

FEUDALISM AND THE HUNDRED YEARS WAR

Nicholas Wright

No-one who makes a study of the Hundred Years War can for long remain ignorant of the vastly different approaches to the subject pursued by French and by English-speaking historians. Although the term "Hundred Years War" was a mid-nineteenth century French invention, imported into England by Edward Freeman,¹ and although the classic work on the subject was written, nearly forty years ago, by a Sorbonne professor, Edouard Perroy (who had spent many years teaching and researching in Britain),² there is a sense in which the Hundred Years War is now the preserve of English-speaking historians. With very few exceptions, English³ historians have tended to concentrate upon the political and military features of the relationship between England and France during the late Middle Ages, and have made of them the defining characteristics of the Hundred Years War. The English still occupy the deserted battlefields of Crécy, Poitiers and Agincourt; the campaign-trails of Edward III, the Black Prince, John of Gaunt, Henry V; and parts of the lost provinces of the Plantagenet empire: Malcolm Vale in Gascony, Christopher Allmand in Normandy, Michael Jones in Brittany. Theirs is essentially a "view from the top": from inside the councils of princes where the grand strategies were worked out, and in the company of the military aristocracy as it implemented, or failed to implement, these strategies. The French, on the other hand, have tended, at least since the time of Michelet, to regard the Anglo-French wars as simply one element in a much wider crisis of late-medieval French society. In the feverish days of the late-nineteenth century (and occasionally today), this crisis was expressed in terms of the birth-pangs of the French nation; more recently, it has been expressed in economic terms: thus Boutruche and his "crisis of a society", or Bois and his "crisis of feudalism".⁴ Perroy, it seems to me, was infected a little by the nineteenth-century nationalistic fever as he wrote *The Hundred Years War* while playing, (to use

his own words), "an exciting game of hide-and-seek with the Gestapo".⁵ But, within a few years, he allowed himself to be brought back into line when he wrote that the Hundred Years War was "not very murderous" and that it would have had no great effect on the French people but for the massive burden of royal taxation and other fiscal measures.⁶

It would be mischievous and misleading to suggest that Hundred Years War scholarship has been shaped by a crude xenophobia: exulting in national triumphs (if rather faded ones) and concealing national humiliations in the vast spaces of "total" history. English historians, with Kenneth Fowler prominent amongst them, have often emphasized the great complexity and intense localization of so much of the Anglo-French wars on French soil, where glory was to be found, if at all, on a personal, rather than on a national, basis.⁷ Rodney Hilton, when he does turn his attention briefly to the Hundred Years War, relegates it to a junior rôle in a group of "social crises" of the late Middle Ages which he calls, in a thoroughly French (and Marxist) fashion, the crisis of feudalism.⁸ On the other side of the Channel, Philippe Contamine has minutely examined the armies of the Valois kings which Michelet considered too feeble and corrupt to be worthy of anything more than casual vituperation in any national history.⁹ Nevertheless, the division of labour between French and English historians which encourages the English to study the war without much of the French socio-economic context, and the French to study the socio-economic context without much of the war, - however profitable it may be for the ultimate synthesis, - has proved to be somewhat unfruitful in terms of cross-Channel scholarly dialogue today. The frontier-territory in which shots are still occasionally exchanged is where the French social historians meet the English political and military specialists in the borderlands of fifteenth-century Normandy. Here the English occupying forces had been busily hanging as bandits persons whom Charles VII's supporters then, and many French historians now, claimed as freedom-fighters against the English oppressors. The English, without recent experience of foreign occupation, are inclined to a less generous view of the Norman brigands.¹⁰

Marc Bloch, who, on 16 July 1944, paid the supreme price of enemy occupation, and whose *Feudal Society* is the unifying theme of this conference, must accept some of the responsibility for these radically different trends in Hundred Years War scholarship. The revolution in French historiography which he and his colleagues and successors on the *Annales d'Histoire Economique et Sociale* have brought about in France has been so complete that the pre-revolutionary aristocracy (as it were) of Delisle, Delachenal, Dupont-Ferrier, Denifle, and Perroy (in his unregenerated state), has been all but swept away. The English historians, especially of the Hundred Years War, have maintained a Burkean distance from the violent events taking place on the other side of the Channel. They have maintained an interest in

political decisions and military events and obstinately attached themselves to the ideology of the *ancien regime*.

The theme of the present paper, "Feudalism and the Hundred Years War", illustrates this historiographical divide very clearly. With a few exceptions (such as Postan and Hilton) English historians (unlike their students) have always been more comfortable with the precise and legalistic definition of feudalism associated with the name of F.L. Ganshof (*Qu'est-ce que la féodalité ?*) than with the rambling eclecticism of Marc Bloch. Their "feudalism" concerns kings and aristocracies exclusively: the legal relationships which bound them and their lands together and which hurled them into violent opposition. Feudalism, in this sense, together with the code of chivalry which was, in many ways, its extension into the realm of art and ideas, helps to explain a great deal of the posturing and something of the motivations of the kings of England and of France, and of the aristocracies which so enthusiastically served them, during this long succession of wars. It is true that "feudalism" in its pristine Ganshofian sense serves to explain little more than the rhetoric in English and French war-propaganda during the Hundred Years War. Its golden age, as Ganshof observed, was past. But if we allow (and Bernard Guenée thinks that we should not)¹¹ the so-called Bastard Feudalism, represented by the indentured retainers of the military captains of the Hundred Years War and the princely orders of chivalry, such as the Garter and the Golden Fleece, as natural extensions of primitive feudalism into the vastly more complicated world of the late Middle Ages, then we are brought to the very heart of the Hundred Years War as English historians portray it.¹² The military aristocracy and their followings are the centre of interest.

To the extent that the economic interpretation of feudalism by French historians of the late Middle Ages obliges them to observe the aristocracies of the Hundred Years War period, not only as warlords, but as landlords too, it is undoubtedly closer to Marc Bloch than the English emphasis on the military aristocracy alone. But, as Postan remarked in his foreword to the English translation of Bloch's *Feudal Society*, the author's scope "did not restrict him to economic phenomena, to the mere business of earning and spending, or to those social problems which Marxists would classify as 'social relations of production' ".¹³ One can only speculate as to how Bloch's *Feudal Society* might have treated the Hundred Years War if its momentum had carried it beyond the thirteenth century. It would certainly have drawn more attention to the social crisis of late-medieval France than those whose focus is on a rampant military aristocracy who found in the Hundred Years War, not crisis, but opportunity. But it would also have been forced by its own logic to recognize in the France of the Hundred Years War, not the moribund feudal society of the neo-Marxist historians, but an extraordinary late flowering of primitive feudalism. This present paper seeks to show how the Hundred Years War might be understood better when viewed

in the context of French feudal society, as understood by Marc Bloch, and which combines something of, with something more than, the "aristocratic" and the "economic" interpretations which are currently fashionable.

The social and economic conditions of France during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries represent not so much a logical continuation of Bloch's "second feudal age" in which the nobility's political independence and arbitrary authority were being eroded from above by a powerful Capetian monarchy, and from below by a self-confident and assertive peasantry and bourgeoisie with money to purchase an end to arbitrary lordship, but rather a reversion to the conditions which gave birth to feudalism itself, in the "first feudal age" of the ninth and tenth centuries. Marc Bloch's first feudal age was characterized by a "great and universal decline in population".¹⁴ So too was France in the late Middle Ages. In eastern Normandy, which is Guy Bois' area of study, the drop in population between 1347 and 1442 meant that "where about ten people had once lived, there were now only three".¹⁵ During the first feudal age the general insecurity of life "induced men to draw nearer to each other", into "aggregations" of people living "cheek by jowl" but separated from others by empty spaces: the wilderness enveloped and encroached upon these villages and upon the arable land in their immediate vicinity.¹⁶ Jean de Venette in the fourteenth century, and Thomas Basin in the fifteenth, are nowhere more lyrical than when they wrote of the encroachment of wilderness upon the once-productive fields of France: "The eye of man was no longer rejoiced by the accustomed sight of green pastures and fields charmingly coloured by the growing grain, but rather saddened by the looks of the nettles and thistles springing up on every side".¹⁷ We now know, too, that the dramatic fall in the population of late-medieval France was not reflected in a proportionate abandonment of villages: a very strong indication that the general insecurity of life then, as in the first feudal age, "induced men to draw nearer to each other" and to abandon the peripheral areas of cultivation for the more productive areas immediately surrounding the villages.¹⁸ Even before we examine in detail the impact on the French countryside of what was often portrayed at the time as the "barbarian invasions" of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we should be aware of some of the general similarities between that society and the Carolingian society which reeled before the Viking invaders four centuries earlier.

Let us begin by acknowledging that the aristocratic bias of many of the English accounts of the Hundred Years War reflects a fundamental reality: that the war essentially belonged to the Anglo-French aristocracy. This small group, hardly more than three-per-cent of the total population, provided the war's leadership and direction;¹⁹ it ensured that the war continued almost indefinitely because it permitted the fulfilment of the noble ideal of the warrior while channeling a large proportion of the profits of war, in wages, ransoms, and booty, to boost its dwindling

traditional revenues from land;²⁰ it established the rules by which the war was fought, and bore the brunt of actual combat.²¹ If the Hundred Years War could be described as a series of battles in which rich prisoners were taken, of assaults on towns which yielded massive booties, and of military campaigns in which soldiers might have expected all of these profits in addition to their wages, we might be justified in thinking (after due acknowledgement of the rôle of the common soldiers) that the war itself was a thoroughly aristocratic affair. Innocent non-combatants may have suffered during the sack of towns, or by being caught up in the destructive passage of an army on campaign, but they would have to be regarded as war's tragic waste-products rather than part of its living substance. A war, however, which lasted for more than one hundred years and which consisted largely of uneasy peace rather than of active war-making, cannot be so described.²² Rather it was a way of life: a habit of violence and the expectation thereof which grew and flourished in all classes of society in the long shadows of the warring sovereigns of England and of France, and which became part of the very social fabric of France. In a world given over to violence and the expectation of violence a warrior class may be expected to do well, just as it did during the turbulence of Marc Bloch's first feudal age. That is not to say, however, that the war is any more fully comprehended by a detailed study of that warrior-caste than was Marc Bloch's feudal society. War in the Middle Ages, as Jean-Philippe Genet has recently reminded us, was not an accidental disorder, but a natural product of a society organized for war.²³ What is true for the Middle Ages generally is doubly true for France in the late Middle Ages when war had become endemic.

The soldiers of the Hundred Years War were as heterogeneous as the wider, male, society whence they came and into which they were finally absorbed. They included kings, princes, dukes, counts, viscounts, barons; occasionally bishops and archbishops. They included knights banneret and knights bachelor, squires banneret and simple squires, who, though vastly different in social status, private wealth and military rank, were united by their noble style of warfare and by their sense of caste. Beneath them, and always subject to their orders, were the common soldiers who normally fought on foot: the archers, crossbowmen, sergeants, *pillars* and *brigands*. These common soldiers ranged from the thoroughly professional foreign mercenaries, such as the Genoese crossbowman who served in the French armies, to the criminal vagabonds who drifted in and out of service in order to secure a royal pardon, and as they found masters to employ them as varlets and *pillars*. Their only common feature was their non-noble style of warfare. Cutting across these horizontal lines which divided the soldiers of the Hundred Years War according to their social and military status were the vertical ones of allegiance. There were moments during that long war, especially during the fragile peace of the 1360s, when companies of soldiers appeared on the

scene, apparently owing allegiance to no sovereign, and they were called the Free Companies. Even in this period, however, there were few soldiers who did not range themselves, however loosely, behind one or other of the warring sovereigns: the kings of France, of England, and of Navarre. A man-at-arms who refused to acknowledge even such a rudimentary form of allegiance and loyalty was thereby repudiating the aristocratic, "feudal", mores to which his military bearing might otherwise have gained him access. He might even find himself on trial for his life as was the melancholy experience of the *routier* captain, Mérigot Marchès, as he faced the stern judges of the Chatelet in July 1391.²⁴ A common man whose armed service was acknowledged by no sovereign was, of course, a brigand and the foe of all authority.

The soldiers of the Hundred Years War may also be distinguished by the military strategies which they were putting into effect. Soldiers who fought on a more or less continuous basis must have been familiar with at least two strategies which radically affected their war-experience: the strategy of maximum destruction in order to punish and cripple an enemy, on the one hand,²⁵ and the strategy of protection of "friendly" territory, on the other. To a certain degree, this was the difference between service in a field army as it passed into territory which was subject to the enemy, and service in a garrison which owed protection to the villages in its *ressort* in return for their material support.²⁶ The army whose primary strategy was destruction was a mercifully rare phenomenon in late-medieval France, although any army on the move must have been an object of acute suspicion by friend and foe alike. Its supply problems, akin to those of feeding an average-sized town, were rarely solved by normal market activity and often prompted expedients which were indistinguishable from the excesses of an enemy. "Even the English if they had arrived in France could not have done more harm than the French *routes* did there" refers to Charles VI's army of 1386,²⁷ but it was a very common complaint. A much more typical feature of the Hundred Years War than the army on campaign was the highly localized and relatively static warfare of garrisons and of sieges, in which soldiers had moved into a situation of *de facto* lordship in their area of operation. This was the face of the Anglo-French wars with which soldiers and civilians were most familiar, but its vast complexity and its often very tenuous connection with the grand strategies of kings and councils make it a thoroughly unfamiliar face to us. So unfamiliar indeed that the great historian of the Hundred Years War, Edouard Perroy, could claim that the war was "peu meurtrière".²⁸

This relatively static warfare, in and around local strong-points, was the daily fare of the several thousand soldiers who made their living from war in France: the men who, with the Bascot de Mauléon, greeted news of the treaty of Brétigny with dismay, or who might, like Sir John Hawkwood, have reacted sharply to the innocent greeting "Peace be with you".²⁹ These were the

men who gave a terrible continuity to the Hundred Years War on French soil, and although they were as anxious as any to be recruited by one or other of the warring sovereigns into the field armies which fought great battles and sacked rich towns, they could not rely on such occasional paid work which might come their way, at best, three times in one decade.³⁰

The warfare of garrisons which lived off the countryside in the vicinity of their stronghold, which received little or no wages from any public authority, and which fought tiny and forgotten wars against neighbouring garrisons, is best described by that experienced warrior of the latter part of the Hundred Years War, Jean de Beuil. The first chapter of *Le Jouvencel* describes how the author approached the fortresses of Luc and Verset through a countryside made desolate by the constant struggle for mastery between their two garrisons.³¹ We may assume that the pitiful garrisons of these dilapidated fortresses (or, rather, the garrisons upon which these fictional ones were modelled), professed a fierce loyalty to one or other of the warring sovereigns. But the military officers of these very sovereigns, who may or may not have been aware of their existence, certainly did not express their awareness in the tangible form of wages. "The great and famous quarrels which arise from the opposition of rich and powerful men spawn noises and dissensions between poor men over trifles, and all because no-one wishes to sacrifice his rights."³² It was from unpromising beginnings such as these that a certain threadbare young gentleman, Le Jouvencel, whose first experience of war was in stealing a cow belonging to the captain of Crathor, made his meteoric ascent to high command within the royal armies. When Le Jouvencel himself has become royal lieutenant in Crathor, delighting in talk about the justice of the French king's cause and about the noble calling of arms, he listens attentively and approvingly to the old captain of Crathor as he advises the taking of "tribute" from the king's subjects in the region, "from which we are assigned our proper wages."³³ Lest there be any doubt about the exact meaning of this reference to wages in the form of tribute, the captain dispels all ambiguity:

If it please the king, our lord, to supply us with victuals and money to sustain us, we will serve him in al his enterprises and obey all his orders - as indeed we must do - without levying or exacting anything from the inhabitants of the countryside here. If, however, other affairs, or false counsel, prevent him from provisioning us or paying us, we ourselves must raise victuals and finance both from persons in our own obedience and frp, eme,oes. as reasonably as we can. We will take tribute and *appatissemens* from our adversaries, and as much as we can. From those of our own side we will demand as modest a collection as we can, telling them that their contributions will guarantee them against everybody.³⁴

It will come as no surprise to those familiar with the

hand-to-mouth methods by which kings raised revenue in the Middle Ages, and with the ramshackle bureaucracy responsible for its disbursement to military captains, that it "pleased" the king very rarely to sustain his scattered garrisons with victuals and money, and that it "pleased" him very much to have them find such victuals and money where they could. The future Charles V, when regent, sent letters to the captain of Étampes in 1358 authorizing him to live off the countryside because he had no wages: "Because the aforesaid captain and his men have no wages from us, we have granted by our said letters full licence and authority to take from the countryside ... all manner of victuals needful for men-at-arms".³⁵ From the point of view of the regent and his captains, it was both necessary and reasonable that in time of crisis the public authority should allow its officers directly to expropriate the king's taxes, rather than rely upon the collection of a *taille* and its disbursement through the treasurers of wars. An agent of the Datini business empire, however, expressed the way local people tended to view this licence to plunder: "it seems to us that their soldiers do more harm to those who are subject to them than they ever did to those who refused obedience, and all because they cannot obtain their pay".³⁶ There were, of course, exceptions. The English garrisons of Calais, and the Calais March, during the fourteenth century were financed almost entirely by the English Exchequer,³⁷ and the English garrisons in Normandy during Bedford's regency were substantially, though by no means completely, financed from taxes voted by the Norman Estates. Elsewhere, "Crathor rules" applied almost universally, and all but the most privileged captains in royal service lived off the tribute paid to them by "friendly" non-combatants in payment for their own protection, and off the ransoms of "enemy" non-combatants who had acquired enemy-status by seeking protection from the "wrong" people. Thus emerged a formula for oppression which covered all possible contingencies. The word "contributions" which was the delicate term used by the captain of Crathor in *Le Jouvencel* to describe protection payments may have been viewed with the same irony which this cruel euphemism received during the Thirty Years War in the pages of Grimmelshausen. In Grimmelshausen's famous vision of the Tree of War, the "higher folk" who inhabited the upper branches of the tree, hacked at the peasants who were at its roots with knives called "war-contributions". But, "if the money would not out, then did the commissaries so handle them with rods (which thing they call military execution) that sighs came from their heart, tears from their eyes, blood from their nails, and the marrow from their bones".³⁸

The more successful the garrison was in extending its sway over the villages of the surrounding countryside, the more it relied upon protection-money for its support, and the less it relied upon ransoms (*appatissemens*) from villages in enemy territory and the booty which came from them in war-prizes. The frontier

between English territory and French territory may have been clear enough to the garrisons of Luc and Verset: they could almost see it from their crumbling battlements. But for the great captains of the teeming garrisons of Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte in the early-1370s, there was no tower of the castle high enough for them to survey all of the 263 parishes which paid dearly for their protection; nor, a decade or so later, could the captain of Brest perceive, at any one moment, the line in West Finisterre which separated his 120 parishes from those of another captain.³⁹ If the *ressort* of the castle of Luc may be compared to the modest fief of an impoverished squire who needed to be constantly active in war in order to supplement his income, that of the castle of Saint-Sauveur may be compared to a great barony whose owner-occupier lived comfortably off the revenues of his estates, and who could not be removed, even by his own lord, without ample compensation or a successful assault. Indeed, the English captains of Saint-Sauveur in the 1360s and of Brest in the 1370s belonged to the new higher aristocracy of military talent which had been elevated from modest backgrounds by conspicuous service to the English Crown: Sir John Chandos, Hugh Calverley, Robert Knowles.

The distinction which the captain of Crathor made, in *Le Jouvencel*, between *appatissemens* extracted from adversaries and contributions demanded from "those of our own side" was a hazy one even in the purely theoretical sense. How many *appatissemens* (collective ransoms) did a village have to pay before it could be considered to be "on the same side" as those who received them? For all practical purposes, however, there must have been no distinction at all. The money and goods extorted from the inhabitants of the villages which surrounded a fortress was protection-money in both the literal and pejorative senses of that term. The Bretons who occupied three fortresses in the Nièvre in 1358 and 1359 were receiving money, "fat, cheeses, eggs, and other victuals and necessities" from the local people who paid "in order to be able to live peacefully in their homes, and to go about their work without the constant threat and fear of the aforesaid enemies".⁴⁰ The immediate threat to the lives and property of the local people was posed by the garrisons themselves, and when the Mignart family entertained members of the garrison of Corvol-l'Orgueilleux in their home, they claimed to be doing so "for fear that they might otherwise be killed and their buildings and goods burned and destroyed". We may assume, however, that the payment of protection-money, often called ransoms or *patis*, offered a certain security to the Mignart family against attacks from "outsiders" for as long as the Breton companies remained at Corvol, Arthel, and Saint Révérien. Those garrisons, even though they consisted only of freebooters, had a powerful interest in guarding the people who provided their material support. Perhaps they watched the peasants of their area of occupation, peacefully engaged in their labours, with as great a measure of satisfaction as any lord viewed his own tenants in more peaceful

circumstances, and, no doubt, they demanded heavy financial compensation for being pressed to evacuate their precious forts and to abandon their *de facto* lordships in accordance with the terms of the treaty of Brétigny.

Whether we focus our attention upon the great captains of companies, such as Seguin de Badefol whose safeconducts were respected throughout the Mâconnais, Forez, Velay, and Basse-Bourgogne during the 1360s, and which were drawn up in princely style,⁴¹ or upon the squalid adventurers who occupied the fortified farmhouse of Corvol-l'Orgueilleux and who terrorized the Mignart family in 1359, we see all of the problems and the opportunities of *de facto* lordship of land. The same conditions applied to the strategic English fortress of Saint-Sauveur as to the forgotten little French garrison at Luc. The concept of armed protection in return for material support provided, at one and the same time, the rationale of their existence (if they felt the need of one) and the means which made such an existence possible. So frequent are the reports of conflicts between garrisons of the same allegiance, and so abundant is the evidence of accommodations between garrisons of opposite allegiances, that one may suspect that protection of the *ressort*, or of the territory *appatised*, often enjoyed a higher priority amongst the garrison-soldiers of late-medieval France than their "official" war-aims. Jean Foliot, who had belonged to the French garrison of Meauliou (? Meaulis, Manche), testified to an agreement made between the English garrison of Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte and some of the French garrisons of the Cotentin to share between them the profits derived from collective ransoms and from individual safeconducts;⁴² a rational arrangement which served everybody's interests except those who insisted upon a vigorous prosecution of the war. On the other hand, where the boundaries of occupation-zones had not been mutually agreed between the various garrisons in the area, tension and violence were endemic whether or not the area straddled an official frontier. The Norman family of de Forges, which had been consistently loyal to the French Crown during the early part of the Hundred Years War, supported itself at Lingèvres (Calvados) by taking from the surrounding countryside, without payment, "quantities of corn, hay, oats, and other grains; bullocks, cows, sheep, hens, pigs, fat, wine, cider, knives, sheets, clothes, iron and steel implements, windows, and other things including horses and mules".⁴³ They were sometimes opposed by the neighbouring French garrison at Ellon, and there were skirmishes. Both garrisons, no doubt, justified their existence by reference to "(the king's) enemies who were occupying several fortresses in the district", as did Rogier de Forges in 1375, but their immediate priority was to secure their own support-base - even at the expense of each other.

Whether a captain, or a soldier, was, or was not, in receipt of wages from a public authority, was later to become the test of his legal status. There were brief periods during the Hundred

Years War when such a test between recognized combatants and bandits could be applied. For most of that period, however, no public authority could afford to employ on anything like a regular basis more than a fraction of the soldiers who were battered upon the French kingdom. The "vertical" ties of allegiance between a soldier and the sovereign he served tended, as a consequence, only to be expressed in a negative way: the soldier demonstrated his loyalty to a lord by not fighting against him or against his interests. The horizontal ties, especially those which bound together the Anglo-French military aristocracy, and those who aspired to its ranks, were of much greater practical significance. This aristocracy enjoyed a professional unity and a certain attitude to life which often cut across lines of political demarcation. The military aristocracy of knights and squires, known as men-at-arms, who fought each other in war, in tournaments, and in jousts, were forever boasting of the high professional standards of their military calling. They boasted too of their hazardous and adventurous lifestyle. The highest standards of professional competence were often achieved by the knights and squires of the "free" companies who had contrived, not only to make warfare into a way of life, but also to explore the furthest avenues of the knight's adventurous calling. They were, as the Bascot de Mauléon reported to Froissart, "as skilled and trained in war as any people could be; as much in preparing for battle and in turning it to their advantage, as in scaling and assaulting towns and castles".⁴⁴ However much the moralists and the lawyers of the period insisted upon calling them pillagers and robbers (or low-born upstarts), rather than "true knights", there can be no doubt but that their leaders were an integral part of the aristocratic world of their day. Captains of free companies, who had acquired their reputations as freebooters, moved in and out of princely service with an ease which suggests no sense of impropriety: they married into the traditional aristocracy; acquired titles, and achieved immortality alongside the Black Prince and Sir John Chandos in the pages of Froissart's Chronicles. "Arms ennoble the man": or, as Le Jouvencel expressed it, "Les armes ennoblissent l'homme quel qu'il soit".⁴⁵

The aristocratic attitude to life to which I refer is not fully comprehended by the "code" of chivalry, which, however broadly defined, concerned only the "distinctively knightly values and behaviour" of the noble class, its imitators and its aspirants.⁴⁶ This consisted of the play-element so admirably described by Huizinga,⁴⁷ and the serious element which has benefited from the recent attentions of Maurice Keen and Malcolm Vale and which imposed limitations and constraints upon armed conflict between nobles while creating new associations between them of a highly political nature. The armed knight in conflict with his fellows, however concealed beneath the rich encrustation of late-medieval chivalric culture, was at its core. But there was always more to the aristocratic attitude to life than a

preparation for, and a participation in, armed conflict. The man-at-arms was a lord, or he aspired to be one, and even that most famous of knights-errant, Don Quixote, whose head had been turned completely by the romances of chivalry, "fancied himself crowned by the valour of his arms, at least with the empire of Trebizond" while his more hard-headed squire sustained himself with the vision of becoming the lord of "some isle".⁴⁸ The heads which filled those massive helms and bascinets, which are now in the armoury of the Tower of London and in the Musée de l'Armée in Paris, were as filled with ideas about lordships to be won or protected as they were with ambitions to serve their ladies and unhorse their opponents - and a good deal more so than the head of Don Quixote.

A lordship, usually of a rather temporary nature, might be acquired in the kingdom of France purely by force of arms. The Gascon squire who had the good fortune to make a stylish entry into Orthez under the very eye of that great fourteenth-century chronicler, Jean Froissart, arrived with a mule-train of possessions (including the silver plate off which he and his companions habitually dined), "like a great baron" (*comme un grant baron*).⁴⁹ He had made his fortune in the French wars and, although he had had his share of rich ransoms and booty, his wealth derived largely from the occupation of land which he had won for himself in the French kingdom. In Picardy, for example, he was one of a number of adventurers in the service of the king of Navarre who "were, for a time, lords of the fields and the rivers (where) we and our friends won a great deal of wealth". Some time later, he and his friends captured La Charité-sur-Loire and, for a year and a half, "everything was ours along the Loire as far as Le Puy in Vélây". Even in that very year, of 1388, when he encountered Froissart, he claimed to be drawing such a substantial yearly income from the castle and lordship of Thurie, in the Tarn, that he would not have exchanged it for Orthez itself where the count of Foix and Béarn held his lavish court. He had not yet decided whether to sell Thurie to agents of the French Crown in the Auvergne, or to keep it to himself for a while longer. The name of this squire was Bascot de Mauléon. He had made himself more than merely the good *homme d'armes* and the great captain which were the terms used by Sir Espan de Lion in his introduction to Froissart; he had also made himself into a great baron (because he lived like one). He would, however, have been forgotten, as were the hundred like him, but for those few idle hours before the fire in the hostelry of the Moon as the chronicler and the captain enjoyed the hospitality of Ernauton de Pin.

If the French kingdom accommodated one hundred captains of garrisons who had acquired their lordships by force of arms, like the Bascot de Mauléon, it accommodated a thousand more who held charters and letters of commission which testified their rights to them. The garrison captain was sometimes the traditional lord who was organizing the defence of his own territory and people.

The Norman knight, Jean de la Boissaye, who moved from one fortress to another in Normandy during the war between the kings of France and of Navarre in the late 1350s, installing garrisons "to guard and defend the (French king's) subjects from the men-at-arms who occupied many fortresses in the region, and who daily raided and plundered them", was certainly in one of his own manors, Le Boc Aliz, when organizing its defence against the Naverrese soldiers operating out of the fortified abbey of Cormeilles (Eure).⁵⁰ It is doubtful, however, whether he held any commission from the regent, and it is certain that, by 1375, his freelance activities in the service of the French Crown had attracted the censure, not only of the royal officers of the *bailliage* of Caen, but also of the royal *reformateurs* of Lower Normandy. Henri de Coulombières, another Norman knight, who was an important captain in French royal service between 1357 and 1381, had received a royal licence to fortify and garrison his mansion at Coulombières (Calvados) before he became captain of Bayeux on 27 December 1357. During this period, and for the first nine months of his captaincy at Bayeux, he received no wages whatsoever from the Crown, making it inevitable, as he later claimed, that many things, such as corn, beverages, and beasts, should be taken from the local people without compensation.⁵¹

Sometimes the garrison captain was a foreigner to the district: inserted into a position of temporary lordship by the proprietor of the castle or by a royal lieutenant. We may guess that a "foreign" captain of this sort, through his unfamiliarity with the customs which had, for generations, regulated the relationship between castle and village, or his indifference to them, may have played the tyrant more than a traditional lord might have done who wished to safeguard the value of his inheritance. Nevertheless, foreign or native, they all faced very similar problems of supporting an expensive military establishment upon the shoulders of a local people who were, at the least, bitterly resentful towards what they considered to be a reversion to the bad old days of arbitrary lordship. At worst, there was rebellion. It now seems likely that the spark which, in the spring of 1358, ignited that famous but short-lived peasant revolt known as the *Jacquerie*, was the breach of the ancient customs of Saint-Leu-d'Essérent by military captains in the service of the regent.⁵² The licences to plunder which the regent issued to his captains in lieu of wages, together with the ruthless exploitation of the local *taille*, the seigneurial revenues from tolls and from justice, the revival of forced labour to repair castle-walls and of watch-service on their battlements, attracted the murderous wrath of the common people. It was a return to serfdom, and it mattered not at all whether the new lords were the French king's friends or his enemies. "Then came war to the French kingdom", said the spokesman for the fourth hierarchy in Philippe de Mézières' *Songs du Vieil Pelerin*, "which made us serfs instead of freemen. We were afflicted, not only by the sword of our English enemies, but by our own lords too. We were all

oppressed by *gabelles*, *tailles*, taxes, watch-duties; by pillage and servitude ..."⁵³

There was, of course, more to the "lordly" lifestyle to which all men-at-arms aspired than mere self-interest in a material sense. Lords not only needed the support in goods and services of the local people, but they also expected it as a right; not only did they need to keep their castle in a proper state of defence as they were commanded to do by the royal *bailli* for their own protection, but they expected to be able to live in a certain style which went far beyond bare necessities. "They wore pearls on their hoods or on their gilded and silver girdles", wrote the horrified Jean de Venette, in 1356, "and elaborately adorned themselves from head to foot with gems and precious stones. So assiduously did all (nobles and knights), from the least to the greatest, cover themselves with these luxuries that pearls and other precious stones were sold for high prices and could hardly be found at all in Paris."⁵⁴ A poor squire who suddenly found himself at the head, or even simply a part, of a successful company in a profitable garrison, quickly surrounded himself with the trappings of an aristocratic household: squires, pages, chaplains, varlets, many of whom may have been, quite literally, kidnapped in the villages and on the public highways in the vicinity of the fortress. The Englishman, Jack Spore, who found himself in possession of a ten-year-old boy after a raid on the village of Saint Julien-du-Sault, and who could find no-one to pay his ransom, "had him mounted on a horse, charged with his lance and bascinet, and made him his page".⁵⁵ The men-at-arms of the Hundred Years War, moreover, brought with them to the war a certain attitude to the peasantry which can only be described as a suspicion bordering on outright hostility (or, if they did not bring it with them, they quickly acquired it). Lords who became men-at-arms, and therefore *maitres du sol* in a new, war-time, sense, harboured a certain bitterness bred of an ancient, and by-and-large a losing, struggle to revive their failing fortune in the face of peasant solidarity and passive resistance. They treated the peasants in their areas of military operation with a ruthlessness which moralists found difficult to understand, and which appeared to these latter as a malicious delight in the sufferings of defenceless non-combatants. It may, indeed, have been an exquisite pleasure for these lords to exercise a "pure" form of lordship, uncomplicated by ancient and undesirable customs: to be able to respond to signs of peasant resistance and rebellion with the massive show of force which they were incapable of mobilizing at home and in peace-time. A glorious return to the primitive simplicities of the "first feudal age"?

The similarities between the conditions of French society during the Hundred Years War and those which Marc Bloch claimed for western Europe during his "first feudal age", - and which had been dead for three hundred years, at least, - are nothing short of remarkable. We already have had cause to notice the dramatic decline in population which coincided, albeit with internal

fluctuations, with the period of that war; also the concentration of that much-reduced population in the villages and on the lands immediately surrounding them. The reduction "to insignificance" of the social function of wages during the first feudal age, which obliged employers either to take men into their own households or "to grant (them), in return for (their) services, estates which, if exploited directly or in the form of dues levied on the cultivators of the soil, would enable (them) to provide for (themselves)",⁵⁶ has unexpected parallels with the conditions of garrisons during the Hundred Years War in France. Although the wages paid to soldiers were by no means insignificant (the peasant in Alain Chartier's "Patriotic Poem" believed that the taxes which had been wasted upon soldiers' wages would have been sufficient to buy England outright),⁵⁷ there can be no doubt but that the great employers of soldiers, the kings of France and of England, were obliged to grant to their captains "estates" in lieu of wages, or at least to tolerate the appropriation of such "estates" by men in their service. One may wonder, too whether the indentured retainers and liveried retainers of the so-called Bastard Feudalism of the late Middle ages were not very similar to the practice of taking men into their own households by the war-lords of the first feudal age. If the first feudal age was characterized by the abrogation of royal rights of justice and taxation by private individuals, so too was French society in the late Middle Ages. If the collapse of central government in Charlemagne's empire, after his death, took the form of local potentates claiming regal powers in return for their "protection" of the district: so too was the collapse of royal authority in France under the Valois kings. It is only prudent to acknowledge that this "feudalization" of late-medieval France was a relatively short-lived phenomenon by Dark Age standards: "manors" changed hands so frequently that few of their occupants were able to establish permanent roots; and royal authority was ultimately to reassert itself over the fragmented kingdom. To ignore such feudalization however, is to withdraw into the exclusively warrior dream-world of chivalric romance in which knights lived without a thought for where their next meal was coming from, and whose only use for peasants was when lost and in need of directions.

There are good reasons why few historians will allow "feudalism" more than an illegitimate, "bastard", status in the world of late-medieval Europe: the general expectation of wages or other financial advantages, in return for military service, had so eroded the primitive centrality of the fief and had opened up so many avenues for the growth of a centralized bureaucracy, that late-Capetian France can no longer be viewed as a "feudal" society. But the France of the first five Valois kings, the France of the Hundred Years War, was a very different society from the one inherited from Saint Louis by his son and grandson. The fragility of the Capetian structure was exposed, and the febrile growth of royal power within the kingdom was imperilled by a collapsing

economy and a revived provincialism. Such circumstances represented a crisis for the French Monarchy, and for those, non-combatant, elements of French society which depended for their security and well-being on strong, centralized, government. But, far from representing a "crisis" of "feudalism", the demographic and political crisis of this period, in significant ways, revived its failing fortunes. It placed a premium on forms of association between members of the military aristocracy and it allowed individual members of that small group the opportunity to appropriate to themselves the power of the State in the localities. Whether we allow "feudalism" only into the world of aristocratic military associations, or permit it an extended rôle in the area of the economic exploitation by warriors over peasant-producers, the "crisis" of the late Middle Ages in France was "feudalism's" opportunity.

NOTES

1. Kenneth Fowler, *The Age of Plantagenet and Valois: the struggle for supremacy, 1328-1498*, London, 1967, pp. 13-14.
2. Edouard Perroy, *La Guerre de Cent Ans*, Paris, 1945. More recent short surveys with the same title have been made by Philippe Contamine (1968), and André Leguai (1974).
3. "English" in this sense must be taken to include North American.
4. Robert Boutruche, *La Crise d'une Société; seigneurs et paysans du Bordelais pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans*, Paris, 1947. Guy Bois, *Crise de Féodalisme*, Paris, 1981.
5. Edouard Perroy, *The Hundred Years War*, trans. W.B. Wells, p. xxvii.
6. Edouard Perroy, "A l'origine d'une économie contractée: les crises du XIVe siècle", *Annales* (1949), pp. 172-3.
7. Fowler, *Plantagenet and Valois*, op.cit., ch. 4: "Chivalry, War and Society". Also his "Les finances et la discipline dans les armées anglaises en France au XIVe siècle", *Cahiers Vernonnais*, iv (1964), pp. 55-84.
8. R.H. Hilton, "Y eut-il une crise générale de la Féodalité?", *Annales* (1951), pp. 23-30.
9. Philippe Contamine, *Guerre, Etat et Société à la fin du Moyen Age: études sur les armées des rois de France, 1337-1494*, Paris, 1972.
10. French "social" historians: Roger Jouet, *La Resistance à l'Occupation anglaise en Basse-Normandie, 1418-1450*, Caen, 1969; Bois, *Crise*, op.cit., ch. 13. English (=English language) political and military specialists: B.J. Rowe, "John, duke of Bedford and the Norman brigands", *English Historical Review*, xlvii (1932), pp. 583-99; R.A. Newhall, *The English Conquest of Normandy, 1416-1425*, London, 1924.
11. Bernard Guenée, "Y a-t-il un état des XIVe et XVe siècles?" *Annales* (1971), p. 401.
12. Bastard feudalism: K.B. McFarlane, "Bastard Feudalism",

- Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xx (1947), pp. 161-80; A.E. Prince, "The indenture system under Edward III", *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J.G. Edwards et al., pp. 283-97; P.S. Lewis, "Decayed and non-feudalism in later medieval France", *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxxvii (1964), pp. 157-84. The princely orders of chivalry: Maurice Keen, "Huizinga, Kilgour and the decline of chivalry", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, viii (1977), pp. 1-20; Malcolm Vale, *War and Chivalry: warfare and aristocratic culture in England, France and Burgundy at the end of the Middle Ages*, London, 1981.
13. Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon, London, 1965, vol.i, Foreword by M.M. Postan, p. xii.
 14. Bloch, *Feudal Society*, *op.cit.*, p. 60.
 15. Bois, *Crise*, *op.cit.*, p. 62. Note comparable figures for the opposite end of France in E. Baratier, *La Démographie Provençale du XIIIe au XVIe Siècle*, Paris, 1961.
 16. Bloch, *Feudal Society*, *op.cit.*, p. 61.
 17. *The Chronicle of Jean de Venette*, trans. J. Birdsall, ed. R.A. Newhall, New York, 1953, p. 94. See also Thomas Basin, *Histoire de Charles VII*, ed. C. Samaran, vol. i, Paris, 1933, pp. 84-88.
 18. Georges Duby, *Hommes et Structures du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1973, ch. 18: "Démographies et villages désertés", pp. 309-23; Guy Fourquin, *Histoire Economique de l'Occident Médiévale*, Paris, 1969, p. 333.
 19. Michael Powicke, "The English aristocracy and the war"; Philippe Contamine, "The French nobility and the war", chs. 5 and 6 resp. of *The Hundred Years War*, ed. K. Fowler, London, 1971. Also J.B. Henneman, "The military class and the French monarchy in the late Middle Ages", *American Historical Review*, lxxxiii (1978), pp. 946-65.
 20. The "crisis of seigneurial revenues" during the late Middle Ages was described by Marc Bloch, *French rural history; an essay on its basic characteristics*, trans. J. Sondheimer, Berkeley, 1966, p. 112. Its connection with the war was suggested by Hilton, "Y eut-il une crise", *op.cit.*, p. 25, and examined in some depth by Guy Bois, "Noblesse et crise des revenus seigneuriaux en France aux XIVe et XVe siècles: essai d'interprétation", *La Noblesse au Moyen Age, XIe au XVe siècle*, ed. P. Contamine, Paris, 1976, pp. 219-33.
 21. The rules of aristocratic warfare are described by Maurice Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages*, London, 1965.
 22. Kenneth Fowler, "Truces", ch.8 of *The Hundred Years War*, ed. Fowler, *op.cit.*, shows that "more than half of the 116 years between 1337 and 1453 were taken up by periods of general truce", p. 184.
 23. Jean-Philippe Genet, review of Philippe Contamine, *La Guerre au Moyen Age*, in *Annales* (1983), p. 193.

24. Keen, *Laws of War, op.cit.*, pp. 97-99.
25. A strategy of this sort is described by H.J. Hewitt, *The Black Prince's Expedition of 1355-1357*, Manchester, 1958.
26. The ressort of a castle was the zone of which it was the geographical centre; the inhabitants of the *plat pays* around it were required to use it as a refuge from enemies and to contribute to its upkeep and defence. P.C. Timbal, et al., eds., *La Guerre de Cent Ans Vue à Travers les Registres du Parlement, 1337-1369*, Paris, 1961, pp. 149-67.
27. Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, ed. S. Luce, xiii, pp. 77-8.
28. See note 6 above.
29. Jean Froissart, *Voyage en Béarn*, ed. A.H. Diverres, Manchester, 1953, p. 91. Maurice Keen, "Chivalry, nobility, and the man-at-arms", *War, Literature and Politics in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. C.T. Allmand, p. 32.
30. "In the 63 years between 1337 and 1400 major campaigns took place in little more than 18 years", Fowler, "Truces, *op.cit.*, p. 184.
31. *Le Jouvencel par Jean de Beuil*, ed. L. Lecestre, vol. i, Paris, 1887, pp. 18-21.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
33. *Ibid.*, Vol. ii, p. 83.
34. *Ibid.*, Vol. i, pp. 95-6.
35. R. Cazelles, "La Jacquerie: Fût-elle un mouvement paysan?", *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendus*, July-Oct. 1978, p. 664.
36. R. Brun, "Annales Avignonnaises de 1382 à 1410; extraites des archives de Datini" *Memoires de l'Institut Historique de Provence*, xii (1935), p. 47.
37. Fowler, "Les Finances", *op.cit.*, pp. 57-8.
38. Grimmelshausen, *Simplicissimus the Vagabond*, trans. A.T.S. Goodrick, London, 1912, pp. 32-33.
39. The statistics are Fowler's, "Les finances", *op.cit.*
40. *Archives nationales*, Paris, JJ 104, no. 231.
41. Georges Guigue, *Récits de la Guerre de Cent Ans: Les Tard-venus en Lyonnais, Forez et Beaujolais, 1356-1369*, Lyon, 1886, pp. 105-108.
42. *Archives nationales*, Paris, JJ 107, no. 221.
43. *Archives nationales*, Paris JJ 107, no. 211.
44. Froissart, *Voyage, op.cit.*, p. 91.
45. *Le Jouvencel, op.cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 81.
46. Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: chivalric society and its context, 1270-1350*, Boydell Press, 1982, defines "chivalric culture" as the "expression of social assumptions which ostensibly set a premium upon distinctively knightly values and behaviour", p. 1.
47. Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, London, 1927.
48. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, trans. J.M. Cohen, Penguin Books, 1970, pp. 33

- and 66.
49. References to the Bascot de Mauléon's story are taken from *Froissart, Voyage, op.cit.*, pp. 88-111.
 50. *Archives nationales*, Paris, JJ 108, no. 17.
 51. *Archives nationales*, Paris, JJ 108, no. 303. More details on this captain may be found in Contamine, *Guerre, Etat, op.cit.*, pp. 605-606.
 52. R. Cazelles, "La Jacquerie", *op.cit.*, p. 664. Pierre Durvin, "Les Origines de la Jacquerie à Saint-Leu-d'Essérent en 1358", *Actes du 101e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes; Philologie et Histoire jusqu'à 1610*, Paris, 1978, pp. 365-374. The first victims of the Jacques appear to have been, not "foreign" captains, but the lord of Saint-Leu and his squires.
 53. *Philippe de Mézières, Chancellor of Cyprus, Le Songe du Vieil Pelerin*, ed. G.W. Coopland, Cambridge, 1969, vol. i, p. 455.
 54. Venette, *op.cit.*, p. 63.
 55. *Archives nationales*, Paris, JJ 111, no. 355.
 56. Bloch, *Feudal Society, op.cit.*, p. 68.
 57. A. Thomas, "Une oeuvre patriotique inconnue d'Alain Chartier", *Journal des Savants*, Sept.-Nov. 1914, p. 447.