to administer its various sources of income and to consume its revenue at their pleasure. By the time, however, of which we are writing the trading guilds had also attained to a separate power of their own, and were in some cases ousting the burgher-aristocracy, though they were very generally susceptible of being manipulated by the members of the patrician class, who, as a rule, could alone sit in the Council (*Rath*). The latter body stood, in fact, as regards the town, much in the relation of the feudal lord to his manor. Strong in their wealth and in their aristocratic privileges, the patricians lorded it alike over the townspeople and over the neighbouring peasantry, who were subject to the municipality.

They forestalled and regrated with impunity. They assumed the chief rights in the municipal lands, in many cases imposed duties at their own caprice, and turned guild privileges and rights of citizenship into a source of profit for themselves. Their bailiffs in the country districts forming part of their territory were often more voracious in their treatment of the peasants than even the nobles themselves. The accounts of income and expenditure were kept in the loosest manner, and embezzlement clumsily concealed was the rule rather than the exception.

The opposition of the non-privileged citizens, usually led by the wealthier guildsmen not belonging to the aristocratic class, operated through the guilds and through the open assembly of the citizens. It had already frequently succeeded in establishing a representation of the general body of the guildsmen in a so-called Great Council (*Grosser Rath*), and in addition, as already said, in ousting the "honorables" from some of the public functions. Altogether the patrician party, though still powerful enough, was at the opening of the sixteenth century already on the decline, the wealthy and unprivileged opposition beginning in its turn to constitute itself into a quasi-aristocratic body as against the mass of the poorer citizens and those outside the pale of municipal rights. The latter class was now becoming an important and turbulent factor in the life of the larger cities. The craft-guilds, consisting of the body of non-patrician citizens, were naturally in general dominated by their most wealthy section.

We may here observe that the development of the mediæval

township from its earliest beginnings up to the period of its decay in the sixteenth century was almost uniformly as follows:¹ At first the township, or rather what later became the township, was represented entirely by the group of *gentes* or group-families originally settled within the mark or district on which the town subsequently stood. These constituted the original aristocracy from which the tradition of the *Ehrbarkeit* dated. In those towns founded by the Romans, such as Trier, Aachen, and others, the case was of course a little different. There the origin of the *Ehrbarkeit* may possibly be sought for in the leading families of the Roman provincials who were in occupation of the town at the coming of the barbarians in the fifth century. Round this nucleus there gradually accreted from the earliest period of the Middle Ages the freed men of the surrounding districts, fugitive serfs, and others who sought that protection and means of livelihood in a community under the immediate domination of a powerful lord, which they could not otherwise obtain when their native village-community had perchance been raided by some marauding noble and his retainers. Circumstances, amongst others the fact that the community to which they attached themselves had already adopted commerce and thus become a guild of merchants, led to the differentiation of industrial functions amongst the new-comers, and thus to the establishment

¹ We are here, of course, dealing more especially with Germany; but substantially the same course was followed in the development of municipalities in other parts of Europe.

of craft-guilds.

Another origin of the townsfolk, which must not be overlooked, is to be found in the attendants on the palace-fortress of some great over-lord. In the early Middle Ages all such magnates kept up an extensive establishment, the greater ecclesiastical lords no less than the secular often having several palaces. In Germany this origin of the township was furthered by Charles the Great, who established schools and other civil institutions, with a magistrate at their head, round many of the palaces that he founded. "A new epoch," says Von Maurer, "begins with the villa-foundations of Charles the Great and his ordinances respecting them, for that his celebrated capitularies in this connection were intended for his newly established villas is self-evident. In that proceeding he obviously had the Roman villa in his mind, and on the model of this he rather further developed the previously existing court and villa constitution than completely reorganised it. Hence one finds even in his new creations the old foundation again, albeit on a far more extended plan, the economical side of such villa-colonies being especially more completely and effectively ordered."² The expression "Palatine," as applied to certain districts, bears testimony to the fact here referred to. As above said, the development of the township was everywhere on the same lines. The aim of the civic community was always to remove as far as possible the power which controlled them. Their worst condition was

² *Einleitung*, pp. 255, 256.

when they were immediately overshadowed by a territorial magnate. When their immediate lord was a prince, the area of whose feudal jurisdiction was more extensive, his rule was less oppressively felt, and their condition was therefore considerably improved. It was only, however, when cities were "free of the Empire" (*Reichsfrei*) that they attained the ideal of mediæval civic freedom.

It follows naturally from the conditions described that there was, in the first place, a conflict between the primitive inhabitants as embodied in their corporate society and the territorial lord, whoever he might be. No sooner had the township acquired a charter of freedom or certain immunities than a new antagonism showed itself between the ancient corporation of the city and the trade-guilds, these representing the later accretions. The territorial lord (if any) now sided, usually though not always, with the patrician party. But the guilds, nevertheless, succeeded in ultimately wresting many of the leading public offices from the exclusive possession of the patrician families. Meanwhile the leading men of the guilds had become *hommes arrivés*. They had acquired wealth, and influence which was in many cases hereditary in their family, and by the beginning of the sixteenth century they were confronted with the more or less veiled and more or less open opposition of the smaller guildsmen and of the newest comers into the city, the shiftless proletariat of serfs and free peasants, whom economic pressure was fast driving within the walls, but who, owing to the civic organisation having become

crystallised, could no longer be absorbed into it. To this mass may be added a certain number of impoverished burghers, who, although nominally within the town organisation, were oppressed by the wealth of the magnates, plebeian and patrician.

The number of persons who, owing to the decay, or one might almost say the collapse, of the strength of the feudal system, were torn from the old moorings and left to drift about shiftless in a world utterly unprepared to deal with such an increase of what was practically vagabondage, was augmenting with every year. The vagrants in all Western European countries had never been so numerous as in the earlier part of the sixteenth century. A portion of these disinherited persons entered the service of kings and princes as mercenary soldiers, and thus became the first germ of the modern standing army. Another portion entered the begging profession, which now notably on the Continent became organised in orthodox and traditional form into guilds, each of which had its master and other officers. Yet another portion sought a more or less permanent domicile as journeymen craftsmen and unskilled labourers in the cities. This fact is noteworthy as the first indication of the proletariat in modern history. "It will be seen," says Friedrich Engels,³ "that the plebeian opposition of the then towns consisted of very mixed elements. It united the degenerate components of the old feudal and guild organisation with the as yet undeveloped and new-born proletarian element of modern bourgeois society

³ *Der Bauernkrieg*, p. 31.

in embryo. Impoverished guildsmen there were, who through their privileges were still connected with the existing civic order on the one side, and serving-men out of place who had not as yet become proletarians on the other. Between the two were the "companions" (*Gesellen*) for the nonce outside the official society, and in their position resembling the proletariat as much as was possible in the then state of industry and under the existing guild-privilege. But, nevertheless, almost all of them were future guild-masters by virtue of this very guild-privilege."⁴ A noteworthy feature of municipal life at this time was the difficulty and expense attendant on entry into the city organisation even for the status of a simple citizen, still more for that of a guildsman. Within a few decades this had enormously increased.

The guild was a characteristic of all mediæval life. On the model of the village-community, which was originally based on the notion of kinship, every interest, craft, and group of men formed itself into a "brotherhood" or "guild". The idea of individual autonomy, of individual action independent altogether of the community, is a modern idea which never entered the mediæval mind. As we have above remarked, even the mendicants and vagabonds could not conceive of adopting begging as a career except under the auspices of a beggars' guild. The guild was not like a modern commercial syndicate,

⁴ The three grades in the craft-guilds were those of apprentice, companion, and master. Every guildsman was supposed to pass through them.

an abstract body united only by the thread of one immediate personal interest, whose members did not even know each other. His guild-membership interpenetrated the whole life, religious, convivial, social and political, of the mediæval man. The guilds were more or less of the nature of masonic societies, whose concerns were by no means limited to the mere trade-function that appeared on the surface. "Business" had not as yet begun to absorb the whole life of men. The craft or "mystery" was a function intimately interwoven with the whole concrete social existence. But it is interesting to observe among the symptoms of transition characterising the sixteenth century, as noted above, the formation of companies of merchants apart from and outside the old guild-organisation. These latter really seem a kind of foreshadowing of the rings, trusts, and joint-stock companies of our own day. Many and bitter were the complaints of the manner in which prices were forced up by these earliest examples of the capitalistic syndicate, which powerfully contributed to the accumulation of wealth at one end of the scale and to the intensification of poverty at the other.⁵

The rich burgher loved nothing better than to display an ostentatious profusion of wealth in his house, in his dress, and in his entertainments. On the clothing and ornamentation of himself and his family he often squandered what might have been for his ancestor of the previous century the fortune of a lifetime. Especially was this the case at the Reichstags and

⁵ See Appendix A.

other imperial assemblies held in the various free cities at which all the three feudal estates of the Empire were represented. It was the aim of the wealthy councillor or guild-master on these occasions to outbid the princes of the Empire in the magnificence of his person and establishment. The prince did not like to be outdone, and learnt to accustom himself to luxuries, and thereby to indefinitely increase his own expenditure. The same with all classes.

The knighthood or smaller nobles, no longer content with homely fare, sought after costly clothing, expensive food and exotic wines, and to approach the affluent furnishing of the city magnate. His one or two horses, his armour, his sword and his lance, his homespunns made almost invariably on his estates, the wine grown in the neighbourhood, his rough oatmeal bread, the constituents of which had been ground at his own mill, the venison and wild fowl hunted by himself or by his few retainers, no longer sufficed for the knight's wants. In order to compass his new requirements he had to set to work in two ways. Formerly he had little or no need of money. He received, as he gave, everything in kind. Now that he had to deal with the beginnings of a world-market, money was a prime necessity. The first and most obvious way of getting it was to squeeze the peasant on his estate, who, bitten by the new mania, had also begun to accumulate and turn into cash the surplus products of labour on his holding. From what we have before said of the ways and manners of the knighthood, the reader may well imagine that

he did not hesitate to "tower" the recalcitrant peasant, as it was called, that is, to throw him into his castle-dungeon if other means failed to make him disgorge his treasure as soon as it came to his lord's ears that he had any. But the more ordinary method of squeezing the peasant was by doubling and trebling the tithes and other dues, by imposing fresh burdens (many of them utterly unwarranted by custom) on any or no pretext. The princes, lay and ecclesiastic, applied the same methods on a more extended scale. These were often effected in an ingenious manner by the ecclesiastical lords through the forging of manorial rolls.

The second of the methods spoken of for "raising the wind" was the mortgaging of castle and lands to the money-lending syndicates of the towns, or, in the case of the greater princes, to the towns themselves in their corporate capacity. The Jews also came in for their share of land-mortgages. There were, in fact, few free or semi-free peasants whose lands were not more or less hypothecated. Meanwhile prices rose to an incredible extent in a few years.

Such were the causes and results of the change in domestic life which the economic evolution of the close of the Middle Ages was now bringing about amongst all classes.

The ecclesiastical lords, or lords spiritual, differed in no way in their character and conduct from the temporal princes of the Empire. In one respect they outdid the princes, namely, in the forgery of documents, as already mentioned. Luxury had, moreover, owing to the communication which they had with

Rome and thus indirectly with the Byzantine civilisation, already begun with the prelates in the earlier Middle Ages. It now burst all bounds. The ecclesiastical courts were the seat of every kind of debauchery. As we shall see later on, they also became the places where the new learning first flourished. But in addition to the general luxury in which the higher ecclesiastics outdid the lay element of the Empire, there was a special cause which rendered them obnoxious alike to the peasants, to the towns, and to their own feudatory nobles. This special cause was the enormous sum payable to Rome for the Pallium or Investiture, a tax that had to be raised by the inhabitants of the diocese on every change of archbishop, bishop, or abbot. In addition thereto the entire income of the first year after the investiture accrued to the Papal Treasury under the name of Annates. This constituted a continuous drain on the ecclesiastical dependencies and indirectly on the whole Empire. There must also be added the cost of frequent journeys to Rome, where each dignitary during his residence held court in a style of sumptuous magnificence. All these expenses tended to drain the resources of the territories held as spiritual fiefs in a more onerous degree than happened to other territories. Moreover, the system of the sale of indulgences or remissions for all sins committed up to date was now being prosecuted to an extent never heard of before with a view to meet the increased expenditure of the Papal See, and especially the cost of completing the cathedral of St. Peter's at Rome. Thus by a sort of voluntary tax the wealth of Germany was still further

transferred to Italy. Hence can readily be seen the reason of the venomous hatred which among all classes of the Empire had been gradually accumulating towards the Papacy for more than a generation, and which ultimately found expression in Luther's fulminations.

The peasant of the period was of three kinds: the *leibeigener* or serf, who was little better than a slave, who cultivated his lord's domain, upon whom unlimited burdens might be fixed, and who was in all respects amenable to the will of his lord; the *höriger* or villein, whose services were limited alike in kind and amount; and the *freier* or free peasant, who merely paid what was virtually a quit-rent in kind or in money for being allowed to retain his holding or status in the rural community under the protection of the manorial lord. The last was practically the counterpart of the mediæval English copyholder. The Germans had undergone essentially the same transformations in social organisation as the other populations of Europe.

The barbarian nations at the time of their great migration in the fifth century were organised on a tribal and village basis. The head man was simply *primus inter pares*. In the course of their wanderings the successful military leader acquired powers and assumed a position that was unknown to the previous times, when war, such as it was, was merely inter-tribal and inter-clannish, and did not involve the movements of peoples and federations of tribes, and when, in consequence, the need for permanent military leaders or for the semblance of a military

hierarchy had not arisen. The military leader now placed himself at the head of the older social organisation, and associated with his immediate followers on terms approaching equality. A well-known illustration of this is the incident of the vase taken from the Cathedral of Rheims, and of Chlodowig's efforts to rescue it from his independent comrades-in-arms.

The process of the development of the feudal polity of the Middle Ages is, of course, a very complicated one, owing to the various strands that go to compose it. In addition to the German tribes themselves, who moved *en masse*, carrying with them their tribal and village organisation, under the over-lordship of the various military leaders, were the indigenous inhabitants amongst whom they settled. The latter in the country districts, even in many of the territories within the Roman Empire, still largely retained the primitive communal organisation. The new-comers, therefore, found in the rural communities a social system already in existence into which they naturally fitted, but as an aristocratic body over against the conquered inhabitants. The latter, though not all reduced to a servile condition, nevertheless held their land from the conquering body under conditions which constituted them an order of freemen inferior to the new-comers.

To put the matter briefly, the military leaders developed into barons and princes, and in some cases the nominal centralisation culminated as in France and England in the kingly office; while, in Germany and Italy, it took the form of the revived imperial office, the spiritual over-lord of the whole of Christendom

being the Pope, who had his vassals in the prince-bishops and subordinate ecclesiastical holders. In addition to the princes sprung originally from the military leaders of the migratory nations, there were their free followers, who developed ultimately into the knighthood or inferior nobility; the inhabitants of the conquered districts forming a distinct class of inferior freemen or of serfs. But the essentially personal relation with which the whole process started soon degenerated into one based on property. The most primitive form of property – land – was at the outset what was termed *allodial*, at least among the conquering race, from every social group having the possession, under the trusteeship of its head man, of the land on which it settled. Now, owing to the necessities of the time, owing to the need of protection, to violence and to religious motives, it passed into the hands of the over-lord, temporal or spiritual, as his possession; and the inhabitants, even in the case of populations which had not been actually conquered, became his vassals, villeins, or serfs, as the case might be. The process by means of which this was accomplished was more or less gradual; indeed, the entire extinction of communal rights, whereby the notion of private ownership is fully realised, was not universally effected even in the west of Europe till within a measurable distance of our own time.⁶

From the foregoing it will be understood that the oppression

⁶ Cf. Von Maurer's *Einleitung zur Geschichte der Mark-Verfassung*; Gomme's *Village Communities*; Stubbs' *Constitutional History*.

of the peasant, under the feudalism of the Middle Ages, and especially of the later Middle Ages, was viewed by him as an infringement of his rights. During the period of time constituting mediæval history the peasant, though he often slumbered, yet often started up to a sudden consciousness of his position. The memory of primitive communism was never quite extinguished, and the continual peasant-revolts of the Middle Ages, though immediately occasioned, probably, by some fresh invasion, by which it was sought to tear from the "common man" yet another shred of his surviving rights, always had in the background the ideal, vague though it may have been, of his ancient freedom. Such, undoubtedly, was the meaning of the Jacquerie in France, with its wild and apparently senseless vengeance; of the Wat Tyler revolt in England, with its systematic attempt to embody the vague tradition of the primitive village community in the legends of the current ecclesiastical creed; of the numerous revolts in Flanders and North Germany; of the Hussite movement in Bohemia, under Ziska; of the rebellion led by George Doza in Hungary; and, as we shall see in the body of the present work, of the social movements of Reformation Germany, in which, with the partial exception of Ket's rebellion in England a few years later, we may consider them as coming to an end.

For the movements in question were distinctly the last of their kind. The civil wars of religion in France, and the great rebellion in England against Charles the First, which also assumed a religious colouring, open a new era in popular revolts. In the

latter, particularly, we have clearly before us the attempt of the new middle class of town and country, the independent citizen, and the now independent yeoman, to assert its supremacy over the old feudal estates or orders. The new conditions had swept away the revolutionary tradition of the mediæval period, whose golden age lay in the past with its communal-holding and free men with equal rights on the basis of the village organisation – rights which with every century the peasant felt more and more slipping away from him. The place of this tradition was now taken by an ideal of individual freedom, apart from any social bond, and on a basis merely political, the way for which had been prepared by that very conception of individual proprietorship on the part of the landlord, against which the older revolutionary sentiment had protested. A most powerful instrument in accommodating men's minds to this change of view, in other words, to the establishment of the new individualistic principle, was the Roman or Civil law, which, at the period dealt with in the present book, had become the basis whereon disputed points were settled in the Imperial Courts. In this respect also, though to a lesser extent, may be mentioned the Canon or Ecclesiastical law, – consisting of papal decretals on various points which were founded partially on the Roman or Civil law, – a juridical system which also fully and indeed almost exclusively recognised the individual holding of property as the basis of civil society (albeit not without a recognition of social duties on the part of the owner).

Learning was now beginning to differentiate itself from the ecclesiastical profession, and to become a definite vocation in its various branches. Crowds of students flocked to the seats of learning, and, as travelling scholars, earned a precarious living by begging or "professing" medicine, assisting the illiterate for a small fee, or working wonders, such as casting horoscopes, or performing thaumaturgic tricks. The professors of law were now the most influential members of the Imperial Council and of the various Imperial Courts. In Central Europe, as elsewhere, notably in France, the civil lawyers were always on the side of the centralising power, alike against the local jurisdictions and against the peasantry.

The effects of the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and the consequent dispersion of the accumulated Greek learning of the Byzantine Empire, had, by the end of the fifteenth century, begun to show themselves in a notable modification of European culture. The circle of the seven sciences, the Quadrivium, and the Trivium, in other words, the mediæval system of learning, began to be antiquated. Scholastic philosophy, that is to say, the controversy of the Scotists and the Thomists, was now growing out of date. Plato was extolled at the expense of Aristotle. Greek, and even Hebrew, was eagerly sought after. Latin itself was assuming another aspect; the Renaissance Latin is classical Latin, whilst Mediæval Latin is dog-Latin. The physical universe now began to be inquired into with a perfectly fresh interest, but the inquiries were still conducted under the ægis of the old habits of

thought. The universe was still a system of mysterious affinities and magical powers to the investigator of the Renaissance period, as it had been before. There was this difference, however: it was now attempted to *systematise* the magical theory of the universe. While the common man held a store of traditional magical beliefs respecting the natural world, the learned man deduced these beliefs from the Neo-Platonists, from the Kabbala, from Hermes Trismegistos, and from a variety of other sources, and attempted to arrange this somewhat heterogeneous mass of erudite lore into a system of organised thought.

The Humanistic movement, so called, the movement, that is, of revived classical scholarship, had already begun in Germany before what may be termed the *sturm und drang* of the Renaissance proper. Foremost among the exponents of this older Humanism, which dates from the middle of the fifteenth century, were Nicholas of Cusa and his disciples, Rudolph Agricola, Alexander Hegius and Jacob Wimpheling. But the new Humanism and the new Renaissance movement generally throughout Northern Europe centred chiefly in two personalities, Johannes Reuchlin and Desiderius Erasmus. Reuchlin was the founder of the new Hebrew learning, which up till then had been exclusively confined to the synagogue. It was he who unlocked the mysteries of the Kabbala to the Gentile world. But though it is for his introduction of Hebrew study that Reuchlin is best known to posterity, yet his services in the diffusion and popularisation of classical culture were enormous. The dispute of Reuchlin

with the ecclesiastical authorities at Cologne excited literary Germany from end to end. It was the first general skirmish of the new and the old spirit in Central and Northern Europe. But the man who was destined to become the personification of the Humanist movement, as the new learning was called, was Erasmus. The illegitimate son of the daughter of a Rotterdam burgher, he early became famous on account of his erudition, in spite of the adverse circumstances of his youth. Like all the scholars of his time, he passed rapidly from one country to another, settling finally in Basel, then at the height of its reputation as a literary and typographical centre. The whole intellectual movement of the time centres round Erasmus, as is particularly noticeable in the career of Ulrich von Hutten, dealt with in the course of this history. As instances of the classicism of the period, we may note the uniform change of the patronymic into the classical equivalent, or some classicism supposed to be the equivalent. Thus the name Erasmus itself was a classicism of his father's name Gerhard, the German name Muth became Mutianus, Trittheim became Trithemius, Schwarzerd became Melanchthon, and so on.

We have spoken of the other side of the intellectual movement of the period. This other side showed itself in mystical attempts at reducing nature to law in the light of the traditional problems which had been set, to wit, those of alchemy and astrology: the discovery of the philosopher's stone, of the transmutation of metals, of the elixir of life, and of the correspondences between

the planets and terrestrial bodies. Among the most prominent exponents of these investigations may be mentioned Philippe von Hohenheim or Paracelsus, and Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, in Germany, Nostradamus, in France, and Cardanus, in Italy. These men represented a tendency which was pursued by thousands in the learned world. It was a tendency which had the honour of being the last in history to embody itself in a distinct mythical cycle. "Doctor Faustus" may probably have had a historical germ; but in any case "Doctor Faustus," as known to legend and to literature, is merely a personification of the practical side of the new learning. The minds of men were waking up to interest in nature. There was one man, Copernicus, who, at least partially, struck through the traditionary atmosphere in which nature was enveloped, and to his insight we owe the foundation of astronomical science; but otherwise the whole intellectual atmosphere was charged with occult views. In fact, the learned world of the sixteenth century would have found itself quite at home in the pretensions and fancies of our *fin de siècle* theosophists, with their notions of making miracles non-miraculous, of reducing the marvellous to being merely the result of penetration on the part of certain seers and investigators of the secret powers of nature. Every wonder-worker was received with open arms by learned and unlearned alike. The possibility of producing that which was out of the ordinary range of natural occurrences was not seriously doubted by any. Spells and enchantments, conjurations, calculations of nativities, were

matters earnestly investigated at universities and courts. There were, of course, persons who were eager to detect impostors: and amongst them some of the most zealous votaries of the occult arts – for example, Tritheim and the learned Humanist, Conrad Muth or Mutianus, both of whom professed to have regarded Faust as a fraud. But this did not imply any disbelief in the possibility of the alleged pretensions. In the Faust-myth is embodied, moreover, the opposition between the new learning on its physical side and the old religious faith. The theory that the investigation of the mysteries of nature had in it something sinister and diabolical which had been latent throughout the Middle Ages was brought into especial prominence by the new religious movements. The popular feeling that the line between natural magic and the black art was somewhat doubtful, that the one had a tendency to shade off into the other, now received fresh stimulus. The notion of compacts with the devil was a familiar one, and that it should be resorted to for the purpose of acquiring an acquaintance with hidden lore and magical powers seemed quite natural.

It will have already been seen from what we have said that the religious revolt was largely economical in its causes. The intense hatred, common alike to the smaller nobility, the burghers and the peasants, of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, was obviously due to its ever-increasing exactions. The sudden increase in the sale of indulgences, like the proverbial last straw, broke down the whole system; but any other incident might have served the purpose

equally well. The prince-bishops were, in some instances, at the outset, not averse to the movement; they would not have been indisposed to have converted their territories into secular fiefs of the Empire. It was only after this hope had been abandoned that they definitely took sides with the Papal authority.

The opening of the sixteenth century thus presents to us mediæval society, social, political and religious, "run to seed". The feudal organisation was outwardly intact; the peasant, free and bond, formed the foundation; above him came the knighthood or inferior nobility; parallel with them was the *Ehrbarkeit* of the less important towns, holding from mediate lordship; above these towns came the free cities, which held immediately from the Empire, organised into three bodies, a governing Council in which the *Ehrbarkeit* usually predominated, where they did not entirely compose it, a Common Council composed of the masters of the various guilds, and the General Council of the free citizens. Those journeymen, whose condition was fixed from their being outside the guild-organisations, usually had guilds of their own. Above the free cities in the social pyramid stood the Princes of the Empire, lay and ecclesiastic, with the Electoral College, or the seven Electoral Princes, forming their head. These constituted the feudal "estates" of the Empire. Then came the King of the Romans; and, as the apex of the whole, the Pope in one function and the Emperor in another crowned the edifice. The supremacy, not merely of the Pope, but of the complementary temporal head of the mediæval polity, the

Emperor, was acknowledged in a shadowy way, even in countries such as France and England, which had no direct connection with the Empire. For, as the spiritual power was also temporal, so the temporal political power had, like everything else in the Middle Ages, a quasi-religious significance.

The minds of men in speculative matters, in theology, in philosophy, and in jurisprudence, were outgrowing the old doctrines, at least in their old forms. In theology the notion of salvation by the faith of the individual, and not through the fact of belonging to a corporate organisation, which was the mediæval conception, was latent in the minds of multitudes of religious persons before expression was given to it by Luther. The aversion to scholasticism, bred by the revived knowledge of the older Greek philosophies in the original, produced a curious amalgam; but scholastic habits of thought were still dominant through it all. The new theories of nature amounted to little more than old superstitions, systematised and reduced to rule, though here and there the later physical science, based on observation and experiment, peeped through. In jurisprudence the epoch is marked by the final conquest of the Roman civil law in its spirit, where not in its forms, over the old customs, pre-feudal and feudal. This motley world of decayed knights, lavish princes, oppressed and rebellious peasants, turbulent townsmen, licentious monks and friars, mendicant scholars and hireling soldiers, is the world some of whose least-known aspects we are about to consider in the following pages.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST SIGNS OF SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS REVOLT

The echoes of the Hussite movement in Bohemia spread far and wide through Central Europe at the beginning of the fifteenth century. It was not in vain that Ziska bequeathed his skin for the purposes of a drum, since the echoes of its beating made themselves heard for many a year in Bohemia and throughout Central Europe. The disciples of the movement settled in different countries, and became centres of propaganda, and the movement attached itself to the peasants' discontent. Amid the various stirrings that took place, there are one or two that may arrest our attention owing to their importance and their typical character.

It was in the year 1476, when Rudolph of Scherenberg occupied the Episcopal See of Würzburg, that a cowherd, named Hans Boheim, of the neighbouring village of Niklashausen, who was accustomed to pipe and to drum at local festivities, at places on the banks of the little stream called the Tauber, was suddenly seized with an inspiration of preaching for the conversion of his neighbours from their sins. It appeared to him that his life had been hitherto sinful; he gave up all participation in village feasts, he became a dreamer, and announced that he had had visions of

the Virgin. In the middle of Lent he proclaimed that he had been given a divine mission from the Mother of God herself to burn his pipe and drum and to devote himself entirely to preaching the Gospel to the common man. All were to abandon their former way of life, were to lay aside all personal ornament, and in humble attire to perform pilgrimages to Niklashausen, and there worship the Virgin as they esteemed their souls' salvation. In all this there was nothing very alarming to the authorities. Peasantly inspirations were by no means unknown in the Middle Ages; but the matter assumed another aspect when the new seer, Hans Pfeifferlein, or "the little piper" as he was nicknamed, announced that the Queen of Heaven had revealed to him that there should henceforth be neither Emperor, Pope, Prince, nor any lay or spiritual authority; but that all men should be brothers, earning their bread by the sweat of their brows, and sharing alike in all things. There were to be no more imposts or dues; land, woods, pastures, and water were to be free. The new Gospel struck root immediately. The peasant folk streamed to Niklashausen, from all sides, – men and women, young and old, journeymen, lads from the plough, girls from the fields, their sickles in their hands, without leave of lord or master, and without preparation of any sort whatever. Food and the necessary clothing and shelter were given them by those on the way who had already embraced the new Kingdom of God. The universal greeting among the pilgrims was "brother" and "sister".

This went on for some months, the young prophet choosing

chiefly Sundays and holidays for his harangues. Ignorant even of writing, he was backed by the priest of Niklashausen, and by perhaps two or three other influential persons. Many were the offerings brought to the Niklashausen shrine. Well nigh all who journeyed thither left some token behind, were it only a rough peasant's cap or a wax candle. Those who could afford it gave costly clothes and jewellery. The proclamation of universal equality was indeed a Gospel that appealed to the common man; the resumption of their old rights, the release from every form of oppression, as a proclamation from heaven itself, were tidings to him of great joy. The prophetic youth was hailed by all as the new Messiah. After each week's sermon he invited the congregation to return next week with redoubled numbers; and his commands were invariably obeyed. Men, women and children fell on their knees before him, crying: "Oh, man of God, sent from heaven, have mercy on us and pity us". They tore the wool threads from his shaggy sheepskin cap, regarding them as sacred relics. The priests of the surrounding districts averred that he was a sorcerer and devil-possessed, and that a wizard had appeared to him, clad in white, in the form of the Virgin, and had instilled into him the pernicious doctrines he was preaching. In all the surrounding country his miracles were talked about. The Bishops of Mainz and Würzburg and the Council of Nürnberg forbade their villeins, under heavy penalties, from making the pilgrimage to Niklashausen. But the effect of such measures only lasted for a short time.

Finally, on the Sunday before the day of Saint Kilian, Hans Boheim, on the conclusion of his discourse, invited his hearers, as usual, to come on the next occasion. This time, however, he ordered men only to appear, but with arms and ammunition; women and children were to be left at home. No sooner did the tidings of this turn of affairs reach the ears of the Bishop at Würzburg than the latter resolved to forestall the movement. He sent thirty-four mounted men-at-arms after nightfall to Niklashausen; they burst upon the sleeping youth, tore him from the house where he lay, and hurried him to Würzburg, bound on horseback. But as it was near the end of the week, 4000 pilgrims had already arrived at Niklashausen, and, on hearing the news of the attack, they hurried after the marauders, and caught them up close by the Castle of Würzburg. One of the knights was wounded, but his comrades succeeded in carrying him within the walls. The peasants failed to effect the intended rescue. By the Sunday, 34,000 peasants had assembled at Niklashausen; but the report of the capture of Boheim had a depressing effect, and several thousands returned home. There were nevertheless some among the bands who, instigated probably by Boheim's friend, the parish priest of Niklashausen, endeavoured to rally the remaining multitude and incite them to a new attempt at rescue. One of them alleged that the Holy Trinity had appeared to him, and commanded that they should proceed with their pilgrim candles in their hands to the Castle of Würzburg, that the doors would open of themselves, and that their prophet would walk out

to greet them. About 16,000 followed these leaders, marching many hours through the night, and arriving early next morning at the castle with flaming candles, and armed with the roughest weapons. Kunz von Thunfeld, a decayed knight, and Michael, his son, constituted themselves the leaders of the motley band. The marshal of the castle received them, demanding their pleasure. "We require the holy youth," said the peasants. "Surrender him to us, and all will be well; refuse, and we will use force." On the marshal's hesitating in his answer, he was greeted with a shower of stones, which drove him to seek safety within the walls. The bishop opened fire on the peasants, but after a short time sent one of his knights to announce that the cause of their preacher would be duly considered at a proper time and place, conjuring them at the same time to depart immediately in accordance with their vows. By cajolery and threats he succeeded in his object; the bands raised the siege of the castle, and dispersed homewards in straggling parties. The ruffianly scoundrel no sooner observed that the unsuspecting peasants were quietly wending their way home in small bodies, without a thought of hostilities, than he ordered his knights to pursue them, to attack them in the rear, and to murder or capture the ringleaders. The poor people, nevertheless, defended themselves with courage against this cowardly onslaught; twelve of them were left dead on the spot; many of the remainder sought shelter in the church of the neighbouring village. Threatened there with fire and sword, they surrendered, and were brought back to Würzburg

and thrown into the dungeons of the castle. The majority were liberated before long; but the peasant who was alleged to have received the vision of the Holy Trinity, as well as he who had wounded the knight on the occasion of the attempt at rescue a few days before, were detained in prison, and on the following Friday were beheaded outside the castle. Hans Boheim was at the same time burned to ashes. The leader of the revolt, Kunz von Thunfeld, a feudatory of the bishop, fled the territory, and was only allowed to return on his formally surrendering his lands in perpetuity to the bishopric. Such was the history of a movement that may be reckoned as one of the more direct forerunners of the peasants' war.

In the years 1491 and 1492 occurred the rising of the oppressed and plundered villeins of the Abbot of Kempten. The ecclesiastics on this domain had exhausted every possible means of injuring the unfortunate peasants, and numbers of free villeins had been converted into serfs by means of forged documents. The immediate cause of the revolt, however, was the seizure, by the abbot, of the stock of wine of a peasant who had just died, in addition to the horse which he was empowered to claim. An onslaught was made by the infuriated peasants on the monastery, and the abbot had to retire to his stronghold, the Castle of Liebenthann, hard by. The Emperor ultimately intervened, and effected a compromise. But the first organised peasant movement took place in Elsass⁷ in 1493, and comprised

⁷ We adopt the German spelling of the name of the province usually known in this

burghers as well as peasants among its numbers. They were for the most part feudatories of the Bishop of Strassburg. By devious paths the members of this secret organisation were wont to betake themselves to the hill of Hungerberg, north-west of the little town of Schlettstadt. The ostensible objects of the association were complete freedom for the common man, reformation of the Church in the sense that no priest should have more than one benefice, the introduction of a year of jubilee, in which all debts should be abolished, the extinction of all tithes, dues and other burdens, and the abolition of the spiritual courts and the territorial juridical court at Rothweil. A *Judenhetze* also appears amongst the articles. The leader of this movement was one Jacob Wimpfeling. The programme and plan of action was to seize the town of Schlettstadt, to plunder the monastery there, and then by forced marches to spread themselves over all Elsass, surprising one town after another.

It would seem that this was the first peasant movement that received the name of *Bundschuh*, and the almost superstitious importance attached to the sign of this kind emblazoned on the flag is characteristic of the Middle Ages. The banner was the result of careful deliberations, and the final decision was that as the knight was distinguished by his spurs, so the peasant rising to obtain justice for his class should take as his emblem the common

country as Alsace, for the reason that at the time of which this history treats it had never been French; and the French language was probably little more known there than in other parts of Germany.

shoe he was accustomed to wear, laced from the ankle up to the knee with leathern thongs. They fondly hoped that the moment this banner was displayed, all capable of fighting would flock to the standard, from the villages and smaller towns.

Just as all was prepared for the projected stroke, the *Bundschuh* shared the common fate of similar movements, and was betrayed; and this in spite of the terrible threats that were held out to all joining, in the event of their turning traitors. It must be admitted that there was much folly in the manner in which many persons were enrolled, and this may have led to the speedy betrayal. Everybody who was suspected of having an inkling of the movement was forced to swear allegiance to the secret league. Immediately on the betrayal, bodies of knights scoured the country, mercilessly seizing all suspected of belonging to the conspiracy, and dragging them to the nearest tribunal, where they were tortured and finally quartered alive or hung. Many of the fugitives succeeded in taking refuge in Switzerland, where they seem to have been kindly welcomed. But the *Bundschuh* only slept, it was by no means extinguished.

In the year 1502, nine years later, the bishopric of *Speyer*, the court of which was noted for its extravagance and tyranny, had to face another *Bundschuh*. This second movement had able men at its head, and extended over well nigh all the regions of the Upper and Middle Rhine. It similarly took the nature of a conspiracy, rather than of an open rebellion. Within a few weeks, 7000 men and 400 women had been sworn into the league, from

a large number of villages, hamlets and small towns, for the larger towns were purposely left out, the movement being essentially a peasant one. The village and *mark* of Untergrünbach was its centre. Its object and aim was nothing less than the complete overthrow of the existing ecclesiastical and feudal organisation of the Empire. The articles of the association declared: "We have joined ourselves together in order that we may be free. We will free ourselves with arms in our hands, for we would be as the Swiss. We will root out and abolish all authorities and lordships from the land, and march against them with the force of our host and with well-armed hand under our banner. And all who do not honour and acknowledge us shall be killed. The princes and nobles broken and done with, we will storm the clergy in their foundations and abbeys. We will overpower them, and hunt out and kill all priests and monks together." The property of the clergy and the nobles was to be seized and divided; as in the former case, all feudal dues were to be abolished, the primitive communism in the use of the land, and of what was on it, was to be resumed. The pass-word, by means of which the members of the organisation were known to one another, was the answer to the question:

"How fares it?" The question and answer were in the form of a rhyme: —

"Loset! Was ist nun für ein Wesen?"

"Wir mögen vor Pfaffen und Adel nit genesen."

This may be paraphrased as follows: —

"Well, now! And how doth it fare?"

"Of priests and of nobles we've enough and to spare."

The idea was to rise at the opportune moment, as the Swiss had done, to free themselves of all intermediate lordship, and to recognise no master below the King of the Romans and the Emperor. "Nought but the justice of God" was the motto of their flag, and their colours were white and blue. Before the figure of a crucifix a peasant knelt, and below was depicted a great *Bundschuh*, the sign which had now become established as the symbol of the peasants' movements. With consummate tact, the leaders of the revolt forbade any members to go to confession, and it was the disregard of this order that led to the betrayal of the cause. A peasant in confession revealed the secret to a priest, who in his turn revealed it to the authorities. Ecclesiastics, princes, and nobles at once took their measures. The most barbarous persecution and punishment of all suspected of having been engaged in the *Bundschuh* conspiracy followed. Those concerned had their property confiscated, their wives and children were driven from the country, and they themselves were in many cases quartered alive; the more prominent men, by a refinement of cruelty, being dragged to the place of execution tied to a horse's tail. A tremendous panic seized all the privileged classes, from the Emperor to the knight. They earnestly discussed the situation in no less than three separate assemblies of the estates. Large

numbers of those involved in this second *Bundschuh* managed to escape, owing to the pluck and loyalty of the peasants. A few bands were hastily got together, and, although quite insufficient to effect a successful revolt, they were able to keep the knightly warriors and *landesknechte* at bay at certain critical points, so as to give the men who had really been the life and intelligence of the movement time to escape into Switzerland or into other territories where they were unknown. In some cases the secret was so well kept that the local organisers remained unnoticed even in their own villages.

For ten years after the collapse of the second *Bundschuh* in the Rhenish district, the peasants remained quiet. It was not till 1512 that things began again to stir. One of the leaders, who had escaped notice on the suppression of the former conspiracy, was Joss Fritz. He was himself a native of Untergrünbach, which had been its seat. He there acted as *Bannwart* or ranger of the district lands. For nearly ten years Joss wandered about from country to country, but amid all his struggles for existence he never forgot the *Bundschuh*. Joss was a handsome man, of taking and even superior manners. He was very careful in his dress, sometimes apparelling himself in black jerkin with white hose, sometimes in red with yellow hose, sometimes in drab with green hose. He would seem to have been at one time a *landesknecht*, and had certainly taken part in various campaigns in a military capacity. Whether it was from his martial bearing or the engaging nature of his personality, it is evident that Joss Fritz was in his

way a born leader of men. About 1512 Joss settled down in a village called Lehen, a few miles from the town of Freiburg, in Breisgau. Here he again obtained the position of *Bannwart*, and here he began to seriously gather together the scattered threads of the old movement, and to collect recruits. He went to work cautiously; first of all confining himself to general complaints of the degeneracy of the times in the village tavern, or before the doors of the cottagers on summer evenings. He soon became the centre of an admiring group of swains, who looked up to him as the much-travelled man of the world, who eagerly sought his conversation, and who followed his counsel in their personal affairs.

As Joss saw that he was obtaining the confidence of his neighbours, his denunciations of the evils of the time grew more earnest and impassioned. At the same time he threw out hints as to the ultimate outcome of the existing state of things. But it was only after many months that he ventured to broach the real purpose of his life. One day when they were all assembled round him, he hinted that he might be able to tell them something to their advantage, would they but pledge themselves to secrecy. He then took each individually, and after calming the man's conscience with the assurance that the proposal for which he claimed strict secrecy was an honourable one, he expounded his plan of an organisation of all the oppressed, an undertaking which he claimed to be in full accord with Holy Writ. He never insisted upon an immediate adhesion, but preferred to leave his

man to think the matter over.

Joss would sometimes visit his neighbours in their houses, explaining to them how all ancient custom, right and tradition was being broken through to gratify the rapacity of the ruling classes. He put forward as the objects of the undertaking the suppression of the payment of interest after it had amounted to an equivalent of the original sum lent; also that no one was to be required to give more than one day's service per year to his lord. "We will," he declared, "govern ourselves according to our old rights and traditions, of which we have been forcibly and wrongfully deprived by our masters. Thou knowest well," he would continue, "how long we have been laying our claims before the Austrian Government at Ensisheim."⁸

From speaking of small grievances, Joss was gradually led to develop his scheme for the overthrow of feudalism, and for the establishment of what was tantamount to primitive conditions. At the same time he gave his hearers a rendezvous at a certain hour of eventide in a meadow, called the *Hardmatte*, which lay outside the village, and skirted a wood. The stillness of the hour, broken only by the sounds of nature hushing herself to rest for the night, was, at the time appointed, invaded by the eager talk of groups of villagers. All his little company assembled, Joss Fritz here, for the first time, fully developed his schemes. In future,

⁸ It will be seen from the historical map that Breisgau and Sundgau were feudal appanages of the house of Austria. Ensisheim was the seat of the *Habsburg* overlordship in the district (not to be confounded with the *imperial* power).

said he, we must see that we have no other lords than God, the Pope, and the Emperor; the Court at Rothweil, he said, must be abolished; each must be able to obtain justice in his native village, and no churchman must be allowed to hold more than one benefice; the superfluity of the monasteries must be distributed amongst the poor; the dues and imposts with which the peasants are burdened must be removed; a permanent peace must be established throughout Christendom, as the perpetual feuds of the nobles meant destruction and misery for the peasants; finally, the primitive communism in woods, pasture, water, and the chase must be restored.

Joss Fritz's proposals struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of his hearers. It was only when he wound up by insisting upon the necessity of forming a new *Bundschuh* that some few of them hung back and went to obtain the advice of the village priest on the matter. Father John (such was his name) was, however, in full accord in his ideas with Joss, and answered that the proposals were indeed a godly thing, the success of which was foretold in the Scriptures themselves.

The meetings on the *Hardmatte* led to the formation of a kind of committee, composed of those who were most devoted to the cause. These were Augustin Enderlin, Kilian Mayer, Hans Freuder, Hans and Karius Heitz, Peter Stublin, Jacob Hauser, Hans Hummel – Hummel hailed from the neighbourhood of Stuttgart – and Hieronymus, who was also a stranger, a journeyman baker working at the mill of Lehen, who had

travelled far, and had acquired a considerable fund of oratory. All these men were untiring in their exertions to obtain recruits for the new movement. After having prepared the latter's minds, they handed over the new-comers to Joss for deeper initiation, if he thought fit. It was not in crusades and pilgrimages he taught them, but in the *Bundschuh* that the "holy sepulchre" was to be obtained. The true "holy sepulchre" was to be found, namely, in the too long buried liberties of the people. The new *Bundschuh*, he maintained, had ramifications extending as far as Cologne, and embracing members from all orders.

Joss Fritz had indeed before coming to Lehen travelled through the Black Forest and the district of Speyer, in the attempt, by no means altogether unsuccessful, to reunite the crushed and scattered branches of the old *Bundschuh*. Among the friends he had made in this way was a poor knight of the name of Stoffel, of Freiburg. The latter travelled incessantly in the cause; he was always carefully dressed, and usually rode on a white horse. The missionaries of the *Bundschuh*, under the direction of Joss Fritz, assumed many different characters; now they were peasants, now townsmen, now decayed knights, according to the localities they visited. The organisation of the movement was carried out on lines which have been since reproduced in the Fenian rising. It was arranged in "circles," the members of which knew one another, but not those outside the "circle". Even the beggars' guild was pressed into the service, and very useful adjuncts the beggars were, owing to their nomadic habits.

The heads of the "circles" communicated with each other at intervals as to the number of recruits and as to the morale of their members. They compared notes with the two leaders of the movement, Joss and his friend Stoffel, both of whom rode constantly from place to place to keep their workers up to the mark. The muster-roll would be held on these occasions, as at Lehen itself, after dark, and in some woodland glade, near the village. The village taverns, generally the kitchens of some better-to-do peasant, were naturally among the best recruiting grounds, and the hosts themselves were often heads of "circles". Strange and picturesque must have been these meetings after nightfall, when the members of the "circle" came together, the peasants in their plain blue or grey cloth and buff leather, the leaders in what to us seem the fantastic costumes of the period, red stockings, trunk-hose and doublet slashed with bright yellow, or the whole dress of yellow slashed with black, the slouch hat, with ostrich feather, surmounting the whole; the short sword for the leaders, and a hoe or other agricultural implement for the peasant, constituted the arms of the company.

There was a visible sign by which the brethren recognised each other: it was a sign in the form of the letter H, of black stuff in a red field, sewn on to the breast-cloth. There appears also to have been another sign which certain of the members bore instead of the above; this consisted of three cross slits or slashes in the stuff of the right sleeve. This *Bundschuh*, like the previous one in Untergrünbach, had its countersign, which, to the credit of all

concerned, be it said, was never revealed, and is not known to this day. The new *Bundschuh* was now thoroughly organised with all its officers, none of whom received money for their services.

The articles of association drawn up were the result of many nightly meetings on the *Hardmatte*, and embodied the main points insisted upon by Joss in his exhortations to the peasants. They included the abolition of all feudal powers. God, the Pope, and the Emperor were alone to be recognised as having authority. The Court at Rothweil and all the ecclesiastical courts were to be abolished, and justice relegated to the village council as of old. The interest payable on the debts of the mortgaged holdings of the peasants was to be discontinued. Fishing, hunting, woods and pasture were to be free to all. The clergy were to be limited to one benefice apiece. The monasteries and ecclesiastical foundations were to be curtailed, and their superfluous property confiscated. All feudal dues were to cease.

The strange and almost totemistic superstition that the mediæval mind attached to symbolism is here evinced by the paramount importance acquired by the question of the banner. A banner was costly, and the *Bundschuh* was poor, but the banner was the first necessity of every movement. In this case, it was obligatory that the banner should have a *Bundschuh* inscribed upon it. Artists of that time objected to painting *Bundschuhs* on banners; they were afraid to be compromised. Hence it was, above all things, necessary to have plenty of money wherewith to bribe some painter. Kilian Mayer gave five vats of wine to

a baker, also one of the brotherhood, in Freiburg, to be sold in that town. The proceeds were brought to Joss as a contribution to the banner fund. Many another did similarly; some of those who met on the *Hardmatte*, however, objected to this tax. But ultimately Joss managed, by hook or by crook, to scrape together what was deemed needful. Joss then called upon a "brother" from a distant part of the country, one known to no one in Freiburg, to repair to the latter city and hunt up a painter. The "brother" was in a state of dire apprehension, and went to the house of the painter Friedrich, but at first appeared not to know for what he had come. With much hesitation, he eventually gasped out that he wanted a *Bundschuh* painted. Friedrich did not at all like the proposal, and kicked the unfortunate peasant into the street, telling him not to come in future with such questionable orders. The artist instantly informed the Town Council of Freiburg of the occurrence; but as the latter did not know whence the mysterious personage had come, nor whither he had gone, they had to leave the matter in abeyance. They issued orders, however, for all true and faithful burghers to be on the look-out for further traces of the mischief.

After this failure, Joss bethought him that he had better take the matter in hand himself. Now, there was another artist of Freiburg, by name Theodosius, who was just then painting frescoes in the church at Lehen; to him Joss went one evening with Hans Enderlin, a person of authority in the village, and Kilian Mayer. They invited him to the house of one of the party,

and emptied many a measure of wine. When they had all drunk their fill, they went to walk in the garden, just as the stars were beginning to come out. Joss now approached the painter with his project. He told him that there was a stranger in the village who wanted a small banner painted and had asked him (Joss) to demand the cost. Theodosius showed himself amenable as regards this point, but wanted to know what was to be the device on the banner. Directly Joss mentioned the word *Bundschuh*, the worthy painter gave a start, and swore that not for the wealth of the Holy Roman Empire itself would he undertake such a business. They all saw that it was no use pressing him any further, and so contented themselves with threatening him with dire consequences should he divulge the conversation that he had had with them. Hans Enderlin also reminded him that he had already taken an oath of secrecy in all matters relating to the village, on his engagement to do church work, a circumstance that curiously enough illustrates the conditions of mediæval life. The painter, fearful of not receiving his pay for the church work, if nothing worse, prudently kept silent.

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