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CHAUCER AND THE "COMMUNE PROFIT":
THE MANOR

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In the introductory stanzas of *The Parliament of Fowls* Chaucer tells us that Scipio Africanus, that exemplar of chivalry and bitter enemy of lecherous self-indulgence,¹ informs his namesake of the sad fate of "brekers of the lawe" and "likerous folk," of the kind that "Massynisse" might have become without the elder Scipio's guidance, having first assured him that if he seeks "commune profit" and guides others to do so he will come to a place of bliss and bright souls. It has long been recognized that a love for "commune profit" of the kind manifested, for example, in Griselda's judgments of the people in the *Clerk's Tale* (431), as distinct from self-love, is synonymous with, or in the present instance highly suggestive of, Christian charity. It has not so often been recognized, however, that in the context of Chaucer's society this ideal not only had immediately practical applications but that its application was viewed as a matter of some urgency, regardless of how we might wish to view the situation in modern terms. First of all, "brekers of the law" and "likerous folk" had a great deal in common in the fourteenth century, whether the law involved was moral law or positive law. Violations of the moral law were conventionally regarded as departures from reason,² and when Sir John Stoner, Chief Justice, observed, referring to the laws of England, that "ley est resoun,"³ he was merely repeating a commonplace. Thus those who broke either the moral law or the law of the land in its various forms violated reason to produce disorder, or what Gower and some of his Elizabethan successors would call "division."⁴ The unhappy consequences of disorder in England after the plagues of 1349 and 1369, whether in the court (where King

Edward turned away from a concern with the community of the realm for a more leisurely life of hunting and dalliance with Alice Perrers, and Richard was unable to cope adequately with increasing French aggressiveness) or in the countryside (where traditional social ties and the hierarchies they formed were being disrupted by the economic activities of enterprising individuals and sometimes by downright revolt) were plain for everyone to see.

The widespread loss of interest in "commune profit" in late-fourteenth-century England is a large topic, and it will be possible to consider it here only with reference to manorial communities, and even there only very briefly. A "manor" in fourteenth-century usage could be a great many different things, and not all "manors" had as their chief function agricultural production. In fact, it is not actually very useful to talk about "the decline of the manor" in the late Middle Ages, since some of its features survived into the present century, and some were not totally obliterated by the Agricultural Holding Act of 1923. It is possible to discuss changes in manorial life and organization, however. If we eliminate for convenience "manors" that were chiefly country residences, those that included a great many borough tenants, special purpose manors like the Black Prince's stud farm of Macclesfield in Cheshire,⁵ or large free tenements within manors that could themselves be called "manors,"⁶ we can say that manors fell roughly into three types. First, some employed an "open field" system on which the lands of the tenants were divided into strips distributed over two or more fields or *seisone* (which might or might not exactly coincide) used for crop rotation. These might or might not contain demesne lands (which might be relatively large or relatively small), sometimes scattered in strips among the strips of the tenants (though not in Kent, and probably not in Sussex) and sometimes separate from them. Other manors, especially in Devon, Cornwall, parts of Somerset, Hereford, Shropshire, Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, Cumberland, and Durham, employed an "infield-outfield" system where the "infield" was regularly cultivated, but the "outfield," divided into strips on poor land, was cultivated only once in every few years. Finally, there were some manors on which the holdings consisted of separate farmsteads, especially in Devon and Cornwall, and a few manors were all demesne.⁷ We should remember that the tenure of land was tenure, not "ownership," and that there were no lordless lands in England.

On manors of the first type especially, the scattered holdings on two or more fields subject to crop rotation⁸ demanded community cooperation in the various tasks of the agricultural year. Generally wheat and rye were sown in the fall, and oats, barley and peas in the spring. Livestock were allowed on the stubble of wheat and barley after harvest, but the fields were temporarily fenced after sowing.⁹ The regular routine here implied was, it is said, eventually disrupted by the widespread cultivation of turnips in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the community spirit of open-field manors, uncorrupted by turnips, has often been remarked by agricultural historians.

But before we consider manorial communities we should remember that manors varied enormously in lordship and tenure. Thus manors held of the Crown in "ancient demesne" were somewhat different from other manors. They might have very elaborate peasant hierarchies, but their tenants had special rights.¹¹ Manors might be managed locally by resident lords or their families, or administered by resident bailiffs, "servientes" or sergeants (whose duties might or might not be identical with those of bailiffs), and in some instances by monks. Clerks, canons, rectors of parishes, monastic obedientiaries, priors, abbots, cathedral chapters (monastic or secular), bishops, merchants, lawyers, large freeholders, groups of self-perpetuating trustees, members of the royal household, minor noblemen, and great lords could all be lords of manors. Most individuals in these groups could also be small tenants on the manors of others. To cite an extreme example, the great London merchant Sir John Philpot held seven acres in villein tenure on a manor held by Robert Braybrook, Bishop of London,¹² although he was by no means a poor cottager. Lords of manors might have obligations to the Crown directly, indirectly through the sheriff, or both, or to another lord, secular or ecclesiastical. Their contact with their tenants might be intimate and direct, occasional, or distant through an intermediate official. A lord might hold a "home manor," with or without a series of nearby manors he visited frequently, and he might also hold distant manors he seldom if ever visited.¹³ Professional stewards who could manage a number of manors were in some demand in the later fourteenth century, constituting a substantial body of literate laymen. Tenants might be either free or unfree by birth (except in Kent, where a man was born free), although by the time of Chaucer's maturity this distinction often had little to do with the size of

his holdings, his obligations for them (which often went with the land), or his social status. There were, of course, numerous families of small servile tenants tied to their holdings who survived long after the fourteenth century. Both free and servile tenants owed a surprising variety of obligations, often met not by the nominal tenants themselves but by leaseholders, who were sometimes prospective heirs and sometimes not,¹⁴ or by servants of the tenants or of their leaseholders. The complexities of land tenure in the later fourteenth century are baffling. The tranquil prospect of forest, field, meadow, and stream concealed an enormously complex series of hierarchical and peer group tenurial relationships. Nevertheless, the inevitable seasonal routine of agrarian labor, the medieval respect for the idea that a man should be judged by his peers, and the further tendency to inculcate group responsibility whenever possible forged tightly knit communities. These communities were threatened during the later fourteenth century by disruptive influences, which, although mild by modern standards, were sufficient to cause much concern among those interested in furthering the "commune profit."

Community integrity is especially apparent on manors employing the "open field" system, although there is no reason to suppose that it did not exist on manors of other types, and even, we may add, in towns.¹⁵ Basic attitudes supporting community integrity were furnished by the Church, and local churches were active community centers that might in some instances be subject to a certain amount of administrative control in manorial courts.¹⁶ Confessors warned lords against unjust tolls and tallages, which were considered to be sinful, and peasants were enjoined to perform their duties faithfully and to avoid transgressions.¹⁷ The hierarchical or "feudal"¹⁸ character of society generally, combined with the popularity of verbal contracts of all kinds, ranging from borrowings of plows or horses among peasants to marriage and even land transactions, lent the ideal of "fidelity" or "truth," usually thought to be dependent on faith in God, an especial importance. Thus a guide for manorial lords, the *Seneschaucy*, warns that "The lord ought to be fair in word and deed, he ought to love God and honesty, and he ought to hate sin, wrong, and wickedness."¹⁹ Another manual, *The Rules of Robert Grosseteste*, urges the lord, "Admonish all your household often that all who serve you should endeavor to serve God and to serve you loyally and diligently, and that in order

to do the will of God they ought to do your will and pleasure in all things; in all things, that is, that are not against God."²⁰ Walter of Henley's *Husbandry* commands, "If thy people fall into the danger of thy courtes, see that they be amerced by their peeres. And if your owne conscience telle yowe that they bee to hyghe amerced, moderate it soe that you bee not reprovod for it heare nor before God."²¹ Actual manorial lords varied in character, some being petty tyrants in the countryside,²² but there are examples of lords who sought to behave in accordance with the prevailing ideals. In his recent study of the manors of the Duchy of Cornwall John Hatcher observes that the estates of the Black Prince there "were governed with a degree of benevolence that far exceeded the feudal obligations of a lord to his tenants, and with a spirit of charity often wanting in the administration of many ecclesiastical estates at this time."²³

Perhaps it will be helpful to recall the general nature of manorial courts, bearing in mind that local variations were common. In the first place, except in areas of early Danish influence and sometimes in the south, the shires of England were divided into hundreds, originally administered by bailiffs, although by Chaucer's time many hundreds were held privately by lords who acted as royal agents.²⁴ Hundred courts met during the terms of Easter and Michaelmas, and at these meetings, or at one of them, what was called the "View of Frankpledge" was held. The rural male non-gentry and non-clerical population over the age of twelve was divided into groups of four to thirty men headed by a tithingman or "chief pledge" who reported their behavior to the jurors of the hundreds, although in some areas in the south "tithings" were territorial. In any event, members of tithings were mutually responsible for each other's behavior. Tithingmen paid "chevage" at court, either for failure to attend or as a regular fee, and they were frequently amerced for failure to report offenses.²⁵ During the later fourteenth century major offenders were reserved for the Justices of the Peace or for the itinerant justices of jail delivery, although courts on manors in ancient demesne could try civil cases and felonies.²⁶ Manorial lords frequently had the right to hold the View, so that their courts became in effect hundred courts as well as courts devoted to manorial business, and chief pledges often became important members of their courts.²⁷

A manorial court met traditionally "from three weeks to three

weeks," although in actual practice meetings were often irregular or less frequent. A court might meet in the lord's hall, in a church, or in some other place. Usually the presiding officer was the lord's steward, who might pronounce judgments at the View, but who could not interfere with the nomination of manorial servants, like the reeve, and who was not supposed to raise the fines imposed by "affectors," or men elected for the purpose from among the tenants or appointed by the reeve.²⁸ The courts established bylaws or customary regulations for both the agricultural and disciplinary management of the manor, recorded land transactions, and imposed fines for trespasses (*transgressiones*) involving such things as straying animals, failure to clean ditches, obstructing roads, boundary infringements, failure to perform customary works properly, poaching, encroachments on the lord's garden (often by boys), carrying off wood or thorns, improper glean-ing, harboring strangers (who might commit crimes), refusal to return borrowed goods, minor debts, minor assaults, defamation, cavedrop-ping, failure to raise the hue, improper raising of the hue, fornication (among bondwomen), and so on. It used to be said that "the action of the courts was nothing but a concealed form of taxation" and that bond tenants were "girdled round with a net of feudal offenses."²⁹ Modern writers, assuming, perhaps, that love is free, still complain bitterly about *leyrwite* or *lecherwite*, the fine imposed on bondwomen (except on ancient demesne) for fornication or extramarital pregnancy; but in general it is now common to regard manorial courts with some ap-preciation for the community cooperation they entailed.

An early indication of this more appreciative tone appears in John Booth's introduction to the Durham Halmotes: "The orders made at the court for the common weal of the vills, and which affected the rela-tion of the tenants toward each other, show a keen appreciation for the benefits arising from cooperation."³⁰ In their classic study, *The Open Fields*, the Orwins discuss at length the spirit of "democracy" and com-munity responsibility at the manorial court of Laxton, which they clearly regard with more favor than the modern situation where rural communities are governed by paid officials and the only power of the resident lies in his vote.³¹ Professor Homans observed that "in English villages of the Middle Ages, cooperation in farm work was the basis of village life."³² It has become clear that decisions regarding changes in field systems, usually from two fields to three fields, were made by the

community as a whole.³³ Professor W. O. Ault, who has studied manorial or village bylaws carefully and extensively, stresses the fact that they involved matters "of mutual profit and concern to all the 'shareholders' in the agrarian enterprise, be their status free or servile, and whether they be landlord or tenant."³⁴ Moreover, bylaws were fre-quently established in the manorial court itself not by the lord or steward but by the free and customary tenants together.³⁵ As for *leyr-wite*, those who have no experience with small communities of persons whose sustenance depends on the mutual efforts of the entire group do not appreciate either the immediate social consequences of fornication, which easily leads to violence, or the economic burden imposed by il-legitimate children who may not have adequate families to support them. In any event, the fines imposed were usually small. It has been said that these fines were roughly equivalent to *merchet*, or license to marry, which the lord presumably lost as the result of fornication,³⁶ or that the lords lost a bondman through fornication, since bastards were free.³⁷ But the facts do not offer very good support for either of these theories. Thus on the manors of the prior of Durham in 1366 two women were amerced 6d. each for *leyrwite*, and, at the same time, 12d. each for *merchet*. On these same manors much higher fines (2s.) were imposed for fornication with a chaplain or adultery.³⁸ At Wakefield male offenders might be flogged through the marketplace,³⁹ although this may have been done under the jurisdiction of the arch-deacon, since it was the standard penalty in ecclesiastical courts. The usual fine for bondwomen was 6d. or 12d., about the same as for breach of the assize of ale, but on at least one Crowland manor after 1349 the fine seems to have been 5s., or enough to purchase a modest brass pot at a fair. Male offenders and freewomen were at the tender mercies of summoners, archdeacons, and rural deans (whose jurisdic-tions corresponded roughly with the hundreds). A man might have to pay considerably more than his female companion.⁴⁰ The usual fines for bondwomen were ordinarily no greater than those imposed for defamation (verbal assault), and, considering the basic economic and social environment, they were neither unwarranted nor especially burdensome. Moreover, they were probably supported by the com-munities in which they were imposed.

On an ordinary open-field manor with a demesne there was a staff of servants elected or appointed from among the unfree tenants. These

might include, in addition to the reeve, a hayward or *messor*, an autumn reeve, plowmen, shepherds, swineherds, cowherds, gooseherds, millers, butchers, smiths, carpenters, dairy maids, brewers, ponders, gardeners, and so on, depending on the economy of the manor and on the extent to which outside labor was hired for manorial services. The duties of these servants varied considerably from manor to manor. At times an obligation to serve in one of these capacities if necessary went with the tenure of a holding, or with that of a type of holding. Bond tenants with large holdings often owed extensive work services on the demesne lands in addition to rents, fewer services being demanded of smaller tenants, although rents and services among the same type of tenants might vary widely on the same manor, a fact that probably had something to do with the character of the land held. Free tenants, even substantial ones, often owed customary services in addition to their rents, and these might vary from supplying plows, mending park fences, or supervising harvests to furnishing a squire, or someone who could pass as a squire, for a certain number of days to a bishop. The community of the manor was linked to that of the shire by the reeve and by free tenants who attended county courts or performed jury services at the behest of the sheriff (except on ancient demesne), and by reeves and their committees of three others who reported to the jurors of royal justices.

We may conclude without too much exaggeration that the community of the manor, or of the vill or township where several manors shared a vill or where there was more than one vill on a manor was, in spite of the complexities of tenure, fairly well integrated, bound together by mutual interests both in agricultural production and in keeping the peace. Strenuous efforts were made to suppress contentiousness or "discord."⁴¹ But the plagues of 1349 and 1369 dealt a severe blow to community organization in many areas. Matters were not improved by French pillaging in the south during the later seventies, Scottish raids in the north, heavy taxes, the misbehavior of English soldiers at home, and raiders from Cheshire in neighboring shires.⁴² Meanwhile, the statutes of laborers were insufficient to curb a new spirit of enterprise in industry, especially in cloth-making, that attracted people of all kinds from the countryside. There is probably no simple explanation for the Revolt of 1381, although it is clear that it did represent a breakdown in community spirit and integrity.

The effects of the Black Death of 1349 varied from place to place, and it is difficult to determine whether subsequent unrest represented delayed reaction or was due to other circumstances. The manors of the Black Prince in Cornwall show few traces of relaxation of manorial discipline,⁴³ perhaps in part because of the wisdom of the Prince's council and in part because of the proximity of an established tin-mining industry that had for some time permitted an interchange between agrarian and industrial labor.⁴⁴ On the Cambridgeshire manors of Crowland Abbey no very disastrous social consequences resulted immediately,⁴⁵ and on the manor of Alciston (Battle Abbey) the disruption was slight and temporary.⁴⁶ On the other hand, on the manor of Manydown (Hampshire), a number of holdings fell into the hands of the lord (the prior of Winchester), and there was no real recovery until the 1360s.⁴⁷ At Cuxham (Oxfordshire), more than half of the half-virgates (holdings of about 15 acres) were untenanted in 1352, although by 1355 all the holdings were taken, sometimes by temporary tenants, and by 1377 the tenurial structure had settled down.⁴⁸ At Forncett (the earl of Norfolk), about a quarter of the free holdings and more than half of the customary holdings were unoccupied during the period from 1376 to 1378.⁴⁹ Members of the higher nobility seem to have retained their incomes more or less by leasing their demesnes.⁵⁰ The evidence is spotty, and it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. Many historians still maintain the view advanced by J. E. Thorold Rogers that the effects of the plague were economically beneficial.⁵¹

If economic conditions improved generally,⁵² several factors contributed to a breakdown in community life, a loosening of traditional *mores*, and a rise in crime. When demesnes were leased on a large scale and the size of individual holdings increased, as they did in many areas, the old organization centering around the manorial servants disappeared and customary works were replaced by higher rents. A demand for hired labor was created, stimulating rising wages attractive to those still settled in traditional manorial communities.⁵³ In some areas the plague and the events of subsequent years merely added impetus to a process that had already been under way,⁵⁴ but in any event, there was a very marked new spirit of individual initiative at the expense of community integrity in the countryside, often accompanied by an increase in trespass and violence. At Warboys (Ramsey Abbey) unrest is especially evident in the sixties, in the mid-seventies (generally a

gloomy and depressed period), and in the eighties after the Revolt.⁵⁵ This situation seems to have been fairly typical,⁵⁶ although some counties were more lawless than others. On some manors substantial free tenants became so powerful by the nineties that they could not be distrained for fines in their manorial courts.⁵⁷ Meanwhile the spiritual leadership of small communities suffered from the same difficulties as those that affected laymen. The errant behavior of chaplains especially became a real problem in the countryside.⁵⁸ Almost everyone wanted cash instead of payment in kind, and agricultural workers often demanded day work instead of employment by the year,⁵⁹ sought generous food allowances on working days, or where feasible took advantage of increasing opportunities for industrial work. For example, a town developed at Thaxted, so that by 1381 it housed 79 cutlers, as well as smiths, brewers, carpenters, and other tradesmen,⁶⁰ a situation that probably stimulated high agricultural wages on the manor.⁶¹ Plowmen seem to have been especially difficult to retain except at very high wages.⁶² Perhaps the most disruptive industry insofar as the agrarian labor market was concerned was the textile industry. Cloth-making had spread over the countryside during the thirteenth century, and fulling mills were erected in comparatively remote areas. After 1353 the cloth-making industry began to flourish, and exports increased steadily until 1369. But the upward trend resumed after the plague of that year, beginning in about 1379 and reaching a peak in the mid-nineties, to the great detriment of Flemish and Italian manufacturers.⁶³ By that time Essex and East Anglia enjoyed a brisk business in the manufacture of worsteds,⁶⁴ while Bristol became a flourishing port for the export of woolens. The trade not only offered opportunities for poor cottagers to supplement their incomes, but enabled more enterprising persons to become comparatively prosperous by working at or supervising the work of others in one or more stages in the process of cloth-making. Chaucer's Wife of Bath offers an exaggerated example of success of this kind,⁶⁵ and her *mores* characteristically show little concern either for the "commune profit" or for traditional ideals of order.

If we are to understand the "manorial" characters in the *General Prologue*, not to mention others in the tales, we should view them against the perspective of events during Chaucer's lifetime as well as in terms of the traditional Christian attitudes he embraced. Certain characteristics of these figures, not immediately apparent to us, would

have been transparent to members of Chaucer's audience, who we may safely assume were men about the royal court and their friends and were thoroughly familiar with manorial administration. Since Chaucer shows little sympathy for figures who are chiefly interested in money, other tangible assets, or lecherous self-satisfaction, we may safely assume that his ideas about manorial life, like his ideals concerning chivalric life, were conservative, and that he viewed the disruption of manorial communities for selfish ends with disfavor.

The first "manorial" character we meet in the *Prologue* is the Yeoman,⁶⁶ clearly a manorial servant, a forester whose presence as the Knight's only servant on his pilgrimage is an indication of his humility. We are not told much about him, just enough to exemplify the character of his lord. The Franklin is, however, described in more detail.⁶⁷ In the treatise *The Manner of Holding Courts* (1342) the word *franklin* is used for a freeholder who owes homage and fealty, a heriot consisting of an accoutred horse, and the wardship of his son.⁶⁸ Homans points out that such men owed suit at hundred courts,⁶⁹ and the evidence indicates that they attended county courts as well.⁷⁰ Chaucer's Franklin is a man of this kind who has expanded his holdings in the flourishing land market of the second half of the century to become a "worthy vavasour" and who has, at the same time, won for himself profitable offices in the shire. His expensive Epicurean tastes and his ostentation mark him as a self-seeking enemy of the old order. It is quite likely that Chaucer's audience would have seen the Wife of Bath as an essentially rural character whose substantial profits in the cloth industry enabled her to take very expensive pilgrimages⁷¹ for amusement rather than for penance, and to dress ostentatiously in expensive coverchiefs and hose of fine scarlet. Both the Franklin and the Wife were undoubtedly intended as amusing caricatures of persons whose views are dominated by a spirit of enterprising self-interest.

The Miller in the *Prologue* is a less elaborately drawn figure than the miller in the *Reeve's Tale*, but his gross physical features, reserved for low characters in the contemporary International Style, suggest strongly his villein status. His sword, his speech, and his wrestling (with its obvious iconological overtones) make him a striking if exaggerated exemplar of the contentiousness that plagued agrarian communities after 1349.⁷² It would be possible to amass a great deal of material concerning reeves, who were important manorial officers

upon whose efficiency and loyalty the welfare of the manor often depended, since they, together with the bailiffs who supervised them, were responsible for agricultural management, production, the buying and selling of livestock, produce, and supplies, and the rendering of annual accounts.⁷³ In addition, they sometimes appointed members of the staff of servants and accounted for customary works. Complaints about reeves vary from trivial misbehavior⁷⁴ to inefficiency, theft, and even extortion.⁷⁵ Chaucer's reeve, with his calculating efficiency, is at once a thief and a man who knows how to keep his fellow tenants in fear of him.⁷⁶ He shows no interest whatsoever in "commune profit"; on the contrary, he exploits his community for his own profit. Chaucer is obviously not seeking to describe a "typical reeve," but to exemplify the worst qualities of reeves who have no real fidelity either to their lords or to their communities.

Finally, a word should be said about the Parson and his brother the Plowman. If they are brothers literally, they are clearly both members of a peasant family. The peace rolls of the later fourteenth century reveal a surprising number of criminal parsons,⁷⁷ and many took advantage of opportunities to find comparatively easy and remunerative tasks in London. Chaucer's Parson, who is content with a small "suffisaunce," and who exhibits real concern for his parishioners, is an ideal figure who comments unfavorably by implication on numerous less worthy members of his calling. The obvious concern of his brother the Plowman for the welfare of his neighbors contrasts sharply with the self-seeking of many of his kind, who left their fellow-tenants and sought high pay at daily labor. Generally speaking, the loyalty of Chaucer's characters and their interest in community obligations were matters that would have registered at once in the minds of his audience, and this audience would also have been aware of criminal behavior in speech and deed that often escapes modern critics. It is time, I think, that Chaucerians began to consider not only the literary and intellectual traditions that underlay Chaucer's attitudes, but also the specific significance of those attitudes in his own society. It was, after all, this relevance that made his work vivid and often amusing to his own contemporaries. Departures from reason, whether that reason is moral or legal, are often ludicrous in a society where reason rather than feeling is considered to be the natural guide for conduct. The poet's delineations of greed, either for land or money, or even for

the Pardoner's coveted wool, cheese, wheat, and imaginary jolly wenches can be ludicrous and at the same time comment trenchantly on events in his own time.

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NOTES

1. See the quotation from Petrarch's *De Viris Illustribus* in Aldo S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Scipio and the "Africa"* (Baltimore, 1962), pp. 17-18.
2. See, e.g., Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale," in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1957), p. 234, ll. 259-68. (All line references are to this edition.) The idea is a consistent medieval commonplace.
3. Bertha Haven Putnam, *The Place in Legal History of Sir William Sharesnull* (Cambridge, 1950), p. 105. Sir John was the father of Edmund Stonor, whose surviving correspondence (*The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290-1483*, ed. Charles Lethbridge Kingford, Camden Society, 3rd ser., Vol. 29 [London, 1919]) affords specific glimpses of the activities of a fourteenth-century sheriff. Edmund's grandson was the ward of Thomas Chaucer, who was a friend of the family.
4. See John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Prologue, ll. 881 *ad fin.* The relationship between inner and outer disorder was a commonplace.
5. See H. J. Hewitt, *Mediaeval Cheshire*, Chetham Society, NS 88 (Manchester, 1929), pp. 52, 56.
6. For an example, see M. T. Pearman, *A History of the Manor of Bensington* (London, 1896), p. 33. Large freeholdings became more common late in our period.
7. For a demesne manor see Eleanor Searle, *Lordship and Community: Battle Abbey and Its Banlieu* (Toronto, 1974), esp. pp. 268-70. For another example in Hampshire, see J. S. Drew, "Manorial Accounts of St. Swithun's Priory, Winchester," in *Essays in Economic History*, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson, Vol. II (London, 1962), p. 15.
8. A series of essays on field systems in various parts of England is available in A. R. H. Baker and R. A. Butlin, eds., *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1973). In some areas the climate permitted only a single crop.

9. There is some evidence for an alternation between grass and arable at intervals of several years in Sussex on relatively poor soil, but the manor involved did not employ an open-field system. See Searle, *Lordship and Community*, pp. 273-75.
10. See Arthur G. Ruston and Denis Witney, *Hooton Pagnell* (New York, 1934), pp. 181-82. The propaganda efforts of Turnip Townshend after 1730 were not immediately successful.
11. Modern writers often refer vaguely to the "well-known" privileges of tenure on lands in ancient demesne. For a specific analysis, see Sir William Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, 3rd ed. (London, 1923), III, 263-64. For a just complaint in 1394 concerning violation of the privileges by the abbot of Abingdon (Berkshire), see I. S. Leadam and J. F. Baldwin, eds., *Select Cases Before the King's Council, 1243-1482*, Publications of the Selden Society, Vol. 35 (London, 1918), pp. ciii-civ and 82-85. Practical implications of tenure on ancient demesne are discussed by K. C. Newton, *The Manor of Writtle* (London, 1970), pp. 86-91.
12. See T. F. T. Plucknett, ed., *Year Books of Richard II: 13 Richard II* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. xxxii-xliii, 122-28. After Sir John's death the resident tenants obtained the fee in the manorial court of the bishop. The Common Bench refused to hear the case of Sir John's heir, who sought recovery, observing (p. 123), "In many manors there is the custom that those who are ncifs and villeins shall inherit, and that their heirs shall have their lands after their death, and that they may have an action within the manor to claim the fee simple, and so also those who hold at will."
13. John Smyth observed of Thomas III Lord Berkeley, "In the course of his whole life I seldome observe him to continue one whole yeare togeather at any one of his houses, but having many furnished hee easily removed (without removing)" (*The Lives of the Berkeleys* . . . , Vols. I and II of *The Berkeley MSS.*, ed. John Maclean [Gloucester, 1883], I, 301).
14. Subletting or transfer of land among villein tenants had been taking place since the twelfth century. See C. N. L. Brooke and M. M. Postan, eds., *Carte Nativorum*, Northamptonshire Record Society, Vol. 20 (Oxford, 1960), esp. p. xlix. Cf. M. M. Postan, "The Chronology of Labour Services," in W. E. Minchinton, ed., *Essays in Agrarian History*, Vol. I (Newton Abbot, 1968), p. 76; Marian K. Dale, ed., *Court Roll of Chalgrave Manor, 1278-1313*, Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, Vol. 28 (Streatley, Beds, 1950), pp. xxiii-iv, and, for a complex example, p. 15; R. H. Hilton, *Social Structure of Rural Warwickshire in the Middle Ages*, Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, No. 9 (Oxford, 1950), p. 19. An example from the manor of Palgrave, Suffolk, in 1357 appears in J. Z. Titow, *English Rural Society* (London, 1968), p. 163.
15. See, e.g., the general remarks of J. S. Furley, *City Government in Winchester from the Records of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1923), p. 147. On what was regarded as the moral basis for community integrity, see Susan Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977), p. 136.
16. An instance is cited by Sidney O. Addy, *Church and Manor* (London, 1913; rpt. New York, 1970), pp. 270-71.
17. See, e.g., *Robert of Brunne's "Handlyng Synne"*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, OS 119, 123 (London, 1901, 1903), p. 70, ll. 2445-634. Cf. Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale," *Works*, p. 252, ll. 750-64, 773-76.
18. S. F. C. Milsom (*Historical Foundations of the Common Law* [London, 1969], p. 8) observes acutely that "feudalism was not a system," but a word used to describe a society organized by dependent tenures.
19. Dorothy Oschinsky, *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 291-92.
20. Oschinsky, pp. 398-99.
21. Oschinsky, p. 311. Students of manorial court rolls are familiar with numerous instances in which fines against an individual are mitigated or forgiven entirely *quia pauper*.
22. See, e.g., the description of John Somery in R. H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society* (London, 1966), p. 42.
23. John Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 127; cf. pp. 116, 117, 128.
24. In Kent and in the Rape of Hastings in Sussex there were "lathe courts" sharing some functions of hundred courts and county courts. See Elinor Joan Courthope and Beryl E. R. Formoy, eds., *Lathe Court Rolls and Views of Frankpledge in the Rape of Hastings*, Sussex Record Society, Vol. 37 (Lewes, 1934), esp. pp. xv-xxiii.
25. Hundred courts continued to meet in the twentieth century in some areas. See F. J. C. Hearnshaw, *Leet Jurisdiction in England*, Publications of the Southampton Record Society, Vol. 3 (Southampton, 1908), p. 255.
26. For a convenient record of a court with a View, see Titow, *English Rural Society*, pp. 169-72. A list of articles of inquiry at the View appears in Titow, pp. 189-90. Such articles might vary from time to time and from place to place.
27. On the estates of Crowland Abbey the tithingmen, who might be free or unfree, represented the "whole homage" in the manorial courts, executed court injunc-

- tions, undertook inquisitions, and elected the manorial servants: reeve, bailiff, collector, hayward, ale-tasters, etc. The tithingmen were responsible for the behavior of those elected. See Frances M. Page, *The Estates of Crowland Abbey* (Cambridge, 1934), pp. 67-70.
28. An extortionate steward might find himself before the royal justices. Thus at the View on the manor of Edgeware held annually on May 1, the tithingmen chose three men for the office of reeve from whom one was selected by the lord or his steward. But in 1392 the tithingmen refused to nominate the man preferred by the steward, John Brook. Brook fined them 20s. He also doubled some assessments decided upon by the regular assessors selected by the reeve. He was distrained by the sheriff and brought before the King's Bench. See G. O. Sayles, ed., *Select Cases in the Court of King's Bench*, Publications of the Selden Society, Vol. 88 (London, 1971), pp. 87-88.
 29. G. W. Kitchin, *The Manor of Manydown* (London, 1895), pp. 17-18.
 30. W. H. D. Longstaffe and John Booth, eds., *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, Surtees Society, Vol. 82 (Durham, 1889), p. xxv. Examples are offered on the following pages.
 31. C. S. Orwin and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1954), pp. 173-74.
 32. George C. Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), p. 81.
 33. See Homans, p. 56, for an example, and, for a general statement, Joan Thirsk, "Field Systems in the East Midlands," in Baker and Butlin, *Studies in Field Systems*, p. 232. For a complex example, see Joan Wake, "Communitas villae," *English Historical Review*, 36 (1922), 406-13.
 34. W. O. Ault, "Village By-Laws by Common Consent," *Speculum*, 29 (1954), 394.
 35. W. O. Ault, *Open-Field Husbandry and the Village Community*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, NS, Vol. 55, Pt. 7 (Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 40-54.
 36. Page, *Estates of Crowland Abbey*, p. 133. Merchet varied a great deal, probably in relation to the land involved. Ada E. Levett (*Studies in Manorial History* [Oxford, 1938], pp. 237-38) regarded it as a registration fee. The relationship between merchet and land is convincingly argued by Eleanor Searle, "Seigniorial Control of Women's Marriage: The Antecedents and Function of Merchet in England," *Past & Present*, 82 (1979), 3-43.
 37. R. H. Hilton, "Peasant Movements in England Before 1381," in *Essays in Economic History*, II, 76.
 38. *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. 60, 125, 26, 27. Cf. W. O. Ault, ed., *Court Rolls of the Abbey of Ramsey and of the Honor of Clare* (New Haven, 1928), p. 196.
 39. J. W. Walker, ed., *Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield*, Vol. V: 1322-1331, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, Vol. 109 (Leeds, 1945), p. vii. Here the fines for leyrwite were variously 4d., 6d., and 12d.
 40. See Page, *Crowland Abbey*, pp. 59, 373-74, 388, 416.
 41. Sometimes all the members of a group or vill were fined for the intransigence of any one of them. Thus a bylaw of Houghton (Ramsey Abbey) stipulated that if any customary tenant entered the grain of another to destroy it, all customary tenants would be fined 6d. each (Ault, *Court Rolls*, pp. 254, 259).
 42. Cf. Mary Margaret Taylor, ed., *Some Sessions of the Peace in Cambridgeshire in the Fourteenth Century*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society, Octavo Publications, No. 55 (Cambridge, 1942), p. xvii.
 43. Hatcher, *Rural Economy*, p. 136.
 44. It is true that the tin market suffered immediately after the plague but recovered later in the century. It may be relevant that a large number of tenants held leased lands that were granted to the highest bidder every seven years, thus introducing what Hatcher calls a "free market" element into the agrarian economy.
 45. Page, *Crowland Abbey*, pp. 89, 120-25.
 46. Judith A. Brent, "Alciston Manor in the Later Middle Ages," *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 106 (1968), p. 95.
 47. Kitchin, *The Manor of Manydown*, pp. 61-63.
 48. P. D. A. Harvey, *A Medieval Oxfordshire Village: Cuxham*, Oxford Historical Series, 2nd ser. (London, 1965), pp. 136-38.
 49. R. H. Hilton, *The Decline of Serfdom* (London, 1969), p. 34. Page (*Crowland Abbey*, pp. 152-53) notes a scarcity of tenants beginning in the 1390s.
 50. G. A. Holmes, *The Estates of the Higher Nobility in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 114-17. A decline in income in the 1380s seems to have been common. On some manors like Cuxham profits declined markedly. They were

£34/12/6 in 1343-44, but when the manor was farmed during 1361-68 it brought only £20/0/0, dropping to £18/10/0 in 1395-1400. See Harvey, *Medieval Oxfordshire Village*, pp. 94-95.

51. J. E. Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England, 1259-1793*, Vol. I (Oxford, 1866), p. 61. Cf. J. Z. Titow, "Some Differences between Manors and Their Effects on the Condition of the Peasantry in the Thirteenth Century," in *Essays in Agrarian History*, I, 39, n. 2; F. R. H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1970), p. 34. The last notes "a stronger competition for women and a more civilized attitude toward them." Cf. Elizabeth Chapin Furber, ed., *Essex Sessions of the Peace 1351, 1377-79*, Essex Archaeological Society, Occasional Publications, No. 3 (Colchester, 1953), p. 6.
52. The evidence concerning prices is conflicting and probably needs more detailed study. Efforts to control prices were notoriously unsuccessful in some areas. Striking examples are given by Nora Ritchie, "Labour Conditions in Essex in the Reign of Richard II," in *Essays in Economic History*, II, 91-111. At Nottingham in 1395 the tithingmen made blanket condemnations of bakers, butchers, fishers, taverners, poulterers, tanners, shoemakers, cooks, hostellers, fullers, shoemakers, and dyers for overpricing. See William H. Stevenson, ed., *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, Vol. I (London, 1882), pp. 269-73. On the other hand, prices of consumables are said to have risen until the seventies and then to have declined until about 1390. See E. H. Phelps-Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables, Compared with Builders' Wage-Rates," in *Essays in Economic History*, II, 183.
53. The leasing of demesnes proceeded unevenly and at varying terms. Castle Combe (Wiltshire) was leased to the tenants collectively for £5 in 1352: see E. M. Carus-Wilson, "Evidence of Industrial Growth on Some Fifteenth-Century English Manors," in *Essays in Economic History*, II, 159-60. At Thaxted (Essex), except for a few acres of mowing, demesne work for the tenants ceased in 1362, so that the manor had a monetary economy: see Newton, *Thaxted*, p. 25. For phases of leasing at Marley (Battle Abbey), see Searle, *Lordship and Community*, p. 324. The new farmers became prominent members of the community: see F. R. H. Du Boulay, *The Lordship of Canterbury* (New York, 1966), pp. 140-42 and 197. Leasing was stimulated in the fifties, the sixties, and then again in the eighties. For the leasing policies of Thomas IV Lord Berkeley, see Smyth, *The Lives of the Berkeleys*, II, 5-6, although here reeves were still being chosen at manorial courts in the early seventeenth century.
54. See Marjorie Morgan, *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1968), pp. 115-17.
55. J. A. Raftis, *Warboys* (Toronto, 1974), pp. 220-21; and see Edwin B. DeWindt, *Land and People in Holywell-cum-Needlingworth*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts, 22 (Toronto, 1972), Ch. iv.
56. See the cases in *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. 36-37 and 145-47. During the sixties tenants became sensitive about being called "natives" or "rustics" (i.e., serfs). Thus in 1364 in the village of East Raynton a tenant could be fined the enormous sum of 20s. for calling another a *neif* (*Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, p. 33).
57. Page, *Estates of Crowland Abbey*, p. 149; J. A. Raftis, "An English Village After the Black Death," *Mediaeval Studies*, 29 (1967), 175.
58. See Elisabeth Guernsey Kimball, ed., *Rolls of the Warwickshire and Coventry Sessions of the Peace, 1377-1397*, Dugdale Society, 16 (1939), p. lxxviii. On the impoverishment of chantries after 1350 see K. L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 93. Chaplains were frequently indicted for assault, rape, theft, and even murder: see E. G. Kimball, ed., *Rolls of the Gloucestershire Sessions of the Peace 1361-1398*, Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society, Vol. 62 for 1940 (Kendal, 1942), pp. 65, 66, 72, 75, 78, 87, 115-16, 117-18, 119, 122-23, 124-25, 130, 154. See also Rosamund Sillem, ed., *Records of Some Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire, 1360-1375*, Lincoln Record Society, 30 (Hereford, 1936), pp. 4-5, 160; E. G. Kimball, ed., *Records of Some Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire 1381-1396*, Vol. I, Lincoln Record Society, Vol. 49 (Hereford, 1955), p. 74; Vol. II, Lincoln Record Society, Vol. 56 (Lincoln, 1962), pp. 37, 46; Charles Gross, *Select Cases from the Coroners' Rolls, A.D. 1265-1413*, Publications of the Selden Society, Vol. 9 (London, 1896), pp. 52-53, 69, 93-94, 124. Vicars and rectors were not above similar kinds of activity, and even a bishop, Henry of Wakefield (Worcester), whom Chaucer undoubtedly knew as Keeper of the Wardrobe and Treasurer, found himself indicted for rape. It is not actually surprising that ecclesiastics suffered from community disruption as well as laymen.
59. Cf. Ritchie, "Labour Conditions," p. 93.
60. K. C. Newton, *Thaxted*, pp. 20-23.
61. Ritchie, p. 95. Prices were generally high in the area.
62. Ritchie, p. 98. At Marley (Battle Abbey) plowmen received £1/17/0 in 1309-22 with a grain allowance; but by 1384-85 they were getting £3/0/0 with grain (Searle, *Lordship and Community*, p. 308).
63. E. M. Carus-Wilson, "Trends in the Export of English Woolens in the Fourteenth Century," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 3 (1950-51), 162-79. This is an extremely important article.

64. Furber, *Essex Sessions*, p. 2.
65. E. M. Carus-Wilson ("Trends," p. 177) calls her properly "a west-country clothier." Bath was convenient to the export town of Bristol. The prominence of women among clothmakers in Yorkshire evidently gave rise to a certain amount of male envy. See Herbert Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries*, Oxford Historical and Literary Studies, Vol. 10 (Oxford, 1920), pp. 38-39. A similar situation may have prevailed elsewhere. For further information on the Wife and the cloth trade, see D. W. Robertson, Jr., "And for my Land thus Hastow Mordred Me?": Land Tenure, the Cloth Industry, and the Wife of Bath," *Chaucer Review*, 14 (1980), 403-20.
66. I have discussed the significance of the word *yeoman* in "Some Disputed Chaucerian Terminology," *Speculum*, 52 (1977), 577-78. Here it may be added that it is used to describe members of a peasant aristocracy of prominent villeins on the manor of Littleport (Ely) in F. W. Maitland and W. P. Baildon, *The Court Baron*, Publications of the Selden Society, Vol. IV (London, 1891), p. 113. An example is afforded by one in 1324 who was a chief pledge, a constant juror, an affeior, and a reeve. He held seven tenements. Cf. DeWindt, *Holywell*, pp. 159-60. Manorial yeomen were not freemen in the fourteenth century.
67. I have sought to examine the Franklin's career and his *Tale* in "Chaucer's Franklin and his Tale," *Costerus*, NS 1 (1974), 1-26.
68. Maitland and Baildon, *The Court Baron*, pp. 103-04.
69. Homans, *English Villagers*, pp. 248-50.
70. See William Henry Hart, *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, Rolls Series [No. 33] (London, 1863-67), III, 77.
71. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem were especially costly and could be afforded only by the wealthy. See Dorothy Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1971), p. 125.
72. His behavior was criminal and might have brought him before the royal justices. See Bertha H. Putnam, *Proceedings Before the Justices of the Peace . . . Edward III to Richard III* (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), p. 112.
73. The agricultural manuals devote considerable attention to reeves. See the *Seneschauy* (ca. 1275) in Oschinsky, pp. 275-81. Walter of Henley emphasizes the need for loyalty among reeves (Oschinsky, p. 340). On the manors of the prior of St. Peter's, Gloucester, an elaborate treatise was provided that the reeve and the hayward were supposed to read, or have read to them, at least once a month outlining their duties in detail. See Hart, *Historia et Cartularium . . . Gloucestriae*, pp. 213-21. There is a full if somewhat skeptical discussion of reeve in J. S. Drew, "Manorial Accounts," pp. 12-30. N. S. B. Gras and E. C. Gr. (The Economic and Social History of the English Village: Crawley, Hampshire, A.D. 909-1928 [Cambridge, 1930; rpt. New York, 1969]) print a long series of reeve accounts. For the fourteenth century, see pp. 239-93. They observe (p. 24) "fe instances of malfeasance of office." An excellent example with a convenient glossary from the late fourteenth century is provided by N. W. Alcock, "An Ea Devon Manor (Bishop's Clyst) in the Later Middle Ages," *Devonshire Association Reports and Transactions*, 102 (1970), 176-87. The privileges of reeves appear often among manorial bylaws. See W. D. Peckham, trans. and ed., *Thirteen Customs of the Sussex Manors of the Bishop of Chichester*, Sussex Record Society, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1925), p. 122.
74. A late-thirteenth-century reeve was accused of being "too long at the fair"—"*nim diu ad nundinas de Worth*." See R. B. Pugh, ed., *Court Rolls of the Wiltshire Manors: Adam de Stratton*, Wiltshire Record Society, Vol. 24 for 1968 (Devizes, 1970), p. 86.
75. E.g., Morgan, *Abbey of Bec*, pp. 65-66; Page, *Crowland Abbey*, p. 75; Putnam, *Proceedings*, p. 79.
76. For an example of a reeve whose trespasses were concealed by his fellow tenants until after he left office, probably because they feared him, see P. D. A. Harvey, *Manorial Records of Cuxham* (London, 1976), p. 669.
77. E.g., Putnam, *Proceedings*, pp. 50-52, 80, 120, 213; Sillem, *Records . . . 1360-1375*, pp. 55, 205, 209; Kimball, *Records . . . 1381-1396*, I, 9, 33, 37; Kimball, *Rolls, Warwickshire and Coventry*, pp. 96-97. These are simply examples.