

CHAPTER TEN

The Last Labourers' Revolt

Where not otherwise stated the authorities for the two following chapters are the Home Office Papers for the time (Municipal and Provincial, Criminal, disturbances, domestic, etc.), the Times and local papers.

I

A traveller who wished to compare the condition of the English and the French rural populations in 1830 would have had little else to do than to invert all that had been written on the subject by travellers a century earlier. At the beginning of the eighteenth century England had the prosperous and France the miserable peasantry. But by the beginning of the nineteenth century the French peasant had been set free from the impoverishing and degrading services which had made his lot so intolerable in the eyes of foreign observers; he cultivated his own land, and lived a life, spare, arduous, and exacting but independent. The work of the Revolution had been done so thoroughly in this respect that the Bourbons, when Wellington and the allies lifted them back on to their throne, could not undo it. It is true that the future of the French peasants was a subject of some anxiety to English observers, and that M'Culloch committed himself to the prediction that in half a century, owing to her mass of small owners, France would be the greatest pauper-warren in Europe. If any French peasant was disturbed by this nightmare of the political economy of the time, he had the grim satisfaction of knowing that his position could hardly become worse than the position that the English labourer already occupied. He would have based his conclusion, not on the wild language of revolutionaries, but on the considered statement of those who were so far from meditating revolution that they shrank even from a moderate reform of Parliament. Lord Carnarvon said in one House of Parliament that the English labourer had been reduced to a plight more abject than that of any race in Europe; English landlords reproduced in the other that very parallel between the English labourer and the West Indian negro which had figured so conspicuously in Thelwall's lectures. Thelwall, as Canning reminded him in a savage parody on the Benedicite, got pelted for his pains. Since the days of those lectures all Europe had been overrun by war, and England alone had escaped what Pitt had called the liquid fire of Jacobinism. There had followed for England fifteen years of healing peace. Yet at the end of all this time the conquerors of Napoleon found themselves in a position which they would have done well to exchange with the position of his victims. The German peasant had been rescued from serfdom; Spain and Italy had at least known a brief spell of less unequal government. The English labourer alone was the poorer; poorer in money, poorer in happiness, poorer in sympathy, and infinitely poorer in horizon and in hope. The riches that he had been promised by the champions of enclosure had faded into something less than a maintenance. The wages

he received without land had a lower purchasing power than the wages he had received in the days when his wages were supplemented by common rights. The standard of living which was prescribed for him by the governing class was now much lower than it had been in 1795.

This was not part of a general decline. Other classes for whom the rulers of England prescribed the standard had advanced during the years in which the labourers had lost ground. The King's Civil List had been revised when provisions rose. The salaries of the judges had been raised by three several Acts of Parliament (1799, 1809, and 1825), a similar course had been taken in the case of officials. Those who have a taste for the finished and unconscious cynicism of this age will note -- recollecting that the upper classes refused to raise wages in 1795 to meet the extra cost of living, on the ground that it would be difficult afterwards to reduce them -- that all the upper-class officials, whose salaries were increased because living was more expensive, were left to the permanent enjoyment of that increase. The lives of the judges, the landlords, the parsons, and the rest of the governing class were not become more meagre but more spacious in the last fifty years. During that period many of the great palaces of the English nobility had been built, noble libraries had been collected, and famous galleries had grown up, wing upon wing. The agricultural labourers whose fathers had eaten meat, bacon, cheese, and vegetables were living on bread and potatoes. They had lost their gardens, they had ceased to brew their beer in their cottages. In their work they had no sense of ownership or interest. They no longer 'sauntered after cattle' on the open common, and at twilight they no longer 'played down the setting sun;' the games had almost disappeared from the English tillage, their wives and children were starting before their eyes, their homes were more squalid, and the philosophy of the hour taught the upper classes that to mend a window or to put in a brick to shield the cottage from damp or wind was to increase the ultimate miseries of the poor. The sense of sympathy and comradeship, which had been mixed with rude and unskilful government, in the old village had been destroyed in the bitter days of want and distress. Degrading and repulsive work was invented for those whom the farmer would not or could not employ. De Quincey, wishing to illustrate the manners of eighteenth-century France, used to quote M. Simond's story of how he had seen, not very long before the Revolution, a peasant ploughing with a team consisting of a donkey and a woman. The English poor could have told him that half a century later there were English tillages in which it was the practice of the overseer to harness men and women to the parish cart, and that the sight of an idiot woman between the shafts was not unknown within a hundred miles of London.(1*) Men and women were living on roots and sorrel; in the summer of the year 1830 four harvest labourers were found under a hedge dead of starvation, and Lord Winchelsea, who mentioned the fact in the House of Lords, said that this was not an exceptional case. The labourer was worse fed and worse housed than the prisoner, and he would not have been able to keep body and soul together if he had not found in poaching or in thieving or in smuggling the means of eking out his doles and wages.

The feelings of this sinking class, the anger, dismay, and despair with which it watched the going out of all the warm comfort and light of life, scarcely stir the surface of history. The upper classes have told us what the poor ought to have thought of these vicissitudes; religion, philosophy, and political economy were ready with alleviations and explanations which seemed singularly helpful and convincing to the rich. The voice of the poor themselves does not come to our ears. This great population seems to resemble nature, and to bear all the storms that beat upon it with a strange silence and resignation. But just as nature has her power of protest in some sudden upheaval, so this world of men and women -- an underground world as we trace the distance that its voices have to travel to reach us -- has a volcanic character of its own, and it is only by some volcanic surprise that it can speak the language of remonstrance or menace or prayer, or place on record its consciousness of wrong. This world has no member of Parliament, no press, it does not make literature or write history; no diary or memoirs have kept alive for us the thoughts and cares of the passing day. It is for this reason that the events

of the winter of 1830 have so profound an interest, for in the scenes now to be described we have the mind of this class hidden from us through all this period of pain, bursting the silence by the only power at its command. The demands presented to the farmer, the parson, and the squire this winter tell us as much about the South of England labourer in 1830 as the cahiers tell us of the French peasants in 1789.

We have seen that in 1795 and in 1816 there had been serious disturbances in different parts of England. These had been suppressed with a firm hand, but during hard winters sporadic violence and blazing hay-stack showed from time to time that the fire was still alive under the ashes. The rising of 1830 was far more general and more serious; several counties in the south of England were in state bordering on insurrection; London was in a panic, and to some at least of those who had tried to forget the price that had been paid for the splendour of the rich, the message of red skies and broken mills and mob diplomacy and villages in arms sounded like the summons that came to Hernani. The terror of the landowners during those weeks is reflected in such language as that of the Duke of Buckingham, who talked of the country being in the hands of the rebels, or of one of the Barings, who said in the House of Commons that if the disorders went on for three or four days longer they would be beyond the reach of almost any power to control them. This chapter of social history has been overshadowed by the riots that followed the rejection of the Reform Bill. Every one knows about the destruction of the Mansion House at Bristol, and the burning of Nottingham Castle; few know of the destruction of the hated workhouses at Selborne and Headley. The riots at Nottingham and Bristol were a prelude to victory; they were the wild shout of power. If the rising of 1830 had succeeded, and won back for the labourer his lost livelihood, the day when the Headley workhouse was thrown down would be remembered by the poor as the day of the taking of the Bastille. But this rebellion failed, and the men who led that last struggle for the labourer passed into the forgetfulness of death and exile.

Kent was the scene of the first disturbances. There had been some alarming fires in the west of the county during the summer, at Orpington and near Sevenoaks. In one case the victim had made himself unpopular by pulling down a cottage built on a common adjoining his property, and turning out the occupants. How far these fires were connected with later events it is impossible to say: the authors were never discovered. The first riot occurred at Hardres on Sunday the 29th of August, when four hundred labourers destroyed some threshing machines.(2*) Next day two magistrates with a hundred special constables and some soldiers went to Hardres Court, and no more was heard of the rioters. The *Spectator* early next year announced that it had found as a result of inquiries that the riots began with a dispute between farmers over a threshing machine, in the course of which a magistrate had expressed strong views against the introduction of these machines. The labourers proceeded to destroy the machine, whereupon, to their surprise, the magistrate turned on them and punished them; in revenge they fired his ricks.' A farmer in another village, talking of the distress of the labourers, said, "Ah, I should be well pleased if a plague were to break out among them, and then I should have their carcasses as manure, and right good stuff it would make for my hops." This speech, which was perhaps only intended as a brutal jest, was reported; it excited rage instead of mirth, and the stacks of the jester were soon in a blaze. This act of incendiarism was open and deliberate. The incendiary is known, and not only has he not been tried, he has not even been charged.'(3*) Cobbett, on the other hand, maintained that the occasion of the first riots was the importation of Irish labourers, a practice now some years old, that might well inflame resentment, at a time when the governing class was continually contending that the sole cause of distress was excessive population, and that the true solution was the removal of surplus labourers to the colonies.

Whatever the actual origin of the first outbreak may have been, the destruction of machinery was to be a prominent feature of this social war. This was not merely an instinct of violence,

there was method and reason in it. Threshing was one of the few kinds of work left that provided the labourer with a means of existence above starvation level. A landowner and occupier near Canterbury wrote to the *Kent Herald* (4*) that in his parish, where no machines had been introduced, there were twenty-three barns. He calculated that in these barns fifteen men at least would find employment threshing corn up till May. If we suppose that each man had a wife and three children, this employment would affect seventy-five persons. 'An industrious man who has a barn never requires poor relief; he can earn from 15s. to 20s. per week; he considers it almost as his little freehold, and that in effect it certainly is.' It is easy to imagine what the sight of one of these hated engines meant to such a parish; the fifteen men, their wives and families would have found cold comfort, when they had become submerged in the morass of parish relief, in the reflection that the new machine extracted for their master's and the public benefit ten per cent. more corn than they could hammer out by their free arms. The destruction of threshing machines by bands of men in the district round Canterbury continued through September practically unchecked. By the end of the month three of the most active rioters were in custody, and the magistrates were under the pleasant illusion that there would be voluntary surrenders. In this they were disappointed, and the disturbances spread over a wider area, which embraced the dover district. Early in October there was a riot at Lyminge, at which Sir Edward Knatchbull and the Rev. Mr. Price succeeded in arresting the ringleaders, and bound over about fifty other persons. Sir Edward Knatchbull, in writing to the Home Office, stated that the labourers said 'they would rather do anything than encounter such a winter as the last.' Mr. Price had to pay the penalty for his active part in this affair, and his ricks were fired.

Large rewards were promised from the first to informers, these rewards including a wise offer of establishment elsewhere, but the prize was refused, and rick-burning spread steadily through a second month. Threatening letters signed 'Swing,' a mysterious name that for the next few weeks spread terror over England, were received by many farmers and landowners. The machine-breakers were reported not to take money or plunder, and to refuse it if offered. Their programme was extensive and formidable. When the High Sheriff attended one of their meetings to remonstrate with them, they listened to his homily with attention, but before dispersing one of them said, 'We will destroy the cornstacks and threshing machines this year, next year we will have a turn with the parsons, and the third we will make war upon the statesmen.' (5*)

On 24th October seven prisoners were tried at the East Kent Quarter Sessions, for machine-breaking. They pleaded guilty, and were let off with a lenient sentence of three days' imprisonment and an harangue from Sir Edward Knatchbull, Hitherto all attempts to discover the incendiaries had been baffled, but on 21st October a zealous magistrate wrote to the Home Office to say that he had found a clue. He had apprehended a man called Charles Blow, and since the evidence was not sufficient to warrant committal for arson, he had sent him to Lewes Jail as a vagrant for three months. 'In company with Blow was a girl of about ten years of age (of the name of Mary Ann Johnson), but of intelligence and cunning far beyond her age. It having been stated to me that she had let fall some expressions which went to show that she could if she pleased communicate important information, I committed her also for the same period as Blow.' Now the fires in question had taken place in Kent, and the vagrants were apprehended in Sussex, consequently the officials of both counties meddled with the matter and between them spoilt the whole plan, for Mary Ann and her companion were questioned by so many different persons that they were put on their guard, and failed to give the information that was expected. Thus at any rate, Lord Camden, the Lord-Lieutenant, explained their silence, but he did not despair, 'if the Parties cannot even be convicted I am apt to think their Committal now will do good, though they may be to be liberated afterwards, but nothing is so likely to produce alarm and produce evidence as a Committal for a Capital Crime.' However, as

no more is heard of Mary Ann, it may be assumed that when she had served her three months she left Lewes Jail a sadder and a wiser child.

Towards the end of October, after something of a lull in the middle of the month, the situation became more serious. Dissatisfaction, or, as some called it, 'frightful anarchy,' spread to the Maidstone and Sittingbourne districts. Sir Robert Peel was anxious to take strong measures. 'I beg to repeat to you that I will adopt any measure-will incur any expense at the public charge-that can promote the suppression of the outrages in Kent and the detection of the offenders.' A troop of cavalry was sent to Sittingbourne. In the last days of October, mobs scoured the country round Maidstone, demanding half a crown a day wages and constant employment, forcing all labourers to join them, and levying money, beer, and provisions. At Stockbury, between Maidstone and Sittingbourne, one of these mobs paraded a tricolour and a black flag. On 30th October the Maidstone magistrates went out with a body of thirty-four soldiers to meet a mob of four hundred people, about four miles from Maidstone, and laid hold of the three ringleaders. The arrests were made without difficulty or resistance, from which it looks as if these bands of men were not very formidable, but the officer in command of the soldiers laid stress in his confidential report on the dangers of the situation and the necessity for fieldpieces, and Peel promptly ordered two pieces of artillery to be dispatched.

At the beginning of November disturbances broke out in Sussex, and the movement developed into an organised demand for a living wage. By the middle of the month the labourers were masters over almost all the triangle on the map, of which Maidstone is the apex and Hythe and Brighton are the bases. The movement, which was more systematic, thorough, and successful in this part of the country than anywhere else, is thus described by the special correspondent of the *Times*, 17th November: 'Divested of its objectionable character, as a dangerous precedent, the conduct of the peasantry has been admirable. There is no ground for concluding that there has been any extensive concert amongst them. Each parish, generally speaking, has risen per se; in many places their proceedings have been managed with astonishing coolness and regularity; there has been little of the ordinary effervescence displayed on similar occasions. The farmers have notice to meet the men: a deputation of two or more of the latter produce a written statement, well drawn up, which the farmers are required to sign; the spokesman, sometimes a dissenting or Methodist teacher, fulfils his office with great propriety and temper. Where disorder has occurred, it has arisen from dislike to some obnoxious clergyman, or tithe man, or assistant overseer, who has been trundled out of the parish in a wheelbarrow, or drawn in triumph in a load of ballast by a dozen old women. The farmers universally agreed to the demands they made: that is, they were not mad enough to refuse requests which they could not demonstrate to be unreasonable in themselves, and which were urged by three hundred or four hundred men after a barn or two had been fired, and each farmer had an incendiary letter addressed to him in his pocket.'

There was another development of the movement which is not noted in this account by the correspondent of the *Times*. It often happened that the farmers would agree to pay the wages demanded by the labourers, but would add that they could not continue to pay those wages unless rents and tithes were reduced. The labourers generally took the hint and turned their attention to tithes and rents, particularly to tithes. Their usual procedure was to go in a body to the rector, often accompanied by the farmers, and demand an abatement of tithes, or else to attend the tithe audit and put some not unwelcome pressure upon the farmers to prevent them from paying.

It must not be supposed that the agitation for a living wage was confined to the triangular district named above, though there it took a more systematic shape. Among the Home Office Papers is a very interesting letter from Mr. D. Bishop, a London police officer, written from deal on 11th November, describing the state of things in that neighbourhood: 'I have gone to the

different Pot Houses in the Villages, disguised among the Labourers, of an evening and all their talk is about the wages, some give 1s. 8d. per day some 2s. some 2s. 3d.... all they say they want is 2s. 6d. per day and then they say they shall be comfortable. I have every reason to believe the Farmers will give the 2s. 6d. per day after a bit... they are going to have a meeting and I think it will stop all outrages.'

The disturbances in Sussex began with a fire on 3rd November at an overseer's in Battle. The explanation suggested by the authorities was that the paupers had been 'excited by a lecture lately given here publicly by a person named Cobbett.' Next night there was another fire at Battle; but it was at Brede, a village near Rye, that open hostilities began. As the rising at Brede set the fashion for the district, it is perhaps worth while to describe it in some detail.(6*)

For a long time the poor of Brede had smarted under the insults of Mr. Abel, the assistant overseer, who, among other innovations, had introduced one of the hated parish carts, and the labourers were determined to have a reckoning with him. After some preliminary discussions on the previous day, the labourers held a meeting on 5th November, and deputed four men to negotiate with the farmers. At the conference which resulted, the following resolutions, drawn up by the labourers, were signed by both parties:(7*) --

'Nov. 5, 1830. At a meeting held this day at the Red Lion, of the farmers, to meet the poor labourers who delegated David Noakes Senior, Thomas Henley, Joseph Bryant and Th. Noakes, to meet the gentlemen this day to discuss the present distress of the poor.... Resolution 1. The gentlemen agree to give to every able-bodied labourer with wife and two children 2s. 3d. per day, from this day to the 1st of March next, and from the 1st of March to the 1st of Oct. 2s. 6d. per day, and to have 1s. 6d. per week with three children, and so on according to their family. Resolution 2. The poor are determined to take the present overseer, Mr. Abell, out of the parish to any adjoining parish and to use him with civility.'

The meeting over, the labourers went to Mr. Abel's house with their wives and children and some of the farmers, and placed the parish cart at his door. After some hammering at the gates, Mr. Abel was persuaded to come out and get into the cart. He was then solemnly drawn along by women and children, accompanied by a crowd of five hundred, to the place of his choice, Vine Hall, near Robertsbridge, on the turnpike road, where he was deposited with all due solemnity. Mr. Abel made his way to the nearest magistrate to lodge his complaint, while the people of the parish returned home and were regaled with beer by the farmers: 'and Mr. Coleman... he gave every one of us half a pint of Beer, women and men, and Mr. Reed of Brede High gave us a Barrel because we had done such a great thing in the Parish as to carry that man away, and Mr. Coleman said he never was better pleased in his life than with the day's work which had been done.'(8*)

The parish rid of Mr. Abel, the next reform in the new era was to be the reduction of tithes, and here the farmers needed the help of the labourers. What happened is best told in the words of one of the chief actors. He describes how, a little before the tithe audit, his employer came to him when he was working in the fields and suggested that the labourers should see if they could 'get a little of the tithe off;' they were only to show themselves and not to take any violent action. Other farmers made the same suggestions to their labourers. 'We went to the tithe audit and Mr. Hele came out and spoke to us a good while and I and David Noakes and Thomas Noakes and Thomas Henley answered him begging as well as we could for him to throw something off for us and our poor Children and to set up a School for them and Mr. Hele said he would see what he could do.

'Mr. Coleman afterwards came out and said Mr. Hele had satisfied them all well and then Mr. Hele came out and we made our obedience to him and he to us, and we gave him three cheers and went and set the Bells ringing and were all as pleased as could be at what we had done.'

The success of the Brede rising had an immediate effect on the neighbourhood, and every parish round prepared to deport its obnoxious overseer and start a new life on better wages. Burwash, Ticehurst, Mayfield, Heathfield, Warbleton and Ninfield were among the parishes that adopted the Brede programme. Sometimes the assistant overseer thought it wise to decamp before the cart was at his door. Sometimes the mob was aggressive in its manners. 'A very considerable Mob,' wrote Sir Godfrey Webster from Battle Abbey on 9th November, 'to the amount of nearly 500, having their Parish Officer in custody drawn in a dung Cart, attempted to enter this town at eleven o'clock this Morning.' The attempt was unsuccessful, and twenty of the rioters were arrested. The writer of this letter took an active part throughout the disturbances. In this emergency he seems to have displayed great zeal and energy. A second letter of his on 12th November gives a good description of the state of affairs round Mayfield. 'The Collector of Lord Carrington's Tithes had been driven out of the Parish and the same Proceeding was intended to be adopted towards the Parish Officer who fled the place, it had been intended by the Rioters to have taken by Force this Morning as many Waggons as possible (forcibly) carried off the Tithe Corn and distributed it amongst themselves in case of interruption they were resolved to burn it. One of the most violent and dangerous papers I have yet seen (a copy of which I enclose) was carried round the 3 adjoining Parishes and unfortunately was assented to by too many Occupiers of Land. I arrived in Time to prevent its circulation at Mayfield a small Town tho' populous parish 3000. By apprehending the Bearer of the Paper who acted as Chief of the Party and instantly in presence of a large Mob committing him for Trial I succeeded in repressing the tumultuous action then going on, and by subsequently calling together the Occupiers of Land, and afterwards the Mob (composed wholly of Agricultural Labourers) I had the satisfaction of mediating an arrangement between them perfectly to the content of each party, and on my leaving Mayfield this afternoon tranquillity was perfectly restored at that Place.' The violent and dangerous paper enclosed ran thus: 'Now gentlemen this is what we intend to have for a married man to have 2s. and 3d. per day and all over two children 1s. 6d. per head a week and if a Man has got any boys or girls over age for to have employ that they may live by there Labour and likewise all single men to have 1s. 9d. a day per head and we intend to have the rents lowered likewise and this is what we intend to have before we leave the place and if ther is no alteration we shall proceed further about it. For we are all at one and we will keep to each other.'

At Ringmer in Sussex the proceedings were marked by moderation and order. Lord Gage, the principal landowner of the neighbourhood, knowing that disturbances were imminent, met the labourers by appointment on the village green. There were about one hundred and fifty persons present. By this time magistrates in many places had taken to arresting arbitrarily the ringleaders of the men, and hence when Lord Gage, who probably had no such intention, asked for the leader or captain nobody came forward, but a letter was thrown into the ring with a general shout. The letter which Lord Gage picked up and took to the Vestry for consideration read as follows: 'We the labourers of Ringmer and surrounding villages, having for a long period suffered the greatest privations and endured the most debasing treatment with the greatest resignation and forbearance, in the hope that time and circumstances would bring about an amelioration of our condition, till, worn out by hope deferred and disappointed in our fond expectations, we have taken this method of assembling ourselves in one general body, for the purpose of making known our grievances, and in a peaceable, quiet, and orderly manner, to ask redress; and we would rather appeal to the good sense of the magistracy, instead of inflaming the passions of our fellow labourers, and ask those gentlemen who have done us the favour of meeting us this day whether 7d. a day is sufficient for a working man, hale and hearty, to keep up the strength necessary to the execution of the labour he has to do? We ask

also, is 9s. a week sufficient for a married man with a family, to provide the common necessaries of life? Have we no reason to complain that we have been obliged for so long a period to go to our daily toil with only potatoes in our satchels, and the only beverage to assuage our thirst the cold spring; and on retiring to our cottages to be welcomed by the meagre and half-famished offspring of our toilworn bodies? All we ask, then, is that our wages may be advanced to such a degree as will enable us to provide for ourselves and families without being driven to the overseer, who, by the bye, is a stranger amongst us, and as in most instances where permanent overseers are appointed, are men callous to the ties of nature, lost to every feeling of humanity, and deaf to the voice of reason. We say we want wages sufficient to support us, without being driven to the overseer to experience his petty tyranny and dictation. We therefore ask for married men 2s. 3d. per day to the first of March, and from that period to the first of October 2s. 6d. a day: for single men 1s. 9d. a day to the first of March, and 2s. from that time to the first of October. We also request that the permanent overseers of the neighbouring parishes may be directly discharged, particularly Finch, the governor of Ringmer poorhouse and overseer of the parish, that in case we are obliged, through misfortune or affliction, to seek parochial relief, we may apply to one of our neighboring farmers or tradesmen, who would naturally feel some sympathy for our situation, and who would be much better acquainted with our characters and claims. This is what we ask at your hands -- this is what we expect, and we sincerely trust this is what we shall not be under the painful necessity of demanding.'

While the Vestry deliberated the labourers remained quietly in the yard of the poorhouse. One of them, a veteran from the Peninsular War who had lost a limb, contrasted his situation on 9d. a day with that of the Duke of Wellington whose 'skin was whole' and whose pension was £60,000 a year. After they had waited some time, they were informed that their demands were granted, and they dispersed to their homes with huzzas and tears of joy, and as a sign of the new and auspicious era they broke up the parish grindstone, a memory of the evil past.(9*)

An important feature of the proceedings in Kent and Sussex was the sympathy of other classes with the demands of the labourers. The success of the movement in Kent and Sussex, and especially of the rising that began at Brede, was due partly, no doubt, to the fact that smuggling was still a common practice in those counties, and that the agricultural labourers thus found their natural leaders among men who had learnt audacity, resourcefulness, and a habit of common action in that school of danger. But the movement could not have made such headway without any serious attempt to suppress it if the other classes had been hostile. There was a general sense that the risings were due to the neglect of the Government. Mr. Hodges, one of the Members for Kent, declared in the House of Commons on 10th December that if the duke of Wellington had attended to a petition received from the entire Grand Jury of Kent there would have been no disturbances.(10*)

The same spirit is displayed in a letter written by a magistrate at Battle, named Collingwood. 'I have seen three or four of our parochial insurrections, and been with the People for hours alone and discussing their matters with them which they do with a temper and respectful behaviour and an intelligence which must interest everyone in their favor. The poor in the Parishes in the South of England, and in Sussex and Kent greatly, have been ground to the dust in many instances by the Poor Laws. Instead of happy peasants they are made miserable and sour tempered paupers. Every Parish has its own peculiar system, directed more strictly, and executed with more or less severity or harshness. A principal tradesman in Salehurst (Sussex) in one part of which, Robertsbridge, we had our row the other night, said to me these words " You attended our meeting the other day and voted with me against the two principal Rate payers in this parish, two Millers, paying the people in two gallons of bad flour instead of money. You heard how saucy they were to their betters, can you wonder if they are more violent to their inferiors? They never call a man Tom, Dick etc. but you d---d rascal etc., at

every word, and force them to take their flour. Should you wonder that they are dissatisfied? "These words he used to me a week before our Robertsbridge Row. Each of these Parochial Rows differs in character as the man whom they select as leader differs in impudence or courage or audacity or whatever you may call it. If they are opposed at the moment, their resistance shows itself in more or less violent outrages; personally I witnessed but one, that of Robertsbridge putting Mr. Johnson into the cart, and that was half an accident. I was a stranger to them, went among them and was told by hundreds after that most unjustifiable assault that I was safe among them as in my bed, and I never thought otherwise. One or two desperate characters, and such there are, may at any moment make the contest of Parish A differ from that of Parish B, but their spirit, as far as regards loyalty and love for the King and Laws, is, I believe, on my conscience, sound. I feel convinced that all the cavalry in the world, if sent into Sussex, and all the spirited acts of Sir Godfrey Webster, who, however, is invaluable here will (not?) stop this spirit from running through Hampshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire, where Mr. Hobhouse, your predecessor, told me the other day that they have got the wages for single men down to 6s. per week (on which they cannot live) through many other counties. In a week you will have Demands for cavalry from Hampshire under the same feeling of alarm as I and all here entertained: the next week from Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, and all the counties in which the poor Rates have been raised for the payment of the poor up to Essex and the very neighbourhood of London, where Mr. Geo. Palmer, a magistrate, told me lately that the poor single man is got down to 6s. I shall be over to-morrow probably at Benenden where they are resolved not to let either Mr. Hodges's taxes, the tithes or the King's taxes be paid. So I hear, and so I dare say two or three carter boys may have said. I shall go to-morrow and if I see occasion will arrest some man, and break his head with my staff. But do you suppose that that (though a show of vigor is not without avail) will prevent Somersetshire men from crying out, when the train has got to them, we will not live on 6s. per week, for living it is not, but a long starving, and we will have tithes and taxes, and I know not what else done away with. The only way to stop them is to run before the evil. Let the Hampshire Magistrates and Vestries raise the wages before the Row gets to their County, and you will stop the thing from spreading, otherwise you will not, I am satisfied. In saying all this, I know that I differ with many able and excellent Magistrates, and my opinion may be wrong, but I state it to you.'

It is not surprising that magistrates holding these opinions acted rather less vigorously than the central Government wished, and that Lord Camden's appeals to them not to let their political feelings and 'fanciful Crotchets'(11*) interfere with their activity were unsuccessful. But even had all the magistrates been united and eager to crush the risings they could not act without support from classes that were reluctant to give it. The first thought of the big landed proprietors was to reestablish the yeomanry, but they found an unexpected obstacle in the temper of the farmers. The High Sheriff, after consultation with the Home Secretary, convened a meeting for this purpose at Canterbury on 1st November, but proceedings took an unexpected turn, the farmers recommending as a preferable alternative that public salaries should be reduced, and the meeting adjourned without result. There were similar surprises at other meetings summoned with this object, and landlords who expected to find the farmers rallying to their support were met with awkward resolutions calling for reductions in rent and tithes. The *Kent Herald* went so far as to say that only the dependents of great landowners will join the yeomanry, 'this most unpopular corps.' The magistrates found it equally difficult to enlist special constables, the farmers and tradesmen definitely refusing to act in this capacity at Maidstone, at Cranbrook, at Tonbridge, and at Tonbridge Wells,(12*) as well as in the smaller villages. The chairman of the Battle magistrates wrote to the Home Office to say that he intended to reduce his rents in the hope that the farmers would then consent to serve.

Even the Coast Blockade Service was not considered trustworthy. 'It is the last force,' wrote one magistrate, 'I should resort to, on account of the feeling which exists between them and the people hereabouts.'(13*) In the absence of local help, the magistrates had to rely on military aid

to quell a mob, or to execute a warrant. Demands for troops from different quarters were incessant, and sometimes querulous. 'If you cannot send a military force,' wrote one indignant country gentleman from Heathfield on 14th November, 'for God's sake, say so, without delay, in order that we may remove our families to a place of safety from a district which want of support renders us totally unable longer to defend.'(14*) Troops were despatched to Cranbrook, but when the Battle magistrates sent thither for help they were told to their great annoyance that no soldiers could be spared. The Government indeed found it impossible to supply enough troops. 'My dear Lord Liverpool,' wrote Sir Robert Peel on 15th November, 'since I last saw you I have made arrangements for sending every disposable cavalry soldier into Kent and the east part of Sussex. General Dalbiac will take the command. He will be at Battel to-day to confer with the Magistracy and to attempt to establish some effectual plan of operations against the rioters.'

The 7th Dragoon Guards at Canterbury were to provide for East Kent; the 2nd Dragoon Guards at Maidstone were to provide for Mid-kent; and the 5th Dragoon Guards at Tunbridge Wells for the whole of East Sussex. Sir Robert Peel meanwhile thought that the magistrates should themselves play a more active part, and he continually expressed the hope that they would 'meet and concert some effectual mode of resisting the illegal demands.'(15*) He deprecated strongly the action of certain magistrates in yielding to the mobs. Mr. Collingwood, who has been mentioned already, received a severe reproof for his behaviour at Goudhurst, where he had adopted a conciliatory policy and let off the rioters on their own recognisances. 'We did not think the case a very strong one,' he wrote on 18th November, 'or see any very urgent necessity for the apprehension of Eaves, nor after Captain King's statement that he had not felt a blow, could we consider the assault of a magistrate proved. The whole parish unanimously begged them off, and said that their being discharged on their own recognisances would probably contribute to the peace of the parish.'

The same weakness, or sympathy, was displayed by magistrates in the western part of Sussex, where the rising spread after the middle of November. In the Arundel district the magistrates anticipated disturbances by holding a meeting of the inhabitants to fix the scale of wages. The wages agreed on were '2s. a day wet and dry and 1s. 6d. a week for every child (above 2) under 4,' during the winter: from Lady day to Michaelmas 14s. a week, wet and dry, with the same allowance for children. A scale was also drawn up for lads and young men. The mobs were demanding 14s. a week all the year round, but they seem to have acquiesced in the Arundel scale, and to have given no further trouble. At Horsham, the labourers adopted more violent measures and met with almost universal sympathy. There was a strong Radical party in that town, and one magistrate described it later as 'a hot Bed of Sedition.' Attempts were made, without success, to show that the Radicals were at the bottom of the disturbances. The district round Horsham was in an agitated state. Among others who received threatening letters was Sir Timothy Shelley of Field Place. The letter was couched in the general spirit of Shelley's song to the men of England: --

'Men of England, wherefore plough,
For the lords who lay ye low,'

which his father may, or may not, have read. The writer urged him, 'if you wish to escape the impending danger in this world and in that which is to come,' to go round to the miserable beings from whom he exacted tithes, 'and enquire and hear from there own lips what distress there in.' Like many of these letters, it contained at the end a rough picture of a knife, with 'Beware of the fatel dagger' inscribed on it.

In Horsham itself the mob, composed of from seven hundred to a thousand persons, summoned a vestry meeting in the church. Mr. Sanctuary, the High Sheriff for Sussex, described the episode in a letter to the Home Office on the same day (18th November). The labourers, he said, demanded 2s. 6d. a day, and the lowering of rents and tithes: 'all these complaints were attended to -- thought reasonable and complied with,' and the meeting dispersed quietly. Anticipating, it may be, some censure, he added, 'I should have found it quite impossible to have prevailed upon any person to serve as special constable -- most of the tradespeople and many of the farmers considering the demands of the people but just (and) equitable -- indeed many of them advocated (them) a doctor spoke about the taxes -- but no one backed him -- that was not the object of the meeting.' A lady living at Horsham wrote a more vivid account of the day's work. She described how the mob made everybody come to the church. Mr. Simpson, the vicar, went without more ado, but Mr. Hurst, senior, owner of the great tithes, held out till the mob seized a chariot from the King's Arms and dragged it to his door. Whilst the chariot was being brought he slipped out, and entered the church with his two sons. All the gentlemen stood up at the altar, while the farmers encouraged the labourers in the body of the church. 'Mr. Hurst held out so long that it was feared blood would be shed, the doors were shut till the demands were granted, no lights were allowed, the Iron railing that surrounds the Monuments torn up, and the sacred boundary between the chancel and Altar overleapt before he would yield.' Mr. Hurst himself wrote to the Home Office to say that it was only the promise to reduce rents and tithes that had prevented serious riots, but he met with little sympathy at headquarters. 'I cannot concur,' wrote Sir Robert Peel, 'in the opinion of Mr. Hurst that it was expedient or necessary for the Vestry to yield to the demands of the Mob. In every case that I have seen, in which the mob has been firmly and temperately resisted, they have given way without resorting to personal violence.' A neighbouring magistrate, who shared Sir Robert Peel's opinion about the affair, went to Horsham a day or two later to swear in special constables. He found that out of sixty-three 'respectable householders' four only would take the oath. Meanwhile the difficulties of prodding troops increased with the area of disturbances. 'I have requested that every effort may be made to reinforce the troops in the western part of Sussex,' wrote Sir Robert Peel to a Horsham magistrate on 18th November, 'and you may judge of the difficulty of doing so, when I mention to you that the most expeditious mode of effecting this is to bring from Dorchester the only cavalry force that is in the West of England. This, however, shall be done, and 100 men (infantry) shall be brought from the Garrison of Portsmouth.'

Until the middle of November the rising was confined to Kent, Sussex and parts of Surrey, with occasional fires and threatening letters in neighbouring counties. After that time the disturbances became more serious, spreading not only to the West of Sussex, but to Berkshire, Hampshire, and Wiltshire. On 22nd November the Duke of Buckingham wrote from Adington in Hampshire to the duke of Wellington: 'Nothing can be worse than the state of this neighbourhood. I may say that this part of the country is wholly in the hands of the rebels... 1500 rioters are to assemble to-morrow morning, and will attack any farmhouses where there are threshing machines. They go about levying contributions on every gentleman's house. There are very few magistrates; and what there are are completely cowed. In short, something decisive must instantly be done.' The risings in these counties differed in some respects from the rising in Kent and Sussex. The disturbances were not so much like the firing of a train of discontent, they were rather a sudden and spontaneous explosion. They lasted only about a week, and were well described in a report of Colonel Brotherton, one of the two military experts sent by Lord Melbourne to Wiltshire to advise the magistrates. He wrote on 28th November: 'The insurrectionary movement seems to be directed by no plan or system, but merely actuated by the spontaneous feeling of the peasantry and quite at random.' The labourers went about in larger numbers, combining with the destruction of threshing machines and the demand for higher wages a claim for 'satisfaction' as they called it in the form of ready money. It was their practice to charge £2 for breaking a threshing machine, but in some cases the mobs were

satisfied with a few coppers. The demand for ready money was not a new feature, for many correspondents of the Home Office note in their letters that the mobs levied money in Kent and Sussex, but hitherto this 'sturdy begging,' as Cobbett called it, had been regarded by the magistrates as unimportant. The wages demanded in these counties were 2s. a day, whereas the demands in Kent and usually in Sussex had been for 2s. 6d. or 2s. 3d. Wages had fallen to a lower level in Hampshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire. The current rate in Wiltshire was 7s., and Colonel Mair, the second officer sent down by the Home Office, reported that wages were sometimes as low as 6s. It is therefore not surprising to learn that in two parishes the labourers instead of asking for 2s. a day, asked only for 8s. or 9s. a week. In Berkshire wages varied from 7s. to 9s., and in Hampshire the usual rate seems to have been 8s.

The rising in Hampshire was marked by a considerable destruction of property. At Fordingbridge, the mob under the leadership of a man called Cooper, broke up the machinery both at a sacking manufactory and at a manufactory of threshing machines. Cooper was soon clothed in innumerable legends: he was a gipsy, a mysterious gentleman, possibly the renowned 'Swing' himself. At the Fordingbridge riots he rode on horseback and assumed the title of Captain Hunt. His followers addressed him bareheaded. In point of fact he was an agricultural labourer of good character, a native of East Grimstead in Wilts, who had served in the artillery in the French War. Some two months before the riots his wife had robbed him, and then eloped with a paramour. This unhinged his self-control; he gave himself up to drink and despair, and tried to forget his misery in reckless rioting. Near Andover again a foundry was destroyed by a mob, after the ringleader, Gilmore, had entered the justices' room at Andover, where the justices were sitting, and treated with them on behalf of the mob. Gilmore also was a labourer; he was twenty-five years old and had been a soldier.

The most interesting event in the Hampshire rising was the destruction of the workhouses at Selborne and Headley. Little is reported of the demolition of the poorhouse at Selborne. The indictment of the persons accused of taking part in it fell through on technical grounds, and as the defendants were also the persons charged with destroying the Headley workhouse, the prosecution in the Selborne case was abandoned. The mob first went to Mr. Cobbold, Vicar of Selborne, and demanded that he should reduce his tithes, telling him with some bluntness 'we must have a touch of your tithes: we think £300 a year quite enough for you... £4 a week is quite enough.' Mr. Cobbold was thoroughly alarmed, and consented to sign a paper promising to reduce his tithes, which amounted to something over £600, by half that sum. The mob were accompanied by a good many farmers who had agreed to raise wages if the labourers would undertake to obtain a reduction of tithes, and these farmers signed the paper also. After Mr. Cobbold's surrender the mob went on to the workhouse at Headley, which served the parishes of Bramshott, Headley and Kingsley. Their leader was a certain Robert Holdaway, a wheelwright, who had been for a short time a publican. He was a widower, with eight small children, described by the witnesses at his trial as a man of excellent character, quiet, industrious, and inoffensive. The master of the workhouse greeted Holdaway with 'What, Holdy, are you here?' 'Yes, but I mean you no harm nor your wife nor your goods: so get them out as soon as you can, for the house must come down.' The master warned him that there were old people and sick children in the house. Holdaway promised that they should be protected, asked where they were, and said the window would be marked. What followed is described in the evidence given by the master of the workhouse: 'There was not a room left entire, except that in which the sick children were. These were removed into the yard on two beds, and covered over, and kept from harm all the time. This was done by the mob. They were left there because there was no room for them in the sick ward. The sick ward was full of infirm old paupers. It was not touched, but of all the rest of the place not a room was left entire.' The farmers looked on whilst the destruction proceeded, and one at least of the labourers in the mob declared afterwards that his master had forced him to join.

In Wiltshire also the destruction of property was not confined to threshing machines. At Wilton, the mob, under the leadership of a certain John Jennings, aged eighteen, (16*) who declared that he 'was going to break the machinery to make more work for the poor people,' did £500 worth of damage in a woollen mill. Another cloth factory at Quidhampton was also injured; in this affair an active part was taken by a boy even younger than Jennings, John Ford, who was only seventeen years old. (17*)

The riot which attracted most attention of all the disturbances in Wiltshire took place at Pyt House, the seat of Mr. John Benett, M.P. for the county. Mr. Benett was a well-known local figure, and had given evidence before several Committees on Poor Laws. The depth of his sympathy with the labourers may be gauged by the threat that he uttered before the Committee of 1817 to pull down his cottages if Parliament should make length of residence a legal method of gaining a settlement. Some member of the Committee suggested that if there were no cottages there would be no labourers, but Mr. Benett replied cheerfully enough that it did not matter to a labourer how far he walked to his work: 'I have many labourers coming three miles to my farm every morning during the winter, (the hours were six to six) 'and they are the most punctual persons we have.' At the time he gave this evidence, he stated that about three-quarters of the labouring population in his parish of Tisbury received relief from the poor rates in aid of wages, and he declared that it was useless to let them small parcels of land. The condition of the poor had not improved in Mr. Benett's parish between 1817 and 1830, and Lord Arundel, who lived in it, described it as 'a Parish in which the Poor have been more oppressed and are in greater misery as a whole than any Parish in the Kingdom.' (18*) It is not surprising that when the news of what had been achieved in Kent and Sussex spread west to Wiltshire, the labourers of Tisbury rose to demand 2s. a day, and to destroy the threshing machines. A mob of five hundred persons collected, and their first act was to destroy a threshing machine, with the sanction of the owner, Mr. Turner, who sat by on horseback, watching them. They afterwards proceeded to the Pyt House estate. Mr. Benett met them, parleyed and rode with them for some way; they behaved politely but firmly, telling him their intentions. One incident throws a light on the minds of the actors in these scenes. 'I then,' said Mr. Benett afterwards, 'pointed out to them that they could not trust each other, for any man, I said, by informing against ten of you will obtain at once £500.' It was an adroit speech, but as it happened the Wiltshire labourers, half starved, degraded and brutalised, as they might be, had a different standard of honour from that imagined by this magistrate and member of Parliament, and the devilish temptation he set before them was rejected. The mob destroyed various threshing machines on Mr. Benett's farms, and refused to disperse; at last, after a good deal of sharp language from Mr. Benett, they threw stones at him. At the same time a troop of yeomanry from Hindon came up and received orders to fire blank cartridges above the heads of the mob. This only produced laughter; the yeomanry then began to charge; the mob took shelter in the plantations round Pyt House and stoned the yeomanry, who replied by a fierce onslaught, shooting one man dead on the spot, (19*) wounding six by cutting off fingers and opening skulls, and taking a great number of prisoners. At the inquest at Tisbury on the man John Harding, who was killed, the jury returned a verdict of justifiable homicide, and the coroner refused to grant a warrant for burial, saying that the man's action was equivalent to *felo de se*. Hunt stated in the House of Commons that the foreman of the jury was the father of one of the yeomen.

We have seen that in these counties the magistrates took a very grave view of the crime of levying money from householders. This was often done by casual bands of men and boys, who had little connection with the organised rising. An examination of the cases described before the Special Commissions gives the impression that in point of fact there was very little danger to person or property. A farmer's wife at Aston Tirrold in Berkshire described her own experience to the Abingdon Special Commission. A mob came to her house and demanded beer. Her husband was out and she went to the door. 'Bennett was spokesman. He said "Now a

little of your beer if you please." I answered "Not a drop." He asked "Why?" and I said "I cannot give beer to encourage riot." Bennett said "Why you don't call this rioting do you?" I said "I don't know what you call it, but it is a number of people assembled together to alarm others: but don't think I'm afraid or daunted at it." Bennett said " Suppose your premises should be set on fire?" I said "Then I certainly should be alarmed but I don't suppose either of you intends doing that." Bennett said "No, we do not intend any such thing, I don't wish to alarm you and we are not come with the intention of mischief." The result of the dialogue was that Bennett and his party went home without beer and without giving trouble.

It was natural that when mob-begging of this kind became fashionable, unpopular individuals should be singled out for rough and threatening visits. Sometimes the assistant overseers were the objects of special hatred, sometimes the parson. It is worth while to give the facts of a case at St. Mary Bourne in Hampshire, because stress was laid upon it in the subsequent prosecutions as an instance of extraordinary violence. The clergyman, Mr. Easton, was not a favourite in his parish, and he preached what the poor regarded as a harsh and a hostile sermon. When the parish rose, a mob of two hundred forced their way into the vicarage and demanded money, some of them repeating, 'Money or blood.' Mrs. Easton, who was rather an invalid, Miss Lucy Easton, and Master Easton were downstairs, and Mrs. Easton was so much alarmed that she sent Lucy upstairs to fetch 10s. Meanwhile Mr. Easton had come down, and was listening to some extremely unsympathetic criticisms of his performances in the pulpit. 'Damn you,' said Daniel Simms,(20*) 'where will your text be next Sunday?' William Simms was equally blunt and uncompromising. Meanwhile Lucy had brought down the half-sovereign, and Mrs. Easton gave it to William Simms,(21*) who thereupon cried 'All out,' and the mob left the Eastons at peace.

One representative of the Church was distinguished from most of the country gentlemen and clergymen of the time by his treatment of one of these wandering mobs. Cobbett's letter to the Hampshire parsons, published in the *Political Register*, 15th January 1831, contains an account of the conduct of Bishop Sumner, the Bishop of Winchester. 'I have, at last, found a Bishop of the Law Church to praise. The facts are these: the Bishop, in coming from Winchester to his palace at Farnham, was met about a mile before he got to the latter place, by a band of sturdy beggars, whom some call robbers. They stopped his carriage, and asked for some money, which he gave them. But he did not prosecute them: he had not a man of them called to account for his conduct, but, the next day, set twenty-four labourers to constant work, opened his Castle to the distressed of all ages, and supplied all with food and other necessaries who stood in need of them. This was becoming a Christian teacher.' Perhaps the bishop remembered the lines from Dryden's *Tales from Chaucer*, describing the spirit in which the good parson regarded the poor:

'Who, should they steal for want of his relief,
He judged himself accomplice with the thief.'

There was an exhibition of free speaking at Hungerford, where the magistrates sat in the Town Hall to receive deputations from various mobs, in connection with the demand for higher wages. The magistrates had made their peace with the Hungerford mob, when a deputation from the Kintbury mob arrived, led by William Oakley, a young carpenter of twenty-five. Oakley addressed the magistrates in language which they had never heard before in their lives and were never likely to hear again. 'You have not such d d flats to deal with now, as you had before; we will have 2s. a day till Lady day, and 2s. 6d. afterwards for labourers and 3s. 6d. for tradesmen. And as we are here we will have £5 before we leave the place or we will smash it.... You gentlemen have been living long enough on the good things, now is our time and we will have them. You gentlemen would not speak to us now, only you are afraid and intimidated.' The magistrates acceded to the demands of the Kintbury mob and also gave them the £5, after

which they gave the Hungerford mob £5, because they had behaved well, and it would be unjust to treat them worse than their Kintbury neighbours. Mr. Page, Deputy-Lieutenant for Berks, sent Lord Melbourne some tales about this same Kintbury mob, which was described by Mr. Pearse, M.P., as a set of 'desperate savages.' I beg to add some anecdotes of the mob yesterday to illustrate the nature of its component parts. They took £2 from Mr. Cherry a magistrate and broke his Machine. Afterwards another party came and demanded One Pound when the two parties had again formed into one, they passed by Mr. Cherry's door and said they had taken one pound too much, which they offered to return to him which it is said he refused-they had before understood that Mrs. Cherry was unwell and therefore came only in small parties. A poor woman passed them selling rabbits, some few of the mob took some by force, the ringleader ordered them to be restored. At a farmer's where they had been regaled with bread cheese and beer one of them stole an umbrella: the ringleader hearing of it, as they were passing the canal threw him into it and gave him a good ducking.'(22*)

In the early days of the rising in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Berkshire, there was a good deal of sympathy with the labourers. The farmers in many cases made no objection to the destruction of their threshing machines. One gentleman of Market Lavington went so far as to say that 'nearly all the Wiltshire Farmers were willing to destroy or set aside their machines.' 'My Lord,' wrote Mr. Williams, J.P., from Marlborough, 'you will perhaps be surprised to hear that the greatest number of the threshing machines destroyed have been put out for the Purpose by the Owners themselves.' The duke of Buckingham complained that in the district round Avington 'the farmers have not the Spirit and in some instances not the Wish to put down' disturbances.(23*) At a meeting in Winchester, convened by the Mayor to preserve the peace (reported in the Hampshire Chronicle of 22nd November), Dr. Newbolt, a clergyman and magistrate, described his own dealings with one of the mobs. The mob said they wanted 12s. a week wages: this he said was a reasonable demand. He acted as mediator between the labourers and farmers, and as a result of his efforts the farmers agreed to these terms, and the labourers returned to work, abandoning their project of a descent on Winchester. The Mayor of Winchester also declared that the wages demanded were not unreasonable, and he laid stress on the fact that the object of the meeting was not to appoint special constables to come into conflict with the people, but merely to preserve the peace. Next week Dr. Newbolt put an advertisement into the Hampshire Chronicle, acknowledging the vote of thanks that had been passed to him, and reaffirming his belief that conciliation was the right policy.(24*) At Overton, in Hampshire, Henry Hunt acted as mediator between the farmers and a hungry and menacing mob. Such was the fear of the farmers that they gave him unlimited power to make promises on their behalf: he promised the labourers that their wages should be raised from 9s. to 12s., with house rent in addition, and they dispersed in delight.

Fortune had so far smiled upon the rising, and there was some hope of success. If the spirit that animated the farmers, and in Kent many of the landowners, had lasted, the winter of 1830 might have ended in an improvement of wages and a reduction of rents and tithes throughout the south of England. In places where the decline of the labourer had been watched for years without pity or dismay, magistrates were now calling meetings to consider his circumstances, and the Home Office Papers show that some, at any rate, of the country gentlemen were aware of the desperate condition of the poor. Unhappily the day of conciliatory measures was a brief one. Two facts frightened the upper classes into brutality: one was the spread of the rising, the other the scarcity of troops.(25*) As the movement spread, the alarm of the authorities inspired a different policy, and even those landowners who recognised that the labourers were miserable, thought that they were in the presence of a rising that would sweep them away unless they could suppress it at once by drastic means. They pictured the labourers as Huns and the mysterious Swing as a second Attila, and this panic they contrived to communicate to the other classes of society.

Conciliatory methods consequently ceased; the upper classes substituted action for diplomacy, and the movement rapidly collapsed. Little resistance was offered, and the terrible hosts of armed and desperate men melted down into groups of weak and ill-fed labourers, armed with sticks and stones. On 26th November the *Times* could report that seventy persons had been apprehended near Newbury, and that 'about 60 of the most forward half-starved fellows, had been taken into custody some two miles from Southampton. Already the housing of the Berkshire prisoners was becoming a problem, the gaols at Reading and Abingdon being overcrowded: by the end of the month the Newbury Mansion House and Workhouse had been converted into prisons. This energy had been stimulated by a circular letter issued on 24th November, in which Lord Melbourne urged the lord-lieutenants and the magistrates to use firmness and vigour in quelling disturbances, and virtually promised them immunity for illegal acts done in discharge of their duty. A village here and there continued to give the magistrates some uneasiness, for example, Broughton in Hants, 'an open village in an open country... where there is no Gentleman to overawe them,'(26*) but these were exceptions. The day of risings was over, and from this time forward, arson was the only weapon of discontent. At Charlton in Wilts, where 'the magistrates had talked of 12s. and the farmers had given 10s.,' a certain Mr. Polhill, who had lowered the wages one Saturday to 9s., found his premises in flame. 'The poor,' remarked a neighbouring magistrate, 'naturally consider that they will be beaten down again to 7s.'(27*) By 4th December the *Times* correspondent in Wiltshire and Hampshire could report that quiet was restored, that the peasantry were cowed, and that men who had been prominent in the mobs were being picked out and arrested every day. He gave an amusing account of the trials of a special correspondent, and of the difficulties of obtaining information. 'The circular of Lord Melbourne which encourages the magistrates to seize suspected persons, and promises them impunity if the motives are good (such is the construction of the circular in these parts), and which the magistrates are determined to act upon, renders inquiries unsafe, and I have received a few good natured hints on this head. Gentlemen in gigs and post chaises are peculiar objects of jealousy. A cigar, which is no slight comfort in this humid atmosphere, is regarded on the road as a species of pyrotechnical tube; and even an eye glass is in danger of being metamorphosed into a newly invented air gun, with which these gentlemen ignite stacks and barns as they pass. An innocent enquiry of whose house or farm is that? is, under existing circumstances, an overt act of incendiarism.'

In such a state of feeling, it was not surprising that labourers were bundled into prison for sour looks or discontented conversation. A zealous magistrate wrote to the Home Office on 13th December after a fire near Maidenhead, to say that he had committed a certain Greenaway to prison on the following evidence: 'Dr. Vansittart, Rector of Shottesbrook, gave a sermon a short time before the fire took place, recommending a quiet conduct to his Parishioners. Greenaway said openly in the churchyard, we have been quiet too long. His temper is bad, always discontented and churlish, frequently changing his Master from finding great difficulty in maintaining a large family from the Wages of labour.'

Meanwhile the rising had spread westward to Dorset and Gloucestershire, and northward to Bucks. In Dorsetshire and Gloucestershire, the disturbances were much like those in Wiltshire. In Bucks, in addition to the usual agricultural rising, with the breaking of threshing machines and the demand for higher wages, there were riots in High Wycombe, and considerable destruction of paper-making machinery by the unemployed. Where special grievances existed in a village, the labourers took advantage of the rising to seek redress for them. Thus at Walden in Bucks, in addition to demanding 2s. a day wages with 6d. for each child and a reduction of tithes, they made a special point of the improper distribution of parish gifts. 'Another person said that buns used to be thrown from the church steeple and beer given away in the churchyard, and a sermon preached on the bun day. Witness (the parson) told them that the custom had ceased before he came to the parish, but that he always preached a sermon on St. George's day, and two on Sundays, one of which was a volunteer. He told them that he had

consulted the Archdeacon on the claim set up for the distribution of buns, and that the Archdeacon was of opinion that no such claim could be maintained.'

At Benson or Bensington, in Oxfordshire, the labourers, after destroying some threshing machines, made a demonstration against a proposal for enclosure. Mr. Newton, a large proprietor, had just made one of many unsuccessful attempts to obtain an Enclosure Act for the parish. Some thousand persons assembled in the churchyard expecting that Mr. Newton would try to fix the notice on the church door, but as he did not venture to appear, they proceeded to his house, and made him promise never again to attempt to obtain an Enclosure Act. (28*)

The movement for obtaining higher wages by this rude collective bargaining was extinguished in the counties already mentioned by the beginning of December, but disturbances now developed over a larger area. A 'daring riot' took place at Stotfold in Bedfordshire. The labourers met together to demand exemption from taxes, dismissal of the assistant overseer, and the raising of wages to 2s. a day. The last demand was refused, on which the labourers set some straw alight in a field to alarm the farmers. Mr. Whitbread, J.P., brought a hundred special constables, and arrested ten ringleaders, after which the riot ceased. There were disturbances in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex; and in many other counties the propertied classes were terrified from time to time by the news of fires. In Cambridgeshire there were meetings of labourers to demand higher wages, in some places with immediate success, and one magistrate was alarmed by rumours of a design to march upon Cambridge itself on market day. In Devonshire Lord Ebrington reported an agitation for higher wages with encouragement from the farmers. He was himself impressed by the low wages in force, and had raised them in places still quiet; a mistake for which he apologised. Even Hereford, 'this hitherto submissive and peaceful county,' was not unaffected. In Northamptonshire there were several fires, and also risings round Peterborough, Oundle and Wellingborough, and a general outbreak in the Midlands was thought to be imminent. Hayricks began to blaze as far north as Carlisle. Swing letters were delivered in Yorkshire, and in Lincolnshire the labourer was said to be awakening to his own importance. There were in fact few counties quite free from infection, and a leading article appeared in the *Times* on 6th December, in which it was stated that never had such a dangerous state of things existed to such an extent in England, in the period of well-authenticated records. 'Let the rich be taught that Providence will not suffer them to oppress their fellow creatures with impunity. Here are tens of thousands of Englishmen, industrious, kind-hearted, but broken-hearted beings, exasperated into madness by insufficient food and clothing, by utter want of necessaries for themselves and their unfortunate families.'

Unfortunately Providence, to whom the *Times* attributed these revolutionary sentiments, was not so close to the scene as Lord Melbourne, whose sentiments on the subject were very different. On 8th December he issued a circular, which gave a death-blow to the hope that the magistrates would act as mediators on behalf of the labourers. After blaming those magistrates who, under intimidation, had advised the establishment of a uniform rate of wages, the Home Secretary went on, 'Reason and experience concur in proving that a compliance with demands so unreasonable in themselves, and urged in such a manner, can only lead, and probably within a very short period of time, to the most disastrous results.' He added that the justices had 'no general legal authority to settle the amount of the wages of labour.' The circular contained a promise on the part of the Government that they would adopt 'every practicable and reasonable measure' for the alleviation of the labourers' privations.

From this time the magistrates were everywhere on the alert for the first signs of life and movement among the labourers, and they forbade meetings of any kind. In Suffolk and Essex the labourers who took up the cry for higher wages were promptly thrown into prison, and arbitrary arrests became the custom. The movement was crushed, and the time for retribution

had come. The gaols were full to overflowing, and the Government appointed Special Commissions to try the rioters in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Berks, and Bucks. Brougham, who was now enjoying the office in whose pompous manner he must have lisped in his cradle, told the House of Lords on 2nd December, 'Within a few days from the time I am addressing your Lordships, the sword of justice shall be unsheathed to smite, if it be necessary, with a firm and vigorous hand, the rebel against the law.'

The disturbances were over, but the panic had been such that the upper classes could not persuade themselves that England was yet tranquil. As late as Christmas Eve the Privy Council gave orders to the archbishop to prepare 'a form of prayer to Almighty God, on account of the troubled state of certain parts of the United Kingdom.' The archbishop's composition, which was published after scores of men and boys had been sentenced to transportation for life, must have been recited with genuine feeling by those clergymen who had either broken, or were about to break, their agreement to surrender part of their tithes. One passage ran as follows: 'Restore, O Lord, to Thy people the quiet enjoyment of the many and great blessings which we have received from Thy bounty: defeat and frustrate the malice of wicked and turbulent men, and turn their hearts: have pity, O Lord, on the simple and ignorant, who have been led astray, and recall them to a sense of their duty; and to persons of all ranks and conditions in this country vouchsafe such a measure of Thy grace, that our hearts being filled with true faith and devotion, and cleansed from all evil affections, we may serve Thee with one accord, in duty and loyalty to the King, in obedience to the laws of the land, and in brotherly love towards each other....'

We shall see in the next chapter what happened to 'the simple and ignorant' who had fallen into the hands of the English judges.

NOTES:

1. See Fawley, p. 279.
2. *Kent Herald*, September 2, 1830.
3. *Times*, January 3, 1831.
4. September 30, 1830.
5. *Brighton Chronicle*, October 6, quoted in *Times*, October 14.
6. For Brede see H.O. Papers, *Extracts from Poor Law Commissioners' Report*, published 1833, and newspapers.
7. They were signed by G.S. Hill, minister, by eight farmers and the four labourer delegates.
8. Affidavit in H.O. Papers.
9. *Times*, November 25.
10. The petition was as follows: 'We feel that in justice we ought not to suffer a moment to pass away without communicated to your Grace the great and unprecedented distress which we are enabled from our own personal experience to state prevails among all the peasantry to a degree not only dreadful to individuals, but also to an extent which, if not checked, must be attended with serious consequences to the national prosperity.' Mr. Hodges does not mention the date, merely stating that it was sent Wellington when Prime Minister.

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11. H.O. Papers.
 12. Ibid.
 13. Ibid.
 14. H.O. Papers.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Transported for life to New South Wales.
 17. Ford was capitally convicted and sentenced to transportation for life, but his sentence was commuted to imprisonment.
 18. H.O. Papers.
 19. According to local tradition he was killed not by the yeomanry but by a farmer, before the troop came up. See Hudson, *A Shepherd's Life*, p. 248.
 20. Transported for life to New South Wales.
 21. Transported for life to New South Wales.
 22. H.O. Papers.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ten days later, after Lord Melbourne's circular of December 8, Dr Newbolt changed his tone. Writing to the Home Office he depreciated the censure implied in that circular, and stated that his conduct was due to personal infirmities and threats of violence: indeed he had subsequently heard from a certain Mr. Wickham that 'I left his place just in time to save my own life, as some of the Mob had it in contemplation to drag me out of the carriage, and to destroy me upon the spot, and it was entirely owing to the interference of some of the better disposed of the Peasantry that my life was preserved.'
 25. See p. 258.
 26. H.O. Papers.
 27. Ibid.
 28. See *Oxford University and City Herald*, November 20 and 27, 1830.