1986

Basilisks of the Commonwealth: Vagrants and Vagrancy in England, 1485-1553

Christopher Thomas Daly

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the European History Commons

Recommended Citation

https://dx.doi.org/10.21220/s2-y42p-8r81

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
BASILISKs OF THE COMMONWEALTH:
Vagrants and Vagrancy in England, 1485-1553

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Christopher T. Daly
1986
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

[Signatures]

Approved, August 1986

[Signatures]
DEDICATION

To my brother, grandmother, mother and father,
with love and respect.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. THE PROBLEM OF VAGRANCY AND GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSES TO IT,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1485-1553</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. TUDOR ATTITUDES TOWARD VAGRANCY AND THE VAGRANT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Professors James L. Axtell and James N. McCord, Jr., for their detailed criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper; their suggestions were always helpful and insightful. Mrs. Hope H. Yelich of Swem Library at the College of William and Mary was extraordinarily kind in allowing me to have special access to the microfilms of the State Papers, Domestic Series for the reign of King Edward VI. Mrs. Norma Campana was most generous in permitting me to borrow her typewriter for more months than I would care to remember, and I give her heartfelt thanks. I also wish to express my deep gratitude to Professor Elwyn F. Chase, Jr., of Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, for his encouragement and good advice.

My largest debt of thanks is due my family and Professor Dale E. Hoak. My parents' and my brother's unending support and assistance made this task much more bearable. My mother, especially, must be singled out for her help with typing and proofreading; without her I could never have completed this project. And as for Professor Hoak, perhaps only other students of his could appreciate fully the care, patience, and enthusiasm he lavishes on those whom he instructs. As Geoffrey Chaucer wrote of his clerk in the Canterbury Tales, so may I say affectionately of Dr. Hoak: "And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche."
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the problem of vagrancy fits into the larger framework of the monumental economic and social changes which occurred in England between 1485 and 1553.

The first chapter looks at the statutes and proclamations devised by the royal governments to punish vagabonds, put an end to their unchecked mobility, and diminish the actual and potential dangers their presence placed on local governments and society as a whole. It is observed that at the times when royal governments felt especially threatened, such as immediately after Henry VII's seizure of power, or during the upheavals of the Henrican Revolution of the 1530s, anti-vagrancy measures were formed more urgently and pursued more assiduously. It is also suggested that the ineffective and insecure government of the Protector Somerset tailored its vagrancy program towards making vagrants conspicuous scapegoats for the existence of problems to which the government had no answers.

The second chapter analyzes the sermons and the popular and prescriptive literature which both reflected and shaped attitudes toward vagrancy and the vagrant. By the middle of the sixteenth century the distinction between God's Poor—those physically incapable of working or those who were hapless victims of circumstance—and the Devil's Poor—malcontents, and the perpetually and intentionally idle—ceased to exist as far as the vagrant was concerned. Each vagrant, without regard to his or her personal history, was held to be the flotsam of an otherwise well-ordered society. Only a few lone voices in the middle years of the century suggested that some vagrants wished to escape from their desperate and useless pattern of wandering, terrorizing, begging, and stealing in order to live. And gradually, by the final years of Edward VI's reign, the royal government was beginning to pay heed to some of the policies of local governments, which tempered the punishment of the vagabond with measures intended to rehabilitate him or at least make him a source of cheap labor for work-projects.

Vagrancy was to become a much more serious problem in the second half of the sixteenth century, but the amount of thought and industry Englishmen devoted to the problem as it existed in the century's first half suggests that preconceptions and overweening fear may have precluded a rational, measured approach to the situation.
BASILISKS OF THE COMMONWEALTH
INTRODUCTION

The foremost challenge of the historian investigating the multi-faceted problem of vagrancy as it existed within the first sixty-two years of the Tudor dynasty is to sort through the widely-divergent contemporary definitions of who the vagrant was and what exactly was the extent of the damage he inflicted upon society. Vagrancy was, as historian Paul Slack has noted, a protean and emotive term which by 1530 had come to convey more than simply a national problem of citizens wandering the land jobless and uncontrollable.

As the leaders of the English Reformation urged every Englishman to eschew the excesses of the Old Faith and rededicate their lives to Christian charity and compassion, many of them were at the same time endorsing—or at least not strenuously objecting to—the notion that all vagrants were insidious wastrels, parasites on the body politic. One writer, imbued though he was with the ardor of nurturing a Christian Commonwealth in England, deemed vagrants 'basilisks'—mythical creatures whose very glance or breath could dissipate the aura of hope and progressiveness which was part and parcel of the Reformation. It seems that by the middle of the sixteenth century fewer upright
men and women than ever before considered any type of forbearance or kindness toward the vagrant to be within the bounds of their duties as Christians or subjects of the king.

Partly for this reason, this essay deals with vagrancy between the years 1485 and 1553. Of course these are primarily dates of convenience, stretching as they do from the accession of the first Tudor king to the premature death of the last one. But neatly covered within this time frame is the emergence of vagrancy as a national, as well as local, problem of epidemic proportions. And as the problem became more menacing, empathy for the situation of the vagrant steadily declined. It is tempting and not altogether unreasonable to conclude that the ever-mounting hostility towards the vagrant and the evils associated with him was wholly a product of the changes of attitudes and perspectives stimulated by the Reformation. There were, however, almost as many similarities as there were differences between Catholic and Protestant views on the subject. The burgeoning anger shared by royal officials and the people they governed over the proliferation of vagrancy was ground less in religious ideology than in the fear that vagrancy would undo England's newly-wrought and delicate prosperity and internal concord. This apprehension was rational in itself, but at times, and particularly
after 1530, it tended to border on a national obsession that imagined the machinations of vagrants as being behind every national misfortune. Commentators were rare who understood that vagrancy was not an isolated problem but really only the most conspicuous part of the much larger dilemma of a society and an economy in the midst of rapid and significant transformations.

The three Tudor kings presided over sometimes-dramatic experiments in legislation aimed at extirpating vagrancy. Laws ranged from the relatively innocuous injunctions of Henry VII that vagrants be kept out of harm's way in whatever manner local officials judged best to the cruel and counter-productive measures of the Duke of Somerset's Vagrancy Act of 1547. Between these extremes were local orders and pieces of royal legislation remarkable for their prudence and moderation in grappling with this very complicated problem. In fact, the vagrancy measures of the last three years of Edward VI's reign proved to be a cornerstone of the Elizabethan Poor Laws.

The problems of vagrancy and the economy—price inflation and unemployment brought on in part by a rising population—were felt most urgently in the latter half of the century, but the decisions taken and the attitudes assumed in the first half had an inestimable impact on how these problems were eventually resolved. Certainly
as the century wore on the problems became much more self-evident. Whereas for the first half of the century quantitative evidence of the state of poverty and vagrancy within the realm is sparse and generally inadequate, the latter half's sources are more plentiful and authoritative. Hence figures (such as the Norwich survey of 1570 and the calculation of the increase in the number of vagrants in London between 1517 and 1594) are quoted in this essay that fall beyond the dates covered; they are the most substantial estimates revealing the amount of people unemployed in a given area and how these people coped with unemployment. The data gleaned from these estimates document the varied methods of poor relief as well as indicate the direction in which the trends in poverty and vagrancy were already headed by the middle of the century.

Sixteenth century chroniclers wavered as to the precise reason the vagrant was the object of unabating scorn; the vagrant was hated for his laziness and for the "licentious liberty" he exuded, but underlying this hatred was a nagging fear that the vagabond's mobility could do more in the long run to weaken the social structure than either his sloth or unruliness. The legislation of the first decades of the century was quick to detect this fear. Until 1547, the turning-point date of official attitudes and responses to vagrancy, royal officials restricted
their efforts to curtailing the movements and determining the punishment of vagrants. Only by slowly coming to follow the lead of a number of local vagrancy policies did the royal government learn that vagrancy could be dealt with to greater effect if as much attention were paid to the causes of the problem as to its symptoms. And just as significant as the changes in official tactics in dealing with the problem was a growing sensitivity, awakened in the populace by such influential figures as Simon Fish and Bishop Nicholas Ridley, that the problems of the vagabond were not always of his own making or choosing, and that the condition of vagrancy ought not to trigger a universal labeling of vagrants as the refuse of the Christian Commonwealth.
CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM OF VAGRANCY AND
GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSES TO IT,
1485-1553

Vagrancy presented Tudor governments with one of their most persistent and exasperating dilemmas. Between 1485 and 1553 the belief prevailed that the solution to the problem of vagrancy lay in writing and enforcing unremittingly harsh laws designed not so much to dissuade the vagrant from his rootless ways than to render him less of a danger and a nuisance to society. Only rarely was vagrancy regarded as poverty's most dire consequence. Usually it was associated with laziness, shiftlessness, mendacity, and every other imaginable vice. When such a simplistic attitude toward the vagrant and his situation was adopted by rich and poor alike, as it was at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was only natural that laws, policies, and writings against vagrancy treated the vagrant almost as though he were a one-man plague, to be quarantined and, if possible, eliminated.

That the Tudor kings took the predicament of vagrancy seriously is patently evident in the myriad statutes and proclamations they sent forth on the subject. Equally apparent is that these directives failed in their intent; they did not end vagrancy nor did they even arrest its
growth. So many of the statutes and proclamations on vagrancy had to be followed up by further proclamations chastening local officials for soft-heartedness or timidity in pursuing vagabonds that one may deduce with some certainty that there was little confidence that the royal government understood fully the problem or addressed it adequately. The solutions which became the framework of the Elizabethan Poor Laws originated mainly at the local levels of government, and were based on the understanding that not all vagrants were unwilling to work and that poverty and vagrancy were linked inextricably. It was the royal government that was extremely slow and reluctant to draw this conclusion.

The eagerness of Tudor governments to build on popular fears concerning vagrants points to the circuitous fashion in which the governments tried to handle this particular problem. The Tudors were generally quite good at attacking head-on the problems they comprehended, such as military threats, plots to topple the dynasty, or breaches in governmental efficiency brought on by inept or disloyal servants of the crown. But their approach to less transparent problems was usually to circumvent them if at all possible, or to try to harry troublemakers with fiercely-worded royal imperatives or threats. This was true of their measures against the unwarranted enclosures of land, against inflation, and to a lesser extent against heresies. But
nowhere was this more the case than with vagrancy. When royal governments encouraged the perception that vagrants were evil personified, they not only over-simplified a complex and crucial situation, but they de-humanized the vagrant and the humiliations and sufferings he endured. In so doing they made him, in his frustration, more likely to become an active social menace.

Shortly after Edward Seymour was appointed Lord Protector of Edward VI, he confided to Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, that he desired "to give to the subjects a little more reasonable liberty without in any way releasing them from the restraints of proper order and obedience."¹ Despite this noble aspiration, when the Frenchman Perlin visited England at the end of Edward VI's reign, he observed with amazement the harshness of England's laws, with drastic punishments prescribed for relatively minor infractions.² The implications of this sweeping condemnation of English justice were, however, somewhat lessened by the reluctance of citizens and local officials to invoke the full powers of the most severe laws because of the general "opynyon...not to procure a man's death for all the goods in the world."³ While this is an overly-charitable self-assessment of the English inclination to be merciful to transgressors, it does reflect that statutes and proclamations were only as potent as the local officials
who executed them wanted them to be. Because of this, some of the more severe laws went unenforced or at most were underenforced.  

A salient example of the selective enforcement of statutes and proclamations concerns the various Tudor laws against vagrancy and begging. Essentially, before 1485 there were seven statutes which directly or indirectly impinged upon the treatment of vagabonds. Between 1485 and 1553 at least fifteen statutes and twenty proclamations were issued regarding vagabondage. Amidst this flurry of legal activities from Westminster, local officials regularly used their discretion in punishing vagrants. Often, particularly before 1530, local officials treated vagrants more severely than government orders required. This was because vagrancy was usually regarded as a local problem which only intermittently merited the attentions of the royal government. After 1530, the government repeatedly ordered local officials to follow more closely its fast-evolving directives against vagrancy. The response of local officials was at best mixed. Local officials often regarded their knowledge of the vagrancy situation in their area, and their experience in dealing with it, as grounds sufficient to overlook some of the finer points of royal legislation. But just as important were the marked changes in official and popular attitudes toward poverty, charity, begging, and idleness.
In a half-century of remarkable changes, these shifts in attitude were as much a product of broader changes as they were themselves a source of political, economic, and moral confusion.

Much of the poverty and itinerant begging found in sixteenth-century England originated as a result of the War of the Roses, which left areas of the countryside destroyed and at times caused significant economic dislocation. Henry VII, who ended the war, took a precaution against future disorder by making laws against livery and maintenance, which made many of the nobles' retainers redundant. A modest percent of these "men of restless character" turned to theft and vagrancy when they could find no work. Likewise, some veterans of the War of the Roses—and indeed of all other Tudor wars—turned to vagrancy when local economies could not absorb them. Demobilized soldiers and sailors usually sought employment in larger towns, and when employment opportunities did not exist, groups of them resorted to pillaging towns. They were soon after either imprisoned or forced to wander the countryside, adding to the number of highway robbers.

Sporadic outbreaks of the plague throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also brought on economic dislocation. The poor were usually huddled into one overcrowded sector of each city, and this was where the plague
struck most severely. During a plague-period, poor relief systems were invariably stretched to their limits after wealthy patrons and merchants fled the cities. Jobs were also lost when the immobile poor could not follow their employers in the exodus from the infected city. Agricultural laborers were also economically affected when farmers substantially cut back on food supplies to the city for fear of contagion. But while the plague increased the number of those forced to beg to survive, it also leveled off the number of vagrants via plague deaths.\textsuperscript{11}

Certainly the biggest reason behind the increase in the numbers of the wandering poor was the changing nature of the economy. Agricultural displacement, caused in part by the enclosure of arable lands, the need for laborers to be increasingly mobile, and the slow but steady migration of available jobs from the country to the town all made poor families totter on the brink of insolvency.\textsuperscript{12} The catalyst behind the movement of laborers from the country to the towns was the cloth industry, which after agriculture was England's largest employer. This industry was subject to wild and frequent fluctuations in prosperity, due to the 'external' effects of inflation, debasement of the coinage, wars, tariffs, and boycotts. Slumps in the cloth industry hit urban wage earners especially hard, because unemployed rural textile workers
could sometimes find work as farmhands, thus encountering underemployment rather than unemployment.\textsuperscript{13}

Country laborers were generally considered better-off than urban workers. Even so, by the end of Edward VI's reign, over two-thirds of the rural population lived at or near the poverty line.\textsuperscript{14} Less than one-quarter of the laborers owned land, and those who did often owned less than four acres. Most farm laborers possessed between two and five animals.\textsuperscript{15} Laborers who owned no land sometimes built makeshift cottages in forests, whereupon they ran the risk of being officially deemed vagrants and forced to move on.\textsuperscript{16}

The most pervasive belief among Tudor pamphleteers was that the enclosure of land was the prime cause of poverty and even the main reason for the spread of vagrancy.\textsuperscript{17} However, historians give little credence to the theory that enclosure was the dominant cause of economic dislocation.\textsuperscript{18} The enclosure movement was more marked in the eighteenth century than in the sixteenth, when the economic incentive to enclose land was limited chiefly to a few counties (Leicestershire, Warwickshire, and Northamptonshire) and, according to a report from Somerset's government, it affected little more than three percent of the total land area of those counties.\textsuperscript{19} Admittedly, such a governmental report is likely to have underestimated the amount of land affected by such an unpopular movement, but it does indicate that enclosure
could only account for part of the economic situation. However, enclosure was and remains a much more easily grasped concept than inflation, debasement of coinage, or worker redundancy, and proved to be ready grist for preachers, social critics, and the ever-growing number of polemicists.

Inflation badly damaged the Tudor ideal of a "stable and cooperative society." The governments of Henry VIII and Edward VI were quick to allocate blame for the rise in prices. Profiteering middlemen, the populace's inordinate fondness for imported luxury goods, idleness, the greed of the laboring poor, the avarice of landlords—"men without conscience...men that would have all in their hands; men that would leave nothing for others," (Robert Crowley)—and the rapacity of the clergy were all said to be responsible for the country's economic ills. Nor did the royal government escape censure; price rises were linked to Henry VIII's deficit-creating wars, and the successive devaluations of the currency (1526, 1544, 1547, 1549) precipitated a crisis of confidence in the coinage's actual and intrinsic worth and a consequential escalation of prices. Bishop Latimer spoke for many when he condemned debasement before Edward VI's court: "Thy silver is turned into dross. Thy silver is dross; it is not fine, it is counterfeit; thy silver is turned; thou hadst good silver.... The naughtiness of
the silver was the occasion of dearth of all things in
the realm." A more esoteric theory was the relation­ship between the rise in prices and the influx of American silver into Spain and eventually Europe. Likewise, a greater relaxation of credit within the first half of the century allowed for more spending and therefore brought on more consumer competition for goods.

Each of these theories contains at least a particle of truth. Together they illuminate how the confused and frustrated elements of Tudor society—king, government officials, prelates, lowly subjects—wanted desperately to find a single, uncomplicated cause for the dramatic economic changes. And dramatic they were. Between 1510 and 1620 there was a steady rise in the cost of almost all commodities. Between 1510 and 1547—a period wholly within Henry VIII's reign—the cost of cheaper commodities more than doubled. Within the next eight years, 1547-1555, prices quadrupled from the original 1510 base value. The items which increased in value most steeply were the goods on which the poor depended for subsistence. The lower income groups (wage earners, servants, and agrarian workers) were especially hard-hit, for as their purchasing power declined, their wages increased either minimally or not at all. They attempted to compensate for their straitened circumstances by marrying at a later age and increasing their mobility within a small geographic region.
They had to move where jobs might be gotten, and while they were in transit, or if they failed to procure a job, they risked being charged with vagrancy.\textsuperscript{30}

Historians now credit the sharp rise in population as the central force behind Tudor England's dual ailments: a paucity of available land and jobs. Land and job supply did not keep pace with the brisk population expansion, and the very poor were the first to be pushed out of the over-burdened economic system.\textsuperscript{31} Between 1485 and 1603, England's population rose by more than 100 percent, from approximately two million people to over four and a half million. During the same period, the number of entry fees paid to obtain leases of land rose even more sharply than grain prices. This resulted in both an increasingly high number of squatters who built illegal cottages wherever they could, and a steady growth in vagrancy.\textsuperscript{32}

The most comprehensive extant survey of the urban poor is from Norwich in 1570. Although its findings pertain more to the state of vagrancy and the poor as it had developed after 1553, the survey very definitely reflects patterns which had begun to evolve in the early years of Henry VIII's reign. Norwich was the wealthiest city in England after London. The survey reveals 2342 destitute people: 504 males, 831 women, and 1007 children. One-quarter of the poor was over sixty. Twenty percent of the men were textile workers; eleven percent were workers in
the leather trades; six percent worked in the clothing industry; and four percent worked in the building industry. Presumably, the remaining fifty-nine percent of the poor men within working age (probably somewhere around fifteen years would be the earliest age to be sent to work—at least under optimum circumstances) either had unreported occupations or were unemployed. Still, only twenty-nine vagabonds and beggars were apprehended in Norwich during 1570 and twenty-six the following year, a fact which more than likely indicates the adequacies of Norwich's poor relief scheme than it demonstrates any local reticence in tracking down the idle. Of the 831 women, many were single, widowed, or deserted by their spouses. Most poor families had two children or less, and there were instances where children from the poorest families were sent to work at the age of five, usually in the textile trade. Nonetheless, some children of the poor received an education—either in industrial or academic schools—and illiteracy among the urban poor remained low compared with illiteracy among the rural poor.

The poor—urban and rural—were an accepted part of Tudor society. So too was the itinerant beggar who eventually settled in one location and begged within the boundaries local authorities set for begging. It was the professional, 'stout' beggar who remained the "principle object of dread [because he flew] in the face of the inherited
medieval concept of the beggar as 'called' by God to genuine adversity as a test of the charity of his fellow-Christians."

Predictably, a body of popular literature developed around those who, according to Thomas Dekker, dissembled better than Puritans and spent their unjustly-acquired alms as "merrily and as lewdly as in the day it was won by counterfeit villany." In 1561, John Awdeley in his "The Fraternity of Vagabonds" enumerated twenty-two distinct types of vagabonds, from an Abram-man who walked about bare-armed and bare-legged while he feigned madness, to a queer-bird, who was really an unrepentant ex-convict.

The Tudor 'handbook' of vagrancy was Thomas Harman's "A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds," written in 1566. Harman added to Awdeley's delineation of vagabond types, and he also described the argot vagrants purportedly had developed since the beginning of the century. Vagrants called their "peevish speech" Pedlar's French, but actually it was an unknown tongue, comprehended only by "these bold, beastly, bawdy beggars and vain vagabonds, being half mingled with English when it is familiarly talked." Some words seem etymologically quite familiar: bene meant good; to cant was the infinitive for the verb speak; pannan meant bread. Some words are easily understood: the darkmans was night; a prancer was a horse; stampers were shoes; drawers were hose; a belly-cheat and a
smelling-cheat for an apron and a nose, respectively; and duds for clothing. The colorful quality of some terms suggests that at least a few imaginative beggars had a clever way with 'non-words': Rome-vill during Mary I's reign was their name for London; rome-mort their name for the queen; Solomon meant an altar or a mass; patrico, a priest; nosegent, a nun; and their affectionate term for Justices of the Peace was Queer Cuffin.41

In all probability, Pedlar's French was nothing more than a glorified lingo known only to a few London vagrants. But when writers embellished on the 'vagrant's language' they portrayed England's vagabonds as far more organized than they ever were. Vagrants occasionally traveled in droves, but they had nothing approaching national organization, despite the insistence of contemporary pamphleteers and some modern historians.42 The irony of the notion that the tricks of vagrants or their 'language' could ever really be culturally subversive to Tudor society appears to have eluded sixteenth-century commentators.

The measures taken to restrain vagrants both before and during the Tudor era were undertaken on an ad hoc basis as police measures rather than as social devices. Lip-service was sometimes paid to setting vagrants on the path of righteousness, but overwhelming emphasis was placed on controlling the movements of vagabonds or utilizing them as instruments of cheap labor.43 Statutes that formulated and
royal proclamations that reinforced official policies toward vagabondage were not philosophical treatises on the dignity of labor; they were legal orders that dealt with an immediate situation by proposing immediate solutions. All too often, statutes and proclamations were futile repetitions of the same bankrupt idea: virtually every one ordered vagabonds either to renounce their laziness and find a job--more easily said than done especially when each area of the country was at one time or another subject to depressions in their native industries--or to leave the city they currently burdened and proceed to the place of their birth--where in turn they would be shuffled away at the first opportunity.

Early Tudor statutes and proclamations clearly followed, rather than shaped, public sentiments towards the poor. Official reaction accepted without reservation the popular distinction between God's Poor--the sick, the incompetent, the aged--and the Devil's Poor--transients who notwithstanding their physical sturdiness chose to be 'habitual' vagrants. The dividing line between the two types of poor was invariably health: if a person enjoyed good health, his inability to find constant employment doomed him to be stigmatized as a minion of Satan out to wreak havoc on honest citizens.44

Still, the popular and official conception that the vagrant chose (or at least was complacent with) his jobless
existence was not totally baseless. The plagues and wars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries created a scarcity of laborers in parts of England which was still a problem at the beginning of Henry VIII's reign. The reality of people going without jobs while some employers wanted for laborers appeared paradoxical to sixteenth century observers. It is still quite difficult to grapple with, but the suggestion, which still persists, that vagrancy was largely a problem stemming from mass laziness and maliciousness is not really satisfying or completely convincing. Vagrants were more often than not victims of the malfunctions--national and local, large and small--to which the rapidly-evolving Tudor economy was increasingly prone.45

Since the beginning of Henry VIII's reign, and especially by mid-century, it was obvious that the English population was far more mobile than it had ever been before--and the government did everything in its power to reverse this trend. A mobile population could not easily be governed and made centralized planning and directing seem at times next to impossible. Therefore, every law that restricted the movements of citizens--and every vagrancy statute was just such a law--had in mind a larger aim of making the government's job less complicated by seeking to control unwarranted travel within the kingdom.46

Local job markets were, to use a rough analogy, like
teeter-totters. Where there was a scarcity of laborers, there would soon be a migration of wandering jobless into that area. Often this would result in a surfeit of laborers and a concomitant strain on the resources of the local economy. This cycle was repeated in town after town, and pointed up the absence of any well-thought-out plan to stabilize local job markets and direct the unemployed to available jobs. To be sure, legislators were interested in regulating the supply of the labor-market where they felt their actions could hold down wages. Legislators believed that if laborers' mobility could be restrained, laborers would be forced to accept whatever compensation the local job market offered. Legislators further reasoned that a policy of checked mobility would transform vagrants from bands of roving instigators of trouble into a pool of cheap, ready laborers from which the government could draw upon for ambitious public works projects. But the frequency of the anti-mobility statutes attests to the failure of social planners to curtail the peripatetic ways of the lower classes.47

Richard II's law against vagabonds determined official actions for the century after 1384. This statute ordered that vagabonds who could not find "surety of their good bearing" were to be imprisoned until "justices of gaol delivery appeared."48 The main problem with this
ordinance was that it resulted in "some inconvenience because of the great charges that...grow...from the bringing of the said vagabond to the jail and the long abiding of them therein." Throughout the fifteenth century, the cost of keeping vagabonds idle in prisons mounted, and as their numbers increased, it became harder for circuit justices to pronounce sentence against them rapidly.

The first Tudor directive against vagabonds was issued on June 6, 1437, as Henry VII's army moved north to meet Lambert Simnel's supporters. The proclamation was issued to ensure that no troublemakers bothered the king's troops. It commanded that "no vagabond, nor other, should follow the King's host but such as be retained or have masters within the same, upon pain of imprisonment and to be punished in example for others." Also prohibited from following the king's army were "common women," or prostitutes, who would meet the same punishment as vagabonds if they hindered the king's march. Indeed, throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, prostitution was treated as an appendage of vagrancy, because both the vagrant and the prostitute were inimical to a well-ordered, Christian society. Like vagabonds, prostitutes were notorious for spending too much time in bed, although there prostitutes were not accused of indolence.

The next proclamation on vagabonds was issued on
December 23, 1487. Vagabonds were ordered to leave the cities where they had congregated and return to the place of their birth. If they did not do so, they would be punished in accordance with SR 7 Richard II, c.5.

Henry VII's proclamation "Prohibiting Weapons in Frays, Punishing Vagabonds" further ordered all officers to make "due search in every suspect house or place in the same city or town for all such vagabonds and other suspect persons; and them to arrest, take, and put in ward, in sure keeping, from time to time, as often as the case shall require." Then the proclamation ordered all subjects, and especially all "mayors, sheriffs, and other officers" to carry out actively the instructions of this proclamation if they wished to "eschew[the king's] grievous displeasure." Almost every proclamation issued by the three Tudor kings concerning vagrancy contained pleas, promises of royal favors, or threats (and sometimes a mixture of all three) for subjects and officials to end their passivity toward vagrancy laws. Proclamations and circular letters were the royal government's best tool in convincing local officials to adopt the official stance against vagrancy.

Local officials who did not support royal pronouncements keenly were a particular source of concern to Henry VII. At least until 1502, Henry VII's hold over the realm was tenuous. While he was consolidating his authority and securing support for the continuation of his dynasty, he
was fearful of even the slightest domestic disruptions. Thus, some of his proclamations have an air of urgency about them.\(^5\) Henry VII's proclamation of May 10, 1489 directed officers to "put themselves in devoir to repress, subdue, and make cease all manner of insurrection, riots, routs, unlawful assemblies; and all other misdoers, vagabonds, finders, and makers of new rumours and tidings to attach, arrest, and imprison, and after their demerits to correct."\(^5\)

On May 22, 1490 Henry recognized the "great hurt, inquietation, and often disturbance of his poor, true, and faithful subjects" in Northumberland, Westmorland, York, Cumberland, and the marches against Scotland brought about by Scottish vagrants who had come south. These "strangers, suspect and idle persons" were to be rounded up and made to swear that they would return to Scotland. If they would not swear, they were to be imprisoned until they changed their minds.\(^5\)

Henry VII's first extensive attempt to define the problem of vagrancy and to propound some new ideas for solving it was the Proclamation of February 18, 1493. The term 'vagabond' was extended to include

beggars able to work,...fautours, [those] excusing themself[yes] by color of pilgrimage, [those] excusing themself[yes] by that they were taken by the king's enemies upon the sea, [those] that...be scholars of the one university or the other within the realm, [those] that...be hermits and so begging by color
of feigned devotion and many other suspicious and vicious livings thus used in the realm.

Officers were given the power to search out and examine all vagabonds, and punish them by putting them in the stocks for three days. While in the stocks, they could be fed only bread and water. Once released, they should be deported from the town. If they lingered, they should be placed in the stocks for three days. When vagabonds left town, they should go to the town where they were born, or where they were best known. There they should "remain and abide, without begging of the said hundred, upon pain to be punished as is abovesaid." University students, when traveling to or from school, should carry letters from the university chancellor reporting the bearer's destination, his route (which must be the most direct), and the estimated travel time. Soldiers and sailors should have a similar letter from their captain. No traveler should linger for more than a day and a night in any one town. Anyone who loiters or "lives suspiciously," as defined by the Statute of Winchester of 1285, was to be apprehended, questioned, and dealt with as a vagrant if necessary. And finally, officials who did not assiduously punish vagabonds would be fined 20d., the cash going to the town's aldermen. 58

By the end of the fifteenth century, officials had discerned a pattern of vagrant behavior. With the objectives
of finding a job, obtaining shelter, being near the larger centers of poor relief, and having more people to beg and steal from, vagrants almost instinctively headed toward towns and cities. As early as 1500 the Recorder of London had to spend several nights a month arresting "shoals" of vagrants as they entered the city via the Great North Road. While isolated farmhouses or lone travelers on deserted roads were sometimes terrorized by bands of prowling vagabonds, the threat vagabonds posed to towns was much more serious. Towns seldom had enough work to offer the vagrants who had wandered there to find it, and civic officials strained to keep order as the undesirable newcomers outstretched the capabilities of the local sources of poor relief. Henry VII knew that if one of England's larger cities was to break out into riots the results could prove fatal to his dynasty, so he yielded to pressure from local authorities who advocated simply ordering vagrants back to the countryside whence they came.

Rudolph Heinze believes that Henry VII's proclama-

tions were mainly stop-gap measures designed "to meet an immediate problem which could not wait for the sitting of the next Parliament. When more permanent legislation was intended, statutes were used." If this were so, Henry VII waited ten years before issuing a definitive piece of legis-
lation on vagabondage. The Act Against Vagabonds and Beggars
of 1495 noted that the Vagrancy Act of 1384 had failed to contain the spread of vagrancy. Henry VII's statute ordered that vagrants who were outright "evildoers" should be sent to jail immediately. All vagabonds should be found by officials and placed in the stocks for three days. They should be fed only water and bread, and any persons giving them additional nourishment or helping them avoid detention would be fined 12 d. After the vagrant was released from the stocks, he should be compelled to leave town. Beggars unable to work, 'impotent' beggars, should return to the "hundred where [they] last dwelled, or where they [were] best known or born, there to remain or abide without begging outside of the said hundred, upon pain of being punished as is aforesaid." Clerks, soldiers, sailors, and traveling men must have letters of credentials and letters explaining where they were going and why. Any sheriff who failed to prosecute vagabonds, or who let the wandering poor stop in his town for more than a day would be fined 20d. This penalty would be paid to the ward's aldermen. Those who played illegal games could be fined a minimum of 6s. 8d. Sheriffs could curtail the sale of "common ale" as they thought fit to control the city's rowdy inhabitants. 63

Almost every detail of the Vagrancy Act of 1495 was identical to the Proclamation of February 18, 1493. As such, this statute was an anomaly: it reiterated a royal
proclamation rather than following the usual pattern of being the source which proclamations merely restated and bolstered.

Henry recognized quite early in his reign that the best way to see that a law was executed was to be sure that the officials charged with enforcing it were supervised by other officials. Thus, for the vagrancy laws, he offered aldermen monetary incentives to ascertain that sheriffs were doing their jobs. In the Act Against Vagabonds and Beggars of 1503-04, Henry went one step further; he appointed officials whose specific task was to supervise the enforcement of vagrancy laws. This statute marks the inception of Westminster's haphazard efforts to build a mechanism within the framework of local government that would deal effectively and quickly with vagrancy. No such mechanism was ever fully created, but the measures of Henry VII against vagrancy were among the most constructive and imaginative of all such Tudor acts and proclamations. Still, most of the questions avoided by Henry VII's legislation remained unaddressed until the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Henry VIII's first effort to emend the vagrancy laws was the Proclamation of July 5, 1511, Enforcing the Statute of Winchester. The Statute of Winchester had been passed under Edward I on October 8, 1285 to counter the increase in crimes. Edward I specified the punishments for each crime
and ordered that courts be held in each county to judge felons. Where no trials were held, the whole village would be responsible collectively for the crimes committed. Hosts were to be held accountable for the conduct of their guests, and no strangers would be allowed to be lodged in the suburbs, only within the city or town proper. The Statute of Winchester of 1285 ordered that town watches must be kept strictly, and that roads between towns should be enlarged.

The Proclamation of 1511 focused on the failure of towns to repulse idle strangers. It also denounced the indulgence of "servants of husbandry and servants of artificers" in unlawful games such as dice, closh, tennis, cards, and bowls. When low-born men played such illicit games, they often resorted to robbery to pay off their gambling debts. They would

\[
\text{untruly feign themselves to be sick and diseased... of which idleness and untruly feigned sickness ensue all vices and enormities... and to the great hinderance of husbands and artificers which cannot get laborers for their money.}
\]

This proclamation first used the phrase describing idleness as the "mother and cause of all vices" which would be echoed in most of the other statutes, proclamations, and circular letters against vagrancy for the next two reigns. The Proclamation of 1511 reduced to one day the amount of time vagabonds caught for the first time would be forced to spend
in the stocks; a second offense would merit only three days. The fine for aiding or comforting vagabonds remained at 12d. Punishment would be reduced for vagabond women "great with child, and men and women in great sickness, and persons being impotent and above the age of sixty years." The proclamation empowered the Lord Chancellor, the Keeper of the Great Seal, the Lord Treasurer, two Chief Justices, Barons of the King's Exchequer, and justices of assize within their circuit to make periodic inspections of how well sheriffs were executing vagrancy laws. All these officials could prosecute vagabonds, but local authorities were granted the right to determine if house searches were necessary to root out hiding vagrants. They could make these random searches up to four times a year.67

The Proclamation of February 19, 1517, Enforcing Statutes on Apparel, Vagabonds, and Laborers listed nine statutes that were not being enforced. The proclamation was directed especially to the officials of London in urging them to prosecute vagabonds.68 The effects of this proclamation were not limited to London, however. This proclamation was not at all specific in telling local officials how they should deal with vagrants, and local officials interpreted the proclamation's absence of definite procedures as giving them latitude to piece together their own vagrancy policies, using past statutes and proclamations as guidelines. Local
officials "responded well to those proclamations that involved their self-interest," and their response to the many proclamations concerning vagrancy bore out this observation. Lincoln, after the Proclamation of February 19, 1517, ordered its officials to search out and report on all idle persons. But after "those which will not work for their living" were taken into custody, "boroughs [often] concentrated on enforcing their own legislation against vagabonds, possibly because penalties were considerably more severe in local regulations than in the proclamations or statutes." Only after the effects of the reforms of the English Reformation began to permeate local government and everyday attitudes would this situation begin to reverse itself.

Shortly after the Proclamation of February 1517, the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London, at the command of the king's council, devised articles "for the avoiding and putting out of mighty beggars and vagabonds out of the same [London]." This report recorded the names of over 1,000 impotent poor in the register of Guildhall. It instructed aldermen to distribute a token to be worn on the right sleeve of the gown of every impotent beggar, so that people might see that the wearer of the badge was entitled to beg. The articles of this report state that licensed beggars should see to it that vagabonds did not enter the city. Vagabonds should be chased from the city by the licensed
beggars' "exclamations, exculpations, and putting them out." If licensed beggars did not aid city officials in driving out vagabonds, they would lose their permit to beg. Licensed beggars were also warned not to pester citizens who refused to give them alms.

The London Articles of 1517 also gave permission for beggars who had become diseased or who had the pox or the plague to turn to city hospitals for care. While they stayed in hospitals, they were to rely on the hospital to provide for them—they were not to attempt to beg for themselves. Hospitals who cared for the impotent beggars were to be compensated by the surrounding parishes.70

This scheme did not prevent vagabonds from infiltrating London; they even got into the Court. In 1526 the Knight Marshal of the King's Court was ordered to expel "boys and vile persons and [see to] the punishment of vagabonds and mighty beggars, also of unthrifts and common women" who hung about the court.71 The increase in "beggars, vagabonds, unlawful games, suspect inns and alehouses" was noted in the Proclamation of November 12, 1527, Prohibiting Grain Engrossing and Enforcing Statutes Against Vagabonds and Unlawful Games. Local officials were blamed for the spread of vagrancy, and they were ordered to "lay apart all feigned and vain pity, affection, and dread and all other excuses and delays" and execute vagrancy laws.72

The period of English history between 1529 and 1534 is
pivotal because of the monumental religious, economic, and political changes brought on by the encroaching ideas of the Protestant Reformation and the struggle for power initiated by Henry VIII's 'Great Matter.' But the attacks on formerly unquestioned practices, beliefs, and attitudes were just as marked and undoubtedly just as important. It is no coincidence that as the Henrican Reformation got under way, significant changes developed in the royal government's approach to poor relief and vagrancy. Royal government, as never before, was determined to strengthen its hold over local authorities. To do this, it could no longer be satisfied with the passive goal of merely maintaining law and order; royal pronouncements very quickly became a means of reshaping laws to support claims of royal absolutism.

As regards the vagrancy laws, the legislation of the central government during this period became more punitive than much of the local regulations. The prescriptions of the royal government against the work-shy caught up with and eventually surpassed the time-honored London practice of whipping and branding sturdy beggars.

The Reformation, not surprisingly, made a large difference in the workings of poor relief and in mass attitudes toward poverty, alms, unemployment, and intentional idleness. The major change was the shift from the Church to the state in regulating the relief of the poor. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Church had developed sophisticated
means to collect material resources from laymen, ostensibly to relieve the poor. Canon law demanded that one-quarter of all ecclesiastical emoluments be given over to the poor. It also stipulated that parish priests were to hand over one-third of their incomes to the poor and that another portion be laid aside to provide 'hospitality' to the needy who came to their doors. The potential effectiveness of Canon Law was greatly negated, however, by the fairly common practice of using parish tithes to fill the bursaries of monasteries rather than the stomachs of the poor.

When the state took over much of the Church's obligations and resources, the poor suffered from the temporary but profound confusion that sprung up concerning the best methods to eliminate want. Like the Medieval Church, Henry VIII's government quickly perceived that it could do no better than to retain the parish as the unit best suited to tend to the poor. However, in the mad dash of the crown and aristocracy to seize the material assets of the Church, local parishes were frequently despoiled and left incapable of handling their poor charges. While the royal government ignored the strains it placed on long-tried methods of poor relief, it also did little to clarify the ambivalent attitude many statesmen, clergymen, and intellectuals seemed to hold about charity. Official reaction to personal charity wavered between considering it a hold-over from the Medieval Church which rewarded indolence to believing it was a means of
quickening the social consciences of the middle and upper classes. Private charity went a long way toward picking up the slack in poor relief caused by the Reformation, and the government soon recognized that while it could seize the wealth of the church, it could never afford to disregard the de-facto partnership between the government and private individuals as twin pillars of poor-relief.  

An outcome of the private sector's new role in helping the government deal with poverty was the grudging admission by the government, after 1529, that there was "genuine unemployment in the realm and that whole classes of men were from time to time and from place to place literally thrust down well below the line of subsistence by forces with which they were powerless to contend." Perhaps the government was reduced to acknowledging this fact only because since the Reformation, the problems caused by the underemployed and the unemployed had become direct reflections of the government's competence and prestige. By openly admitting that there was true unemployment in the land, Henry's government could continue to lay blame on the past malpractices of the church, which had surely brought on such a situation. Thus it was safe for Henry to take any future credit for easing the unemployment situation, for if things did not improve, or even if they became worse, he could still hold the pernicious Roman Church entirely accountable.

During this period there was also a sharpening in the
tendency of officials to use the presence of vagabonds as an excuse for indiscriminate repression, or to blame vagabonds inordinately for the ills of the realm. Thomas Cranmer said that:

The great part of them that be the chief stirrers in these insurrections [referring to the enclosure riots of 1549] be ruffians and sturdy idle fellows, which be the causes of their own poverty, commonly resorting to tippling and to alehouses, much drinking and little working, much spending and little getting, and yet they will be clad gorgeously, fare daintiously, and lie softly.... These fellows make all this hurly-burly in one place, then they run to another.

The 'hit and run' tactics of vagabonds were seized upon by Tudor theorists as a justification for the royal government to take upon itself rights and responsibilities traditionally the domain of local officials.80

The emphasis on poor relief was shifted and the role of private and religious-organized charitable efforts was displaced as a result of the analysis of the "functional causes of poverty within the economic organization of society and the means of relief as part of the social duties of governance." The objectives of the poor-relief and vagrancy measures remained the same before and after 1530: the impotent and the sturdy poor were to be suppressed because of the threat they posed to domestic harmony. But after 1530 these measures were used to increase royal dominance over local officials. The stridency of vagrancy measures rose markedly after 1530.81 Henry VIII thought it to be...
...small charity to bestow otherwise alms on [the]... many folk [who]... had rather live by the craft of begging slothfully, than either work or labour for their living ..., we think it right necessary that such should be compelled by one means or other to serve the world with their bodily labour. 82

Henry's beliefs concerning vagrancy were consonant with the official position that there were ample work opportunities for everyone in England, and that since most beggars and vagabonds were physically capable of working, idleness would be destroyed only if punishments were made stern and plentiful enough. 83 The primary change was that after the Reformation commenced, the royal government took the lead in molding attitudes towards charity, poverty, vagrancy, and the duties of local officials and the public vis-à-vis enforcing royal statutes and proclamations.

In some respects, the interests of the poor and the jobless were less well served by secular authorities than they had been even under flagrant excesses of the old Church. Inexperienced, and therefore insecure, the royal government undertook the construction of an unbending system which would deal with poverty and vagrancy; in discounting the subleties and plasticity of the old system, some deserving poor persons found themselves quite literally left out in the cold, while the unemployed who wandered to look for work usually found it harder than ever before to escape being officially labeled as incorrigibles.

The next proclamation concerning "that most damnable
vice of idleness, chief subverter and confounder of 
commonweals...the mother and root of all vices" was 
the June 1530 Proclamation Ordering Punishment of 
Vagabonds and Beggars. Despite all laws, "the said 
numbers of vagabonds and beggars be not seen in any 
part minishe, but daily to be augmented and increased 
into great routs and companies." Local officials were 
charged to round up all vagabonds who had stubbornly 
refused to return to their place of birth or home town, 
and whether they were male or female, the recalcitrant 
vagabonds should be stripped naked and be "bound and 
sharply beaten and scouraged." Then they should be 
issued a 'billet' or schedule that gave them permission 
to take a specific route to their birthplace or home town 
within a certain amount of time. The billet should follow 
this format:

A. 3. taken to C. in the county of D. as a vagabond, 
without a schedule or token of scourging, and there­
fore whipped at C. aforesaid, the -- day of the month 
of -- in the -- year of the reign of our sovereign 
lord King Henry VIII, in the presence of T. F., 
constable, and other inhabitants of the same town.

Those who possessed this billet could, on their way 'home', 
stop in cities or towns for a meal or for a night's lodging. 
If the vagabond refused to produce his travel-billet, or 
if he wandered without one, he must promptly be "scourged 
or beaten" and issued one. 84

The 1530 Proclamation was issued immediately after
the end of the first session of the first Reformation Parliament. Rudolph Heinze classified it as emergency legislation, designed to fill a void until Parliament reconvened on January 16, 1531. But by the time parliament did end its recess, the privy council had a new "expert on Parliamentary affairs," Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell's approach to the vagrancy problem was novel: he made a concerted effort to establish a practical differentiation between able-bodied vagrants and those who needed alms to survive. So the Proclamation of 1530 was a watershed, for while it continued the pattern of representing little more "than an attempt to transfer London's problems to the localities," it did presage the shape of future vagrancy edicts in its toughness.

The Act Concerning the Punishment of Beggars and Vagabonds of 1531 commented on the increase in the number of vagrants and on the "thefts, murders, and other heinous offenses and great enormities" that sprung from them. Justices of the Peace were given discretionary powers to determine how many and which vagabonds should be allowed to beg within their districts. Those permitted to beg would be told when and where they might do so, and their names would be recorded on a roll and certified by the Justices of the Peace of the shire. Those who deviated from their appointed time and place of begging would be placed in the stocks for two days without bread and water.
Those who begged without a permit would be either stripped "from the middle up" and whipped publicly or put in the stocks for three days with the usual fare of bread and water. After that ordeal, the vagrant would be assigned a time and a place to beg, and would be sworn to observe those restrictions.

Those not appointed by the Justices of the Peace to beg but who were "whole and mighty in body and able to labour having no land, master, nor lawful merchandise, craft, or mastery, whereby they might get [their]living... and can give none reckoning how he doth lawfully get his living" would officially be deemed vagabonds. They were to be brought to the market town where the Justice of the Peace presides, and there be "tied to the end of a cart naked and be beaten with whips throughout the same market town or other place until his body be bloody by reason of such whippings." Afterwards, the vagabonds should be returned to his place of birth or where he last resided for three years, and once there he should "put himself to labour like as a true man oweth to do." If the vagrant failed to find such labor, he ought to be whipped again and "after such whipping he shall be kept in the stocks till he hath found surety to go to service or else to labour after the discretion of the said J.P."

An important clause in the Vagrancy Act of 1531 was the threat that local officials who did not punish impotent
beggars would be fined 3s. 4d., and 6s. and 8d. for every unpunished sturdy beggar. The royal government rightly understood that if local officials would not execute its laws simply on the basis of obedience to higher authority, or because the laws fit in with the local officials' self-interest, they would execute them to avoid steep fines.

Fortunetellers, whose profession like that of prostitutes was classified as a sub-stratum of vagrancy, would be whipped for "two days together" for practicing their art. A second offense got the same punishment plus being put in the pillory for two days and having an ear lopped off. University students or "shipmen pretending losses of their ships and goods of the sea going about the country begging without sufficient authority witnessing the same, shall be punished in the manner and form as is above rehearsed of small beggars." This last-mentioned clause reflected a widely-held sentiment, made explicit in Foxe's Martyrs, that universities fomented laziness and a sense of purposelessness.

The Vagrancy Act of 1531 made for the first time a clear distinction between the able-bodied beggar unable to explain "how he doth letfully get his living" and the "idle person and no common beggar." Professor C. S. L. Davies recognized that the act's definition of vagrancy did not necessarily posit an "element of wandering abroad." After this act, the legal definition of vagabondage expanded
gradually but steadily. With this act came a govern-
ment propelled initiative to reconsider charitable impulses
and methods. With the emphasis on distinguishing between
able-bodied and impotent beggars, the "common argument that
evil rulers are a scourge of God for wicked subjects"
was inverted. Now it was vagrants themselves, and the
dissention they spread, which Thomas Cranmer held to be
the instruments of God's wrath.

The Vagrancy Act of 1531 was reinforced by two
proclamations. The Proclamation of June 16, 1531 Enforc-
ing Statutes Against Beggars and Vagabonds, ordered the
arrest of beggars and vagabonds who did not leave London
for their home towns. A Proclamation of uncertain date
in 1532 complained of the slackness of officials in enforc-
ing statutes and proclamations, including those dealing
with vagrancy. Local officials ought to pursue vagabonds
as the "very enemies of this commonwealth, and punish them
in their bodies, hands, and goods, and after their demerits
that it shall be to their confusion and undoings, to the
most terrible example to such offenders." (One wonders
how many vagabonds had any type of goods, other than the
clothing they wore, which could be confiscated by way of
punishment.) Officials were bound to act "without dread,
corruption, affection, or partiality" if they hoped to be
recipients of the Kings' favor.

A proclamation in 1533 addressed an especially
menacing problem for the King. Since Henry VII had ordered the nobles to disband their private armies and reduce significantly the number of their retainers, Henry VII and Henry VIII had suspected some nobles of taking on "vagabonds, masterless folk, rascals and other idle persons which have used to hang on, and follow the court" as servants. Therefore, Henry VIII commanded that no person, whatever his rank, might "keep any more number of persons or servants retaining unto them within the court that doth appertain unto them." Anyone who brought vagabonds into the palace would be imprisoned and "utterly forever to be excluded [from] the King's service." The same punishment applied to courtiers who gave vagabonds food or drink. Vagabonds were ordered to leave the court within twenty-four hours of the publication of the proclamation, presumably on pain of being beaten, scourged, or placed in the pillory. This proclamation was evidently ineffective, or at least not heeded for long, because it was reissued practically verbatim in October 1541, with the addendum that those who employed, aided, or associated with vagrants who lounged about the court would be sent to Marshalsea prison.

It was not until 1534-35 that Thomas Cromwell turned his full attention towards a comprehensive poor law that would systematically define the kingdom's poor relief apparatus, the responsibility of the central and local
governments to provide work for the sturdy unemployed, and the efforts to restrict begging and monitor parishes' poor-relief systems. The Draft of the Poor Law of 1535 was composed by Cromwell's assistant, William Marshall. It acknowledged the complex links between economic changes and the rise in unemployment. It recommended large-scale state actions to stem the growth of poverty and vagrancy.

The draft proposed a public works project designed to give the unemployed in each shire steady work. The project would encompass building harbors, roads, fortresses, and watercourses. These projects would be supervised by a "Council to Avoid Vagabonds." If a vagabond refused to work, or if he by "continual loitering, or of any sedition, unlawful means, corrupt council or practice...makes murmuration, grudge, or insurrection in and among the rest of the labourers," he was to be branded, and on the second offense he should be hanged as a felon. Professor Elton argues that the most astounding aspect of the whole draft was the freedom to be granted to this council to publish proclamations in "like manner as proclamations made by the King and the privy council."

The public works project was to be funded through royal munificence, church collections, and an "annual levy or graduated income tax." The draft did not specify what this tax would consist of, or how it would be collected, but the mere suggestion of an income tax made
this draft quasi-revolutionary. Undoubtedly it also made the draft a repugnant concept to the merchants and gentry on whom an income tax would fall most heavily. When the Vagrancy Act of 1536 truncated the public works projects and tax measures of the draft of 1535, it eviscerated the plan's potential strengths: the 'extreme' measures of the draft would have ended the shortsighted practice of the cities' deporting of vagabonds. The draft at least offered the possibility of rehabilitating vagrants while improvements were made on roads, bridges, and military buildings at minimal costs to the exchequer.103

The Poor Law Draft of 1535 also proposed that new official posts be created to oversee the vagrancy situation. "Censors or overseers of poverty and correctors of idleness" would be appointed for each parish, and "beadles" would tend to the collection of alms.104

Even though the Poor Laws Draft of 1535 was never passed in its entirety, it marked the sole "positive achievement of the commonwealth movement in the 1530's," and it served as a prototype for future poor laws.105 Perhaps because it was so innovative it was doomed to be buried under bureaucratic lethargy or middle class enmity, (despite the fact that Henry VIII personally vouched for the act before Parliament; perhaps he did this because the act would have provided him with an enormous source of free labor.) Still, Professor Jones seems closer to the mark
than C.S.L. Davies in contending that the draft of 1535 was much more in keeping with the ideals of the Commonwealth 'Party' than was the Vagrancy Act of 1547.106

By early 1536 it was apparent that the troubled mood of the people, first manifested in 'wild' rumors of the demands the king was about to make on each man's property, and later demonstrated in outright rebellion in the Pilgrimage of Grace, made the passage of the Poor Law Draft of 1535 quite unlikely.107 The Act for the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars, which followed in the wake of the northern uprising in 1536, was not, however, totally devoid of commonwealth idealism.

The Vagrancy Act of 1536 repeated the prologue of the Vagrancy Act of 1531. It admitted that the Vagrancy Act of 1531 had not elucidated...

...how and in what wise the said poor people and sturdy vagabonds should be ordered at their repair and at their coming into their countries, nor how the inhabitants of every hundred should be charged for the relief of the same poor people, nor yet for the setting and keeping in work and labour of the aforesaid valiant vagabonds at their said repair into every hundred of this realm.

The act also ordered that vagabonds returning to their homes should be treated charitably:

All the governors and ministers of every of the same cities, shires, towns...shall not only succour, find and keep all and every of the same poor people by way of voluntary and charitable alms...as shall be thought meet by their discretions in such wise as none of them of very necessity shall be compelled to wander idly and
and go openly in begging to ask alms in any of the same cities, shires, towns, and parishes; but also to cause and to compel all and every the aforesaid sturdy vagabonds and valiant beggars to be set and kept to continual labour, in such wise as by their said labours they and every of them may get their own livings with the continual labour of their own hands.

After the vagabond was whipped as stipulated in the Vagrancy Act of 1531, he was allowed to stop every ten miles en route home to receive from the local parish (after he had shown his letter of passport affixed with an official seal) "competent meat, drink, and lodging for one night only" or for one meal "so that he might continue his journey."108

The need for an official seal arose from the practice among bands of vagrants to appoint a 'secretary' from among their numbers who could forge official-looking letters of passport or other pseudo-credentials.109

Parishes that failed to produce adequate amounts of voluntary aid for their vagabond and beggar dependents would be fined 20s. per month. Civic officials and churchwardens were instructed to see to the "gathering and procuring of such charitable and voluntary alms of the good Christian people within the same, with boxes every Sunday, holy day, and other festival day" to relieve the poor and to halt begging. They were also to ascertain that the "lusty or [those] having their limbs strong enough to labour may be daily kept in continual labour, whereby everyone of them may get their own substance and living with their own hands." If the officials or churchwardens were negligent in this,
they would be fined 20s.

According to the act, healthy children (between the ages of five and fourteen) of vagabonds and beggars were to be taken from their parents by the local authorities. The authorities would "appoint them to masters of husbandry or other crafts or labours to be taught, by the which they may get their livings when they shall come to age." Children between twelve and sixteen who without good reason refused to serve as apprentices were to be "openly whipped with rods...[and] sent again [into their master's] service, and so to be served as often as he shall be apprehended and convicted in form aforesaid."

For the first time, the government acted on the need to enlist the assistance of preachers in combating vagrancy. Clergymen were ordered to use every occasion to "exhort, move, stir, and provoke people to be liberal and bountifully to extend their good and charitable alms and contributions from time to time [for] poor relief and to keep continual work for vagabonds."110

The Vagrancy Act of 1536 was the harshest such law to date. But the new ideas which had infiltrated England since Luther's repudiation of papal primacy encouraged the attitude that virtually no law against idleness could be too strict. The sine qua non of effective poor relief was, the reformers emphasized, rigorous vagrancy laws.111

The Proclamation of January 1, 1536, Ordering the
Surrender of Bishop Fisher's Sermon Books further broadened the definition of vagrancy. The king warned that he would begin punishing as vagrants those...

...divers and sundry light persons, called pardoners, [who] go daily abroad in this his realm, declaring and publishing to his people, as well in parish churches as elsewhere, divers indulgences and pardons corruptly and deceitfully obtained of the Bishop of Rome, and by the color thereof exact and gather of his subjects great and innumerable sums of money.

Pardoners were also accused of being confederates of the "great errant thieves of this realm," with whom they robbed the houses of the realm's wealthiest men. They used the money they extorted from the "poor innocent people by color of their indulgences [on] ribaldry and carnal vices, carrying with them drabs, whores, and cut purses, to the great slander of the realm and to the damage, deceit, and impoverishment of the King's good loving subjects." 112

To be sure, this proclamation was more an attack on the 'minions of Rome' than an attempt to bring vagrants under control. Its hyperbolic description of the abuses of the 'unreformed' church was reminiscent of Simon Fish's language in "The Supplication of the Beggars." The proclamation indicated that the official government attitude toward the vestiges of power of the Roman Catholic Church in England had begun to coalesce with the convictions of some of the most vehement reformers: the unreformed churchmen were assailed as inveterate collaborators with the realm's forces
of idleness and dissension. This recent 'realization' was yet another justification for the government's suppression of all monasteries and religious houses whose annual income was less than two-hundred pounds. Later, by a statute in 1539, all monasteries were dissolved. However well or badly the monasteries responded to the needs of the poor and the homeless, the destruction of over six hundred religious institutions only exacerbated the growing sense of disarray felt by many people. The Pilgrimage of Grace was in large part an expression of this feeling of general dislocation. The relatively spontaneous nature of this march supports Lewis Einstein's thesis that the brutality and abruptness with which Henry effected economic changes made his frightened and frustrated subjects rise up in the name of religion even when they were concerned only mildly over the religious aspects of Henry's revolution.

The orders drawn up by city officials for regulating begging at Southampton in 1536 illustrate a city government assimilating royal government orders into its own legal traditions. As royal directives specified, the mayor took charge of assigning beggars a place and a time to beg, and a badge to wear while they did it. Beggars without a badge were to be placed in the stocks, and those who gave alms to such illicit beggars were liable to be fined 12d. for each offense. Traveling beggars could spend only one night in Southampton. The mayor and his 'brethren' determined the
number of people allowed to beg within the city limits, and all residual beggars were obliged either to labor or leave town. But the Southampton order struck a chord of originality by appointing a person—who was paid 6s. 8d. (a year?)—to control begging and beggars. This "constable over all beggars" had the privilege of wearing a scutcheon weighing two ounces, presumably so he would not be confused with the beggars he supervised, who were doomed to wear lighter tin badges.\textsuperscript{118}

The deep-seated concern of all classes that poverty and vagrancy were destroying society was reflected in a letter by John Bayker, a craftsman, to Henry VIII. Bayker admitted his audacity in presuming to lecture the king on the elements of destruction over which Henry's government presided. In his travels throughout the realm, Bayker said he had seen many decayed houses, villages, and highways which had been made dangerous by vagrants. Despite all the "god and holsome statutes and lawes for the condynge [sic] punishment off all vagabonds and valyent beggars...yet none the less I cannot perceave byt the multytude doth dayle encrease more and more." Bayker's theory was that the number of sedentary and itinerant poor multiplied largely because of ruinously high rents. His letter to the king was in fact a striking, articulate petition for the king to take the lead in reversing the spread of poverty and in cracking down on truculent vagrants who made life difficult for everyone.\textsuperscript{119}
John Marshall, the likely author of the Poor Law Draft of 1535, wrote to Thomas Cromwell in 1539 that the "greatest ruffling" had passed, and the realm had found tranquility at last. He was indulging in wishful thinking. Marshall claimed that the dissolution of the monasteries had greatly increased the prosperity of the commoners. All honest men, he wrote, rejoiced that the "valiant beggars be gone, and unlawful games with them, except that in some alehouses men play at 'shiffeabourd' in default of the constables." A last remnant of the "papists' enormities" was the superstitious fear of the commoners about working on former Holy Days ("abrogated workdays.") The letter is so optimistic it is hard to understand. Why did Marshall need to propagandize to Cromwell? And why did the letter peremptorily dismiss the threat of vagrancy—especially when the war of words against idleness remained a central feature of Cromwell's program? By 1539 the godly society of the commonwealth had approved laws that "provided to avoid idle people and vagabonds, and to cherish and sustain the impotent poor, and live so that the works of charity are better observed than ever," but it had not managed to eliminate vagabondage as Marshall implied.

There was even some question as to whether the post-1530 vagrancy acts were at all effective. Sir Robert Mawde, the parson of Whatcote, was brought before a commission
headed by Cromwell to answer charges that he received valiant beggars in his house and there played cards with them. Mawde had injudiciously declared in one of his sermons that the King's injunctions were so prolix that people often inadvertently disobeyed them:

[The King's statutes and proclamations against vagrancy] must needs be conned, for by God's bones I have read [them] unto you a hundred thousand times, and yet ye be never the better....Here is an hundred words in these injunctions where two would serve.122

Mawde was rash but essentially correct in stating that the king's strongly-worded laws against vagrancy and begging did not allay the sense of confusion some people felt over what the proper bounds of Christian charity should be. Indeed, there was a growing tendency to "regard begging as symptomatic of a defect in the functioning of society rather than an opportunity for the exercise of individual Christian charity."123 Social tensions escalated as it became more and more apparent that upward economic mobility was restricted mainly to those already at the higher echelons of the social pyramid. The resentment on the part of the poor in the sharp contrast between their stagnant or declining standard of living and the continued prosperity of the gentry was vented in a detestation of the beggar and the vagabond, both of whom seemed to thrive on idleness.124

The followers of the 'new' learning believed, as did John Hooper, that "peace and quietness shall [not] come to
the realm a better way than to have the true religion
of God restored." True religion demanded a re-evaluation
of the means and ends of charitable efforts, but
preachers were adamant in proclaiming the duty of all
Christians to relieve the helpless poor. Latimer
later told Edward VI that the historic task of the king
to provide for the poor was more essential than ever
before. And especially in the 1540's, 'practical'
reformers like Crowley and Brynklow were urging that
free medical care be provided in cities for the sturdy
as well as the impotent beggars. They also advocated
that vagabond children should be reared properly, with
a decent education at public expense. They insinuated
that the enacting clause of the Vagrancy Act of 1536,
forcing children of vagabonds to serve as apprentices,
did not provide for the future of these youths as well
as it might have.

Unfortunately, private benefactions reached their
nadir between 1540 and 1560. Because individual con-
tributions were an indispensable component in the govern-
ment's poor-aid plan, the poor-relief system was particu-
larly ill-equipped during this period to deal with the
side-effects of poverty.

Merchants were the mainstay of private benefaction
both before and after 1540. Between 1480 and 1540
merchants bequeathed roughly 60% of the 49,327 pounds
for the relief of the poor, and they left almost 93% of the 9,509 pounds to be spent on the social rehabilitation of the poor. Between 1541 and 1560 they left 60% of the 39,436 pounds left for the relief of the poor and 77% of the 11,357 pounds earmarked for social rehabilitation. Their dominance in alms-giving continued after 1560. The next-most-generous group between 1480 and 1540 was the lower gentry, and between 1541 and 1560, the tradesmen. After these groups were the nobility and the upper gentry, the yeomanry, and the upper clergy. The seeming reluctance of the nobility and upper gentry to contribute their fair share to the shrinking amount of poor-relief funds caused Bishop Latimer to lash out against them: "They will not look on the poor; they must help their children, and purchase them more land than their grandfathers had before them."

Between December 20, 1540 and November 18, 1541, at least three vagrants were brought before the Privy Council to be tried. The first case was a man named Walsh, from Waterford, who was brought before the Council as a "naughty person and a vagabond." The Council found him innocent of vagrancy and he was allowed to return unmolested to Waterford. On November 1, 1541, John Dowglas, a Scot, confessed that he had been living in England as a vagrant since he had fled Scotland for a murder. The Council issued him a passport to leave the realm within
twenty days. The final such case of the year was on November 18, when a vagabond presented to the Council by the constable of Hounslow was found guilty of having spoken seditious words. The Council ordered that he be sent back to Hounslow to be whipped. None of these three cases would appear to have merited the attention of so important and increasingly busy a royal advisory body as the Privy Council. Such business was a reminder of the council's earlier quasi-judicial functions which were more plentiful before its procedures were streamlined by Cromwell. None of the cases heard by the Privy Council resulted in fresh innovations or precedents in judging individual cases of vagrancy. But since the tradition of sporadically hearing vagrancy cases before the Privy Council continued into Edward VI's reign, these cases might have been instances where a decision had to be rendered by the Privy Council because local officials had not been able to reach a decision.

A circular letter of June 30, 1541 from the king to the Justices of the Peace expressed surprise that notwithstanding "sundry advertisements lately made" which commanded them to do their duties, justice was not being done. Justices were warned of the harm that would befall them if they failed to heed Henry's "good monition." The letter made special reference to the deficient efforts to punish sturdy beggars and 'valiant'
beggars according to the "late statute of 1536 the neglect of which has bred no small inconvenience." The watches that the Vagrancy Act [of 1536] ordered to be kept from Ascensiontide to Michaelmas were to be extended to Hallowtide. 138 And further to make it impossible for justices of the peace to avoid dealing with vagabondage, Henry ordered that all justices must hold an annual inquiry that dealt just with offenders against certain statutes, the vagrancy acts being among them. 139

Motivating lethargic local officials was an ongoing struggle for the Tudors. So too was maintaining a hold over the royal bureaucracy and the royal household. The Proclamation of 1541, like the one of 1533 that ordered all vagabonds to leave the court and threatened courtiers who consorted with them, was a continuation of the task begun by Cromwell to rid the court of superfluous attendants. 140 A letter from the king in 1543 ordered further reductions in the number of people permitted access to the court: no persons "lodged within the King's house [shall] suffer any vagabonds, &c., to resort to their chambers..., [and] no persons [shall] suffer any of their servants to come within the gates but such as be like men, and to rest in good order, excluding from them in any wise all boys and rascals." 141

As Henry VIII prepared for what would be his last war against France in 1545, he issued a mandate to the mayor
and sheriffs of London. He claimed that the young men who would make up his army were being "polled and undone" by the "detestable vices and fashions commonly used at the Banke and other such places naught" which were haunted by "ryffians and vagabonds." Therefore, all "ruffyns, vagabondes, masterless men, common players and evil disposed persons [would] serve [the king] in these wars in certain galleys to be armed before 1 June next." 142 This circular letter was promptly backed up by a proclamation; on May 26, 1545 the Proclamation Ordering Vagabonds to the Galleys also forbade anyone from naming "any man to be his servant who is not his household servant, bailiff, keeper or other lawful servant." 143 This proviso was instituted to "prevent these men from being unlawfully included as servants in someone's household, thereby shielding them from the king's press gangs." 144

The idea of using vagabonds as galley slaves was not entirely new; the concept had been mulled over at least since February 1539 when Richard Layton wrote to Cromwell that the Emperor Charles V was using Flanders' sturdy beggars and men without masters to man the galleys of his ships. 145 But unlike Flemish vagabonds, English vagrants were only being impressed into the king's fleet for the duration of the war; they were not being enslaved. Yet, the imprecise phrasing in the Proclamation of 1545 concerning how long vagabonds would have to serve as
involuntary galle[y workers was pointed out by the partisans of the Vagrancy Act of 1547 as the first instance of the legal enslavement of vagrants.\textsuperscript{146}

The mid-1540s was the beginning of a long period of economic difficulties for England. The people hardest hit were those who had the least to begin with. Between 1543 and 1551 silver coins were so badly 'clipped' that they retained only one-third of their original value. People with little or no land holdings were most affected. Debasement of the coinage made cloth exports cheaper; this in turn added to the prosperity of English merchants, who then advocated more land enclosure, to keep this economic cycle--so favorable to them--going.\textsuperscript{147} The prosperity of cloth producers and merchants diminished suddenly in 1551, however, when a collapse of English cloth sales in Antwerp caused a depression in England. Farmers and farm laborers were troubled not only by enclosures, but by the near-catastrophic harvest failures in 1545-46 and 1549-51. Also, urban society was shaken by bad outbreaks of its old nemesis, the plague, in 1543 and 1548. And when the plague and the sweating sickness were dormant in the cities, they were active in the provinces during 1544-46 and 1549-51.\textsuperscript{148} Sixteenth-century England was no stranger to epidemics, successive crop failures, or economic slumps, but when the three struck together, in full force, as they
did in the 1540s and early 1550s, the results seemed at times to be tearing English society apart.

Not surprisingly, during these extremely tense years, writings, official positions, and popular attitudes toward vagabondage became ever more vitriolic. The didactic King's Book (formally known as A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man), written in 1543, said that whether or not vagabonds actually robbed people, they were all thieves because even though they were "able to get their living by labour, [they took] such alms wherewith the poor and impotent folk should be relieved and sustained." On November 23, 1545, Parliament ordered the "continuation of divers statutes...touching impotent persons and vagabonds." The two remaining official pronouncements on vagrancy under Henry VIII were a royal proclamation and a circular letter by the Privy Council, both written in 1546. The Proclamation Enforcing Statutes of Sewers and Vagabonds recited the usual litany of royal complaints against reticent officials who allowed agents of disorder to have free rein in their shires. And on June 27, 1546 the Privy Council sent out a letter to all "sherifes, Justices of Peace, and Commissioners for the Becons in al the Shires for discharge of the Becon Watche and the Reducing of the Watche according to the Statute of Winchesterest." Henry's policy towards vagrancy had come full circle; he had
begun his reign urging that the Statute of Winchester be more closely adhered to, and he ended by repeating this order. The officials who directed the watch should have "special regard to the ydle sorte of peple and vacaboundes, and lykewise to thinferior sorte now returneng from the Campe, that they lyve in ordre, and in case of breche thereof to be punished in tyme." Clearly the process of absorbing the veterans of the most recent war was going poorly, and in light of this it seems incongruous that Henry wrote about reducing any watches.

Henry VIII left 1,000 marks to be distributed among the poor, with the warning, expressed in his will, that "common beggars, as much as may be" should be excepted. To the end of his life, Henry VIII remained theologically conservative enough to believe that if he hoped for his soul to be received by God, he needed, in life and in death, to share some of his wealth with his meanest subjects. But like most of his people, Henry VIII did not include the giving of alms to vagabonds, or a sense of empathy toward vagabonds' woes, as contributing to a sense of Christian deceny. For his lack of compassion toward vagrants Henry deserved no more censure than did the vast majority of his contemporaries. Henry must be held accountable for his persistent blaming of timid local officials for the shortcomings of his vagrancy legislation rather than attacking the inadequacies of the program itself.
Paul Slack observed that the official approaches and reactions to social problems under Edward VI and Mary I have been largely overlooked by historians. This is regrettable, because these reactions filled the gap between the "much-trumpeted innovations of Wolsey and Cromwell on the one hand and those of William Cecil on the other." At least a portion of this neglect is attributable to the colorful works of social criticism that debated contemporary problems so fiercely that they overshadowed more plodding, prosaic official writings on the same subjects. But the significance of the positions taken by the two governments under Edward VI regarding vagrancy have received as much attention as have unofficial utterances. The unequivocal wording of the Vagrancy Act of 1547 made the act one of the most famous (or infamous) pieces of English legislation of the sixteenth century. The wording is so strong, in fact, that it is impossible to view the act as a 'bridge' between the idealism of the Poor Law Draft of 1535 and the pragmatism of the Elizabethan Poor Laws. The Vagrancy Act of 1547 was so abrupt and extreme in comparison with even the harshest laws of Henry VIII that it must be considered only as an end in itself; it must have been intended as the definitive anti-vagrancy law, so out of keeping does it seem with the moral scruples of those who wanted to found a Christian commonwealth.
To its ultimate misfortune, Somerset's Protectorate was quite adept at disseminating its vision as to what constituted a Protestant community, and how the people would flourish under justice and prosperity if Somerset's regime were able to carry out its agenda. When the government raised expectations too high, every failure that it encountered was magnified not only by its enemies but by its partisans. No government could survive under such circumstances, but Somerset's government was really destroyed by its inability to promote economic stability, ideological uniformity, and political and social tranquility.155

Somerset was not unique in professing concern for the realm's internal harmony while at the same time acting ruthlessly to suppress people, factions, or ideas which opposed his political dominance. Most successful kings had been forced to do the same thing. But when Somerset promised to bestow more liberties on the populace and at the same time argued that social inequalities were mandatory for the government to function properly, he seemed confused to his sympathizers and hypocritical to his foes.156 Thus when he repealed the Proclamation Act of 1539, the Treason Act of 1534, the 1414 Act of Burning Heretics, and the Act of Six Articles of 1539, he provoked his advisor, Sir William Paget, to rebuke him that "then all things were too straight, and now they are too loose."157 Many of Somerset's subor-
dinates believed that his hasty actions—which were probably initial bids for popularity—were endangering the Commonwealth ideal of a well-ordered, static society insulated from social mobility and change.\(^1\)\(^5\)\(^8\)

What actually extinguished the dream of such a society was Somerset's continuation of Henry VIII's inflationary practices. True, inflation stymied the hope of many for upward social mobility, but it threatened to incite a revolt if continued unchecked. Because inflationary practices were instrumental in allowing Somerset's government to finance its military ventures in Scotland and France, the government acted to regulate the economy or encourage financial growth only when it was threatened politically.\(^1\)\(^5\)\(^9\)

But the ideals of a Protestant Commonwealth necessitated a fresh start in the formulation of poor-relief plans. Achievements in poor relief under Edward VI may well have been "more banal and more confused than aspirations," but the determined, if belated, efforts of Protestant intellectuals to establish separate procedures for treating the impotent poor and the shirkers were in themselves notable accomplishments.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^0\) Protestant prelates preached that the new king should be trained to take a personal interest in the welfare of his poorest subjects: "The palace of a prince, or a magistrate, should be the refuge and sanctuary of the poor.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^1\) The exhortations of Cranmer, Ridley, and
Latimer bore fruit, for by the end of his reign Edward VI was active in restoring many hospitals for the care of the poor and homeless. There were even activities, sponsored by Nicholas Ridley, to resuscitate the plan of the Poor Law Draft of 1535 to create a workhouse for vagabonds. But this was only entered into after Somerset's fall from power. While Somerset's Protectorate existed, any plan to treat sturdy beggars with the least amount of humaneness was anathema.

The Protectorate's first official statements against idleness represented variations on well-worn themes. In February 1547 the Privy Council addressed an open letter to all justices of the peace. They were ordered to "see [that] the vagaboundes and perturbers of the peace [are] ponyshed, and that ev[ery] man applie himself to doe as his calling dothe requyer." Next was a proclamation, issued on May 24, 1547, on enforcing statutes on seditious rumors. Vagrants were accused of being treasonous rumor-mongers. According to medieval legislation, those charged with tale-spreading could be kept in prison for as long as they withheld from authorities the sources of their gossip. The letter of the Privy Council and the Proclamation of May 24, 1547 established no new procedures for dealing with vagrants; they reflected the indecision of the first few months of Somerset's rule, when he was trying to consolidate his position and think out what would be
his approach to key issues.

Historians now question whether the Vagrancy Act of 1547 was conceived by someone inside Somerset's circle, or by an unknown person or group within Parliament. Professor Davies believed that the Act did not originate as a government measure; it seemed more a pastiche of theories on how to handle vagabondage than a unified policy. Additionally, it was too vague in defining the legal status of the slave, and it did not create the administrative machinery needed to implement its threats. 166

The history of the act is cloudy. It evidently originated in three individual bills introduced in the House of Lords on November 30, 1547. To examine these bills, plus a fourth one proposed on December 3, a special legal committee was empaneled. This committee presumably took different ideas from each bill and shaped them into the Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and for the Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons. This act passed on December 8, 1547. Among those recorded as having assented to the act were the Duke of Somerset, Privy Councillors Riche, St. John, Russell, Northampton, Thomas Seymour, conservative bishops Tunstal, Bonner, Aldridge, Day, and reformer bishops Cranmer, Ridley, Barlow, Holbeach, Bird, and Bush. The act arrived in the House of Commons as the Bill for Vagabonds and Slaves.
It was read three times and approved. It was signed into law by Edward VI on December 24, 1547.

Historians' opinions on the motivations behind the act have varied dramatically. Froude thought the act a noble experiment, "the worst feature of which was an offensive name [slavery]." He added that until the nineteenth century, the precepts of the act were still in effect in the British penal colonies. Pollard hailed the act by citing what he believed to be its best point: it saved vagabonds from being hanged as felons. If this was praise, it was praise by not-very-faint dams. Much more rational is Davies' premise that the act was a panic measure. This idea is partially confirmed by the fact that while the House of Lords was considering its vagrancy proposals, the Commons were debating several of their own bills concerning vagabonds and gypsies.

The existence of so many separate bills on a single subject indicates that vagrancy was regarded as a pressing issue. The problems of the bad harvests of 1545-46 and the troubles some of the 48,000 men who accompanied Henry VIII to Boulogne had in settling back into civilian life sharply increased the number of vagabonds. Although the harvest of 1547 was abundant, cloth exports dropped sharply in 1547, and the Parliament of 1547, the first since 1545, obviously felt that a firm law was essential to counter the spread of
Among the many reasons that the Vagrancy Act of 1547 was a milestone in legal development was that it completed the "sixteenth-century shift from treating a man out of work as if he were a vagabond, to the concept that he was a vagabond." The act was more than an attack on the bands of rogues who disrupted the king's peace. It was a subtle "excuse to make palatable a policy of enforced employment, and, by implication at least, to reduce still further the worker's limited ability to bargain.... The act was distinguished more by its ferocity against the worker than by its provisions for the relief of the unfortunate." Whether or not Somerset inspired or sponsored any of the vagrancy bills considered in Parliament in the Autumn of 1547, he did put the full force of his prestige behind the Vagrancy Act of 1547. Sir Thomas Smith and Sir John Cheke were the act's midwives in its last stages of passage through Parliament. They were also close assistants to Somerset, and shared his predilection for Roman or Civil Law over the "Norman barbarities" of the Common Law. Indeed, Somerset's closest advisers, many of whom were Cambridge-educated intellectuals, often were iconoclasts toward the traditional practices and procedures of English government. They preferred applying abstract theories to situations that would have been better addressed
with little more than common sense and steadfastness. 172

The aspect of slavery in the Vagrancy Act of 1547 was a distinct fracture in the tradition of the Common Law in England. Its precedence was in Roman Law:

In the case of those who are lazy and not to be pitied on account of any physical debility...the zealots and diligent informant shall obtain the ownership of the beggars who are held bound by their servile status, and ...the right to perpetual colonate [forced labor] of beggars born free. 173

The act was drawn from other sources as well. The Law of Villeinage had developed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the influence of Roman Law. Its failure to distinguish theoretically between slavery and serfdom "facilitated rather than prevented the introduction of a concept of slavery as punishment." 174 Also, slavery was widely regarded as virtually identical to the type of forced apprenticeship so common in the sixteenth century. 175 And while not a precedent, a good deal of sixteenth-century literature, most prominently Sir Thomas More's, argued persuasively that criminals and vagabonds were of more use to the kingdom as penal servitors than as idle prisoners or dead felons. As Martin Bucer, a theologian respected by Somerset's faction, said, the laws of God and of the Emperor Valentinean "forbiddeth that any man be suffered to beg, and commandeth that those that be able to labour should be forced to labour." 176

The preamble to the act began with the standard declama-
tion that "idleness and vagabundage is the mother and roote of all theftes, Robberyes and all evill acts and other mischiefs." Past laws against vagrants and "unprofitable membres or rather ennemyes of the Comen Wealthe," had been ignored by the "folishe pitie and mercie of them which shoulde have seen the said godlie Lawes executed." 177

The act then declared all previous laws and proclamations on vagrancy and begging voided. A man or a woman would be "taken for a vagrant" if they did not work and were not lame, impotent or so aged or diseased with sickness that he or she cannot find w'ke, not having Landes or [tenements], fees, annuityes or any other yerelie Revenues or profits wheron there may fynde sufficientlie their Living, shall either like a serving man wanting a master or like a beggar or after any other such sort be lurking in any house or houses or loitering or idly wandering by the highways' side or in streets in cities, towns, or villages, not applying themselves to some honest and allowed art, science, service, or labour.

A person would also be taken for a vagrant if he refused work, even if the only recompense was meat and drink. Conceivably, if a worker refused to accept a reduction in his wages, he could bring on himself the punishments of vagrancy.

Any master who offered a vagabond work and was refused was instructed to bring the vagabond before "two Justices of the Peace and if by two honest witnesses or confession of the [party], shall immediately cause the said loiterer to be marked with a hot iron in the breast the mark of V...."
Then the vagrant would be given to the accuser as a slave for the next two years. The slave was to be fed only on "bread and water or small drink and such refuse of meat as he [the master] shall think meet cause the said slave to work by beating, chaining, or otherwise in such work and labour how vile soever it be as he shall put him unto." Runaway slaves ought to be pursued by the masters (who need not have a license to chase the slave within the first two weeks after his escape.) When the slave was apprehended, he should be beaten and chained, and branded with an S, which indicated that he was a runaway slave and was now his master's slave for life. Anyone who knowingly detained a runaway slave would be fined ten pounds and would be made to reimburse the slave's rightful owner the costs incurred in the manhunt.

Because the children of vagabonds had idleness so instilled in them that "they hardly...may be brought after to good thrift and labour," the act determined that they should be taken from their "mother, nurse, or keeper [and brought up] by any manner of person [who] will take any such child, be it male or female." This person must rear the child "before one of the constables of the parish and two other honest and discrete neighbors, witnesses, and before any Justice of the Peace." The child would be forced to do "honest Labour" until the age of twenty (if a woman) and twenty-four (if a man). Until that age, they would be legally classified as servants or apprentices to their foster
parents. They would be considered their guardian's chattel, and could be sold, bequeathed, bartered, or given away by their master at any time. Any apprentice child who tried to run away would automatically become a slave. Any apprentice or slave who plotted to harm his master or his master's family or property would be subject to execution as a felon.

Even if a vagabond managed to avoid being brought before a local Justice of the Peace by an accuser, it was up to the local officials to see that the vagrant was branded with a V and sent to his birth city with the following written information:

A. B. Justice of the Peace in the county of S. to the mayor or chief officer to the city (or town or village) of Q., greeting; According to a most godly statute made in the first year of the reign of our sovereign lord King Edward the Sixth, &c., we have taken this bearer I. K. vagrantly and to the evil example of others without master, service, or labour whereby to get his living going loitering idly about; and because the same saith he was born in Q in the county of S. whereof you are the head-officer or constable we have sent him to you to be ordered according to the purport and effect of the same statute.

Once in his home town, the vagrant was to be kept in chains and forced to work at some type of local work project. He would be a "slave to the corporation of the city or to the inhabitants of the town or village that he or she were born in."

If a town or village did not enslave its loiterers, or
if it allowed its slaves to go without laboring for three
days, it would be fined five pounds, or forty shillings if
it were a borough or a town incorporate. The king would
get half of this penalty, and the other half would go to
the person who brought the action. And finally, all foreign
vagabonds were to be deported.

Strangely, the Vagrancy Act of 1547 was little commented
upon by contemporary writers. The imperial ambassador
never mentioned it despite his penchant for noting every
rumor or tidbit of news regarding political machinations,
developments in the law and religious practices, and the
mood of the populace. It was not even mentioned in the list
of grievances compiled by the rebels of 1549. Most references
to the law came after it was repealed; it was then unanimously
condemned. Perhaps it evoked so little comment because
from the onset it was unobserved. In 1548 London was
continuing with its longstanding practice of either putting
its vagabonds in stocks and cages or sending them to the
king's ships. The Corporation of Norwich threatened vagrants
with enslavement only after being twice convicted. In
fact, there is no evidence that any vagrant was enslaved
during this period.

Somerset relied much more heavily on the use of royal
proclamations than did any of the kings before him. Since
no proclamation was ever issued to reinforce this statute, it
is tempting to conclude that Somerset never really meant for
this statute to be enforced—perhaps it was only a sop thrown to his critics who charged he was not strong-willed enough to hold society together. But the objectives of the act, the curbing of poverty and vagrancy, were far too important for the act to have been conceived merely as a symbol, an expedient, or a ploy. In each of these three senses the act was a failure. It did not institute an effective system of poor relief and it left intact the principal inadequacy of the Henrician system: the reliance on voluntary contributions to make up the bulk of the poor funds.\footnote{182} Instead of seeing the lack of enforcement of the act as evidence of Somerset's disdain for the act's cruelty, it is better to consider the unenforced act as the ultimate indictment of Somerset's administrative incompetence and impotence.

Of course, the central feature of the act, and the greatest impediment to its implementation, was the enslavement of vagrants, a "foreign concept in the sixteenth century."\footnote{183} The servile nature of apprenticeship was quite acceptable and thought of as completely different from slavery as a formal concept:

\begin{quote}
...necessitie and want of bondmen hath made men to use free men as bounden to all servile services; but yet more liberally and freely and with a more equalitie than in the time of gentilitie slaves and bondemen were wont to be used.  
\end{quote}

\footnote{184}

But above all, apprenticeship was an economically
feasible proposition; slavery was utterly uneconomic. Slavery required groups of workers whose sole job would be to drive the slaves in their labor, keep them under control on and off the job, and constantly check the quality of their work. This might be possible on a huge state-operated work project, but it was widely beyond the means of individual slave owners. The benefits which could accrue from free (that is, unpaid for) labor would pale beside the cost of continually supervising a slave who could never be trusted and who would be likely to flee given the slightest opportunity.  

Somerset probably regarded the Vagrancy Act of 1547 as a component of a broader plan to solidify his power-base. He hoped that the creation of a reservoir of free laborers would win for him the gratitude and support of local officials and merchants. Likewise, his efforts to reverse the trend of the enclosure movement by returning pasture lands to tillage was intended to gain for his regime the support of farmers and farm laborers. But it seems that neither farmers nor merchants had much faith in these goals. Because the government did nothing more than announce the details of the Vagrancy Act without ever indicating how it would enforce it, no one took the statute at its word. This was extremely harmful to the regime's reputation. If employers had believed that Somerset's Protectorate would or could have made good the statute's threats, they almost certainly
would have begun a concerted effort to force down their employees' wages. Somerset was myopic in not realizing that if this situation were to come to pass, many employees would be pushed over the poverty line, and the number of vagrants would increase precipitously. As it was, the deleterious effects on the economy were being felt as more and more landlords put pressure on small tenant farmers. People gradually began to heed Somerset's detractors who said that the Protector's vacillations in carrying out his objective compounded the country's woes. The government's ambition to control enclosures was also frustrated; enclosure regulations were flouted with impunity because by the time they were established the Protectorate lacked the will and the strength needed to back up their stiff provisions.

While Somerset's government at least made a front of pursuing its obtuse schemes of controlling 'willful' and 'involuntary' idleness, more tenable schemes were being devised. One plan called for government investment to build facilities where wool might be treated without having to be sent overseas as an unfinished product. Another suggestion, perhaps a bit too starry-eyed, was that every English employer should re-evaluate the wages he paid to each of his laborers. If the wage-earners were allotted a decent compensation, they would perform better, be able to spend more, and the economy would respond favorably. Then,
the. theory went, all but the intentionally idle would have jobs. Thomas Starkey suggested that each town should appoint an officer who would see not only that everyone in his district was employed, but that every employed person did a useful task.\(^\text{139}\) These proposals certainly left unanswered more questions than they answered. That was inevitable; any solution to such a monumental problem would, in and of itself, have to be only partial. But Somerset's Vagrancy Act was no solution—it was a problem in its own right. It was nothing new for the royal government to try to impose a monolithic solution on a far-ranging and complex problem, but Somerset's foray into social-policy crafting was a debacle. He repealed past vagrancy laws, which had served at least as rough guidelines for local officials, and in the place of these laws he put an ordinance so unworkable that he exposed his government to a contemptuous accusation that it was out of touch with reality.\(^\text{190}\) As a result, local governments were more fervent than ever in defending their right to construct and act upon independent poor-relief and vagrancy packages.

The leaders of London apparently recognized that they could no longer rely on voluntary contributions to care for the poor. In most rural areas, poor rates usually exceeded poor relief expenditures and thus were only collected sporadically. Rural churches supplemented
their collections by raising livestock and holding annual carnivals and ale sales when the demand for poor relief increased.\textsuperscript{191} But what was sufficient in rural areas was not enough in most cities. Although London's intake of poor relief funds was far greater than most shires because of its population, its demands for poor relief were much greater than anywhere else simply because the poor tended to migrate there.\textsuperscript{192} So in 1547, London established its first compulsory poor rate plan. Inhabitants of the city would henceforth contribute toward the...

\ldots sustentacyon, maynteynyng and fyndyng of the poore personages by the space of one hole yere now ensuyng the moitie or half deale of one hole fiftene, and that the said wekely colleccyon of the Deuocyone of the people for that extent and purpose shall hence-forthe utterly cease and be discharged. 193

This plan was inaugurated before the Vagrancy Act of 1547 became law. It was unpopular, being viewed as a de facto tax, but it allowed London, especially under Bishop Ridley's guidance, to start some imaginative poor relief programs.

The government's response to poverty was grounded partially in the commonwealth men's idea of social justice. They believed—as did for that matter most conservative theorists—that the poor were a necessary element in a well-balanced, Godfearing society. To try to eliminate poverty would precipitate chaos. The intelligent response
to poverty was for the government to try to mitigate its effects, but not to try to make it disappear altogether. After all, was it not Christ who said, "For ye have the poor always with you?" The best way to ease the burdens of poverty was to eradicate obstacles—such as the movement to enclose common lands—that prevented poor people from working.\textsuperscript{194} Crowley expressed the sentiments of those who despaired that the Protestant Commonwealth would never be secured when he wrote: "...there are poor people, well-most innumerable, that are driven to beg, and yet to work they are able if they might have all things provided aright. Alas! is not this a great oversight?"\textsuperscript{195}

Part of Somerset's economic response to the problem of poverty consisted of attacking church possessions not already despoiled by Henry VIII. In 1537 Thomas Starket had written to Henry to advocate the rental at very low prices of former church lands to those in need.\textsuperscript{196} This suggestion went unheeded; most of the church goods and estates were parceled off to the king's supporters. By the end of Henry VIII's reign, many believed that the breakup of church lands had actually facilitated the spread of poverty. Most of the former priests and nuns dispossessed by the dissolution were put on government pensions that were to maintain them at least at subsistence level. Yet these stipends included no cost of
living increases, and by 1547 most pensions were in arrears, and many of the monasteries' former inhabitants and domestic staff were destitute. The Act of Parliament on the Dissolution of the Chantries of 1547 produced more than 610,000 pounds revenue for the government. It made 2500 priests redundant, but it pensioned off five hundred of them, and the remainder obtained benefices. The act met with resistance in Parliament because many members feared the government's grasping even more local assets. The act passed, however, because of Somerset's commitment to use the wealth of these lands to improve poor relief efforts. These good intentions fell prey all too quickly to the pressing expenses of Somerset's Scottish war. Despite the Chantry Act, "prolonged pressure by local interests [was needed] to preserve hospital foundations, for example, and efforts to procure further chantry lands for charitable purposes were rarely rewarded." Somerset's military ventures and problems with domestic unrest diverted his attention from efforts to relieve the poor to only the harsher aspects of social policy. Somerset's later tamperings with church goods, such as his order that all "superfluous" church items be sold, were crass attempts to gain ready-money for purposes unrelated to poor relief.

Quite apart from Somerset's efforts to increase the royal government's control over poor-relief systems, there was a general movement in local poor-relief programs toward
more discrimination in the distribution of alms. For instance, in 1548 Exeter stopped the wholesale handing-out of doles of bread because of the danger of "great infection...by reason of the great press of people."

In York the concurrence of bad harvests, high prices, and the outbreak of the plague and the sweating sickness elicited from city officials a "comprehensive reaction: censuses of corn" (as a precaution against hoarding), "surveys of the poor, searches for vagrants, close control of alehouses, quarantine measures," and compulsory 'donations' of city dwellers for the poor. In most cities, and in many rural areas as well, officials began to categorize the different types of poverty and began to apply various solutions to each category.

As Ket's rebellion heated up, Somerset turned his attention to the enclosure of land and its ramifications. By July 1549 Somerset had appointed a commission which was to proceed "expediently [to wipe] out all suspicion" from the peoples' minds. His advice to the officials was sound: they must "begin to the reformations of your selves, whereby you shall both have the better credit and may with the more boldness proceed to the redress of others." The work of the commission was made difficult on account of the wild rumors that began to circulate at that time. The government tried to deal with the debilitating rumors by insisting that vagabonds had spread the rumors and were the
chief beneficiaries of the confusion they caused. The Proclamation of July 8, 1549 claimed that those who...

...have neither place to inhabit in, neither seeketh any stay to live by...now employ and labor themselves, running and posting from place to place, county to county, town to town, by day to day, to stir up rumors, raise up tales, imagine news, whereby they seek to stir, gather together, and assemble the King's true subjects, of simplicity and ignorance deceived.

Once the people were deceived, the "unruly vagabonds would become ringleaders and masters of the King's people," whom they would swiftly turn into their servants. These vagabonds and rumor-mongers were to be brought before the king, the Lord Protector, or the Privy Council. Those who turned them in would be commend-ed and rewarded by the king. Those found guilty by the king or his ministers of spreading rumors on the pretext of "redressing the commonwealth" would either be sent to the pillory, with the words "Movers of Sedition and Spread-ers of False Rumors" placarded on their backs, or they would have their ears cut off.205

Despite these explicit instructions, Sir Thomas Smith complained to William Cecil that Somerset's proclamations were too vague and "directed so generally." Smith endorsed the idea that proclamations must be "directed to one or more special men of trust in every shire to the attendant upon the execution thereof." Smith believed that the head
yeomen of every shire could, upon hearing of the stirrings of vagabonds or other troublemakers, "there suddenly in the night...come with a sixty or a hundred horse, and take and lead away the stirrers before any more company be come unto." Smith was trying to suggest to Somerset a last-ditch way to save the protectorate: the government should give back to local authorities some of the prerogatives it had usurped. But the concessions Somerset was willing to make to restore confidence in his regime were too little too late; his regime collapsed in October 1549.

The Vagrancy Act of 1547 did not long survive Somerset's downfall. Northumberland acknowledged that the "extremity of some [laws] have been the occasion that they have not been put in use." The act was repealed in 1550. In its place the Statute of 1531 was re-enacted. Only the clause demanding the compulsory employment of poor children was retained. Probably Northumberland wanted the 1531 act to serve only until he could put together a better scheme, but in his three years in power he did not show much imagination in formulating vagrancy laws and poor-relief alternatives. At least the country again had a functioning vagrancy law after 1550.

In May 1550 the officials of London complained to Northumberland that the city was being "pestred with a multitude of vagabondes." In response, Northumberland
issued a proclamation ordering anyone not born in London or not gainfully employed there to return to his birthplace. Those who failed to do so would be punished as vagrants. A proclamation issued in July 1550 ordered disbanded soldiers lingering in London to return to their homes, but in September 1550 the Lord Mayor and the aldermen of London reported to the Privy Council that they still feared that demobilized soldiers would pillage homes on the outskirts of London.

Northumberland closely supervised the progress of London's officials in suppressing vagrants and rioters. He understood that if riots were to break out in London, one of the first casualties would likely be his own government. During an especially turbulent period for the city in April 1551, the Lord Mayor and the aldermen were summoned before the Privy Council, where they were...

...charged, on the King's behalf, to have a vigilant regard to the order of the city; first, for their nightly watch; than for the correction of vagabonds, thirdly for the repulsion of strangers coming into the realm, fourthly, for the reformation of the disorder in churches, that an unity may be had, and consequently to see a substantial good order preserved in all things, which they have undertaken to do as ferrforthe [?]as shall lie in their powers.

The council also sent letters to every Justice of the Peace in each shire ordering them to execute the laws against vagabonds, to make the appointed watches against disorder, and to have "regard to the quiet of the realm and the
repressing of lewd attempts" of unruly behavior.214

By April 1551 Northumberland's government was complaining that despite its efforts to make vagrancy laws fairer and more practical, the realm was suffering under the failure of local officials to execute them. The Proclamation on Enforcing Statutes against Vagabonds, Rumor Mongers, Players, Unlicensed Printers, etc., of April 28, 1551 added that no one more so than Edward VI and his councilors was "more loath to use the extremity of correction" upon subjects. However, since some subjects had grown "into such a contempt of their prince, of his laws and of his ministers, as they care not to use all such ways as may be dangerous to their sovereign lord and his estate, and desperately and obstinately in the end to cast themselves into utter ruin and destruction," the king would, in a "fatherly fashion," step-up the pressure on local officials to enforce vagrancy laws. The proclamation offered no new indications as to how it would cope with the problems vagrants were causing; apart from the perfunctory, standard warning that vagrants should mend their ways, and the command that vagrants return to their last place of residence, the proclamation was noteworthy for accusing actors, booksellers, and printers of encouraging idleness and inciting the people to riot. Henceforth, all printed materials would have to be submitted to the Privy Council for consideration, and anyone who circulated unapproved compositions would be imprisoned
"at the King's pleasure." 215

Northumberland and his men were, by the middle of 1551, increasingly watchful over potentially uncontrollable elements in society, although they never developed Somerset's obsession with seeing a conspiracy of vagabonds at the core of every abortive rising or unlawful assembly. 216 Unlike Somerset, Northumberland had no base of popular support, no blood ties with the king to justify his domination of Edward VI (not that bonds of kinship with majesty had shielded the Seymour brothers from their fates), nor had he a sense of religious destiny to create a Protestant Utopia. And his popularity remained as stagnant as the economy; the slowing down of the inflationary spiral was neither fast nor substantial enough to win Northumberland much credit. 217

London especially seemed to seethe in discontent, as the new imperial ambassador, Jehan Scheyfve, observed to Charles V:

> London is still being closely watched, though it seems that things are calmer now and the danger is past. For greater safety orders have been issued, that all English vagrants, who have no master and practice no trade, are to repair within four days to their birthplaces, or to the localities where they have resided during these last three years, under dire penalties. Nonetheless, many foreigners, Flemings, Frenchmen, and others, do not feel at all safe. Many of them have gone home, and great companies are leaving from day to day. 218

Scheyfve wrote his master that the English government had uncovered a conspiracy, in which a group of vagrants
was implicated, the object of which "was to excite the people to revolt" and then to kill all the kingdom's foreigners. Popular literature blamed foreigners for stealing English jobs and secretly encouraging vagabonds to be idle and disruptive. Xenophobia was nothing novel with London—the Evil May Day riots of 1517 were still a relatively fresh memory to many,—but the accusation that foreigners were in collusion with vagrants was a fresh twist. It was also rather ironic, because the government was moving hastily to round up London's vagrants to prevent them from participating in anticipated anti-foreigner pogroms. High on Northumberland's list of targets were foreign vagrants, who were listed under the generic term 'Egyptians,' or gypsies, which was meant to indicate their wandering nature and their idleness more than their ethnic background. In November 1552, the council requested Sir Edward North to coordinate the efforts of Justices of the Peace in removing foreign vagabonds to the nearest port of departure.

London's tumultuous mood sprang mostly from the suffering and frustration caused by the mid-century exodus of numerous large-scale industries (such as the cloth industry) from the city back to the countryside. Because of excessive guild and city government exactions and regulations, companies looked for more 'stable' (i.e., more sedentary) employees who were willing to settle for lower wages. Agricultural workers and their families who wanted to
supplement their earnings were especially suited to these industries' needs. As jobs were taken from the city, the poor and homeless crowded into the city at just as fast a tempo as before, thereby further straining the poor-relief capacities of the city and at the same time eviscerating the power of the guilds by their willingness to work for almost nothing. By 1550 charity and patience were stretched to their limits within London. The most transitory of solutions, deporting vagabonds to the countryside, had been resorted to continuously throughout the past century-and-a-half, and the results were always the same: by the next winter the wandering poor always returned in droves to London.

To help defuse this situation, the government issued a statute that tried to spell out how alms should be collected and how much everyone was obliged to give. Town mayors, bailiffs, and other officers, along with parsons, vicars, curates, and churchwardens, were to appoint two persons to gather and distribute alms. Persons appointed collectors had no right to refuse the office; it was a year-long post and shirkers would be fined twenty shillings. The collectors were to "gently ask and demand of every man and woman what they of their charity will be contented to give weekly towards the relief of the poor." Those who could afford to contribute but chose not to, or those who discouraged others from giving would be "gently exhorted...towards the relief
of the poor" by the local clergymen. If this failed, the intransigent would be brought before the bishop of the diocese, who would "induce and persuade...them by charitable ways and means." Presumably it was expected of the bishop that he would be forceful while he was being charitable, because the statute implied that he would certainly be successful in convincing reluctant souls to come up with an appropriate donation. While the Statute of 1552 placed the onus on the individual parishes to control begging, it did grant to parishes a say in the decision to permit some licensed begging when poor relief could not support all the deserving poor.\textsuperscript{224}

The Statute of 1552 was an important "step towards a permanent poor rate" because it compelled parishes to keep strict records of donors and recipients of poor relief. It was also a major advance in completing the groundwork of the Elizabethan Poor Laws.\textsuperscript{225}

But movements toward an extensive and cogent set of poor laws were not matched, in the half-century before 1553, with advances towards a credible response to vagrancy.\textsuperscript{226} It is true that after 1549 the government backed off a hysterical program in favor of a more balanced (and relatively moderate) stance; but this was just a retrenchment, a rejection of a failed policy (the Vagrancy Act of 1547) and a return to a policy (the Vagrancy Act of 1531) not much better-conceived or more successful. By the middle of the
sixteenth century, the government, with the help of local officials, prelates, writers, intellectuals, and idealists, was just beginning to see a connection between the effects of poverty and vagrancy. Until the realization was complete, which it would not be for several decades to come, the laws against poverty, begging, homelessness, wandering, and idleness would continue to be bigoted, lopsided, and ultimately ineffectual.
Notes for Chapter I


5 Those statutes were: PRO, SR 1, 13 Edward I, c.1-6 (Winchester), 1285; PRO, SR 1, 13 Edward I, c.8 (London), 1285; PRO, SR 1, 5 Edward III, c.14, 1331; PRO, SR 1, 23 Edward III, c.7, 1349; PRO, SR 2, 7 Richard II, c.5, 1383; PRO, SR 2, 12 Richard II, c.3-4, 1388; PRO, SR 2, 12 Richard II, c.7-9, 1388.


10 Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy, pp. 6-8.


17. Ibid., p. 20.


21. Ibid., p. 20.

22. Ibid., p. 16.

23. Ibid., p. 8.


31 Ibid., p. 125.

32 Ibid., p. 11.


34 Ibid., p. 35.

35 Ibid., p. 27.

36 Ibid., pp. 28-29.


41 Ibid., pp. 113-17.


48 PRO, SR 7 Richard II, c. 5.


50 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 66.

51 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 13: "Enforcing Public Order, Military Regulations," (Kenilworth, c. 6 June 1487, 2 Henry VII.)


55 Ibid., p. 111.


58 Ibid.

59 Russell, Crisis of Parliaments, p. 20.


61 Ibid., p. 63.

62 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 81.

63 PRO, SR 11 Henry VII, c.2, 1495, "An Act against Vagabonds and Beggars."

64 PRO, SR 19 Henry VII, c. 12, 1503-04, "An Act against Vagabonds and Beggars."


67 Hughes and Larkins, TRP, 63.

69 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 255.


74 Ramsey, Tudor Economic Problems, pp. 158-60.

75 Heinze, Proclamations, pp. 117-18.


77 Jordan, Philanthropies in England, pp. 81-82.

78 Ibid., p. 84.

79 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

80 Jones, Tudor Commonwealth, p. 54.

81 Jones, Mid-Tudor Crisis, p. 137.


84 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 128: "Ordering Punishment of Vagabonds and Beggars," (Westminster, June 1530, 22 Henry VIII).
85 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 118


87 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 118.

88 Hoak, King's Council, p. 194.

89 PRO, SR 22 Henry VIII, c.12, 1531, "An Act Concerning the Punishment of Beggars and Vagabonds."

90 Heinze, Proclamations, pp. 122-23.

91 PRO, SR 22 Henry VIII, c.12, 1531.


94 Jones, Tudor Commonwealth, p. 47.


98 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 204: "Ordering Vagabonds to Leave Court," (Oct 1541, 33 Henry VIII).


100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 58.

Ibid.


PRO, SR 27 Henry VIII, c.25, 1536, "An Act for the Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars."


PRO, SR 27 Henry VIII, c.25, 1536.


PRO, SR 27 Henry VIII, c.28, 1536.

PRO, SR 31 Henry VIII, c.13, 1539.


Einstein, *Tudor Ideals*, p. 236.

119 Tawney and Power, _TED_, vol. 2, pp. 302-305.


121 Ibid., #402, p. 154.

122 Ibid., #542, p. 211.


124 Jones, _Mid-Tudor Crisis_, p. 141.


128 Einstein, _Tudor Ideals_, p. 237.


130 Einstein, _Tudor Ideals_, p. 236.

131 Pound, _Poverty and Vagrancy_, p. 71. Pound took his figures from Jordan, _Philanthropies in England_, pp. 385-87; the totals and percentages are his own.


134 _LPFD_, XVI, #340, p. 156.

135 Ibid., #1310, p. 605.

136 Ibid., #1355, p. 626.

138 LPFD, XVI, #945, p. 456.


140 Elton, Tudor Revolution, pp. 380-81.

141 LPFD, XVIII, #542, p. 289.

142 LPFD, XX-I, #812, p. 402.


144 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 195.

145 LPFD, XIV-I, #326, p. 128.

146 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 195.

147 Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy, pp. 11-13.

148 Slack, Social Policy, pp. 95-96.


150 LPFD, XX-II, #850.30, p. 414.


152 PRO, APC, (1542-1547): June 27, 1547, p. 467.

153 Jones, Tudor Commonwealth, p. 125.


158 Ibid., p. 273.


162 Einstein, Tudor Ideals, p. 237.


164 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 281: "Enforcing Statutes on Seditious Rumors," (Somerset Place, 24 May 1547, 1 Edward VI).

165 Heinze, Proclamations, p. 80.


167 Ibid., pp. 536-537.

168 Ibid., p. 533.

169 Ibid., pp. 537-538.

170 Ibid., p. 535.

171 Ibid., p. 536.

172 Ibid., pp. 543-544.

173 Ibid.

174 Ibid., p. 542.
PRO, SR 1 Edward VI, c.3, 1547, "An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and for the Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons." Discussion of this act continues for the following four paragraphs.


Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy, pp. 42-43.

Heinze, Proclamations, p. 255.

Davies, Peace, Print and Protestantism, p. 264.


Ibid., p. 548.

Ibid., p. 547.

Ibid., p. 548.

Ibid., p. 549.

Ibid., p. 546.

Davies, Peace, Print and Protestantism, p. 274.

Jones, Tudor Commonwealth, p. 124.


Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy, p. 34.


194 Davies, Peace, Print and Protestantism, p. 274.

195 Jones, Tudor Commonwealth, p. 124.


197 Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy, pp. 16-24.

198 Davies, Peace, Print and Protestantism, p. 268.

199 Slack, Proclamations, p. 98.

200 Ibid., p. 99.

201 SP Dom., 10/V-19: (? 1548).

202 Slack, Proclamations, p. 108.

203 Ibid., p. 107.

204 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VIII-18: (July 1549).

205 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 337: "Offering Reward for arrest of Rumor Mongers," (Richmond, 8 July 1549, 3 Edward VI).

206 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 341: "Pardoning Enclosure Rioters; Ordering Martial Law against Future Rioters," (Richmond, 16 July 1549, 3 Edward VI).

207 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VIII-33: July 19, 1549.

208 PRO, SR 3&4 Edward VI, c.16, 1550.

209 APC, vol. 3, May 7, 1550, p. 27.

210 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 356: "Ordering Vagabonds to Leave London," (Greenwich, 7 May 1550, 4 Edward VI).
211 Ibid.

212 Hoak, *King's Council*, p. 194.


214 *APC*, vol. 3, April 12, 1551, pp. 256-57.

215 Ibid., April 15, 1551, p. 260.

216 Hughes and Larkin, *TRP*, 371: "Enforcing Statutes Against Vagabonds, Rumor Mongers, Players, Unlicensed Printers, etc.," (Greenwich, 28 April 1551, 5 Edward VI).


219 *PRO, CSP Sp.*, vol. 10, May 12, 1551, pp. 290-91.

220 Ibid., April 21, 1551, pp. 278-79.

221 Ibid., September 14, 1551, p. 368.

222 *APC*, vol. 4, p. 18.


225 *PRO, SR 5-6 Edward VI*, c.2, 1552.

Professor Wilbur K. Jordan's premise that vagrancy was Tudor England's "most immediate and pressing concern" probably would have met with little objection from sixteenth-century Englishmen. In a country where the government was preoccupied with promoting domestic order and stability, vagrancy was seen as the phenomenon most likely to sow the seeds of discontent.

Profound changes in the economy and in religious practices, together with the introduction of the 'New Learning' of Christian humanism and the maturation of the printing industry combined to force society to reevaluate many preconceptions. One distinct transformation was the way society regarded the poor, philanthropy, and poverty itself. Perhaps because those who suffered want were notably receptive to any ideas which might mitigate their poverty, Catholic and Protestant preachers made certain that most of their sermons dealt as much with temporal issues as they did with theological questions.

But the new emphasis on the worth of the poor and the dignity of poverty did not extend to sympathy for the vagrant. Religious and intellectual literature of
the sixteenth century only rarely showed a realization that vagrancy was the ultimate manifestation of poverty, and not an inherited evil spawned by the sin of Cain, the first vagabond. Likewise, while Tudor governments, whether motivated by fear of uprisings or true benevolence toward the poor, made occasional efforts to lessen the sufferings of the impoverished, they did almost nothing to reduce the plight of the vagabond. The persistent assertion of the government that the vagabond chose his lot was even more cynical than the notion that vagrancy was a curse from God on the malevolent. When the government's rhetoric on ending abuses against the poor grew more and more grandiose, as it did under Somerset's regime, government pronouncements against vagrants became increasingly frenetic. The treatment of vagrants and vagrancy by the politicians, prelates, intellectuals, and ordinary citizenry of the first half of the sixteenth century indicates that the English sense of compassion and commonweal was limited and at times even hypocritical.

At the height of Ket's Rebellion in 1549, Sir John Cheke, tutor to Edward VI and a confidant of the Duke of Somerset, wrote a telling definition of a vagrant. A vagrant was...

...a sucker of honye, a spoyler of corne, a destroyer of fruite. Naye a waster of money, a spoyler of vytaile, a sucker of bloud, a breaker of orders, a seker of breakes, a queller of lyfe, a basiliske
This description reveals much about Cheke; his study of the Greek lawmakers Lycurgus, Draco, and Solon made him regard idleness and begging as capital offenses only slightly less grave than high treason. But Cheke was far from alone in his severe perception that the "swarm-inge of loyalringe vagabondes, redde to begge and braule at every mannes doore" was a "grevouser and perilouser daunger then the plage." From the Lord Protector, to government ministers and local officials, members of the clergy both conservative and reformed, indeed to every subject of the king, the vagabond was reviled and feared as the very personification of anarchy.

Both the government's official response to vagrancy and the sermons and popular literature which dealt with vagrancy practically without exception failed to understand (or refused to acknowledge) that vagrancy was an extremely complex problem. It was far easier to think of the sturdy beggars solely as "rogues...[who] spare neither rich nor poor; but whether it be great gaine or small, all is fishe that commeth to net with them," rather than to include them in Hugh Latimer's dictum that the "poorest plowman is in Christ equal with the greatest prince that is." Vagrants could not be
considered to share in the inherent equality of mankind because through their base nature they negated the divine-inspired instinct of man to labor. The Renaissance concept of work differed little from the Medieval: work was the lot of everyone after the Fall. The Protestant view went as far as suggesting that Adam and Eve opted for physical labor to pass their time in the prelapsarian world.

There was general agreement among sixteenth-century preachers that men, as heirs of Adam, must live by the "sweat of [their] browes, that is, in labour and travel... they which doe not should not eat." As Christ "lived off his occupation" St. Paul warned men who watched other men work and then stole their bread that they should not...

...disdain or think scorn to follow him in a mean living, a mean vocation, a common calling or occupation. For as he blessed our nature with taking upon him the shape of man, so in his doing he blessed all occupations and arts. This is a notable example to signify that he abhors all idleness. *Labores manuum tuarum*, let us all labour.

It was widely assumed that those who did not work had elected to live as malingerers. Some did not even bother to hide their laziness under the guise of infirmity; these were the sturdy beggars who had been "easily and naturally brought from labour to ease, from the better to the worse, from diligence to slothfulness." Such...

...daieslepers, purse pikers, highwaie robbers,
quarelmakers,...and bloudsheders...linger in stretes, lurk in ale houses, range in highewaies...play in tounes, and yet complaine of needce.... They will never be allured to labour againe, contenting themselves better with idle beggary, then with honest and profitable labour. 13

Thus were all vagrants blithely dismissed as inveterate scroungers, with no consideration wasted on the economic factors that made the reality of vagrancy so wide-spread.

As the number of sedentary and wandering poor grew, the national concept of the role and efficacy of charity evolved. 14 Conservative, moderate, and radical theologians and laymen differed over exactly how the Christian community of England should set about alleviating the suffering of the poor. All agreed that something must be done, but gradually, as the reformed theologians' influence over the nation increased, the emphasis on private charity diminished as the state assumed greater control over the distribution of alms. The state acted in part to fill the alms-giving vacuum brought about by the dissolution of the monasteries. But the state's new emphasis on creating national rather than local solutions to poverty and homelessness also was indicative of a philosophical belief that benevolence should no longer be the "care of the monk and knight or even of the rich city merchants, but of the entire population." 15

Late-medieval mechanisms for alms-giving placed as much stress on private, and especially on noble, contribu-
tions as they did on the monasteries'. Edmund, Earl of Derby, Bishop John Fisher, Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, and even Thomas Cromwell always kept their households open to the poor for a meal, and on nights of unbearable cold, the poor were provided shelter. Margaret of Richmond, Henry VII's mother, maintained and personally cared for twelve poor men, and most late-medieval kings up to Henry VIII (including the reputedly tight-fisted Henry VII who founded the Savoy Hospital and a hospital in Bath) believed it their duty personally to finance and maintain poor-relief centers. Of course kings, nobles, and lesser-folk continued to give relief to the poor privately and spontaneously, but the age of "broad hospitality everywhere displayed" toward the poor waned, chiefly because reformers impuned the outcome of monastic and private poor aid. The Duke of Norfolk expressed the sentiments of many of his contemporaries when he wrote to Thomas Cromwell in 1537 that the charity administered privately and through the "religious houses is the great occasion thereof, and also the slackness of Justice of peace, for not doying their dewties." 17

Unfortunately, the preachers, prelates, and reformers who were so concerned with the problems of the poor and the dangers posed by vagrancy, and who so galvanized Edward VI to solve these problems, themselves had no feasible program to suggest. What preachers like
Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and John Hooper yearned for was a quasi-medieval society where the "relations from peasant to king were established beforehand." Such a society could have no vagabonds because everyone's place in society was rigidly circumscribed, and everyone kept to it. Vagabonds had no legitimate place in society, and in a society where order was paramount, they could not be tolerated. Only rarely did reformers concern themselves, as they did eagerly with the poor, with the trauma and deprivations endured by the vagrant. They instead persisted in equating the vagrant, rather than vagrancy itself, with social and spiritual poison.

Oddly enough, one who is sometimes viewed as England's last bastion of medieval ideals, Sir Thomas More, rendered a far less one-sided account of England's vagrancy problems than that of many subsequent Tudor intellectuals and reformers.

More's *Utopia*, written in 1516, took a sharp, even sardonic look at England's shortcomings as a civilized, Christian nation. In *Utopia*, England was beset by a "great triumvirate that rules an empire of evil." Sloth, greed, and pride were destroying social cohesiveness. Sloth led "stout fellows able to work" first to lives of debauchery and idleness, and eventually to banditry, because vagabonds were the "robbers of the future." But More did not blame idleness only upon sloth;
idleness and its corresponding evils could be imposed upon a person by a "great man" who had the power to waste the lives of his retainers by turning them into unskilled, useless drones. These retainers served mainly to enhance their masters' prestige. Because they were "raised in soft idle pleasures," they were unlikely to find employment outside of a noble household because of their alleged unwillingness to "serve a poor man laboriously for scant wages and diet." So the greed and pride of the nobility provided a ready source for the ranks of vagabonds by creating a caste of professional wastrels. More's indictment of the practice of keeping large numbers of retainers in a single nobleman's hands complemented Henry VIII's almost obsessive suspicion of over-mighty subjects.

The enclosure movement was well under way when More was taken into royal service, and he was but one of many to write vitriolically (and flippantly) of the "greedy and wild sheep" who, abetted by indolent nobles, gentry, and abbots, forced tenants off their lands to increase pasture area. The tenants were forced to sell their lands at ridiculously low prices, and if they were reduced to wandering and begging to survive, they ran the risk of being imprisoned and whipped as sturdy beggars. Some proud few refused to beg, and in desperation they were compelled to steal, because a "man of courage is
more likely to rob than to beg.\textsuperscript{26} They were hanged. Enclosure also cut into the number of farm laborers needed: "a single shepherd and his dog replaced a hundred plowmen." Because fewer fields were tilled, less grain was grown, and when grain prices inevitably rose, the troubles of the poor and homeless multiplied.\textsuperscript{27} And finally, enclosure made it harder for the poor to clothe themselves, for the oligarchs who enclosed the lands preferred to sell their wool to Flemish merchants who paid handsomely for it, rather than to have it bartered or sold cheaply domestically.\textsuperscript{28}

So More, through his wise, well-traveled narrator, Raphael Hythlodaye, recognized that for at least some of the vagrants, their condition was not the result of a predisposition to indolence, but of an evil economic trend fueled by pride and greed. And perhaps because it was not simply a matter of spurring vagrants to return to labor, More had the cardinal—presumably modeled after his mentor, Cardinal Morton—suggest that the many laws against vagrants had had no real effect. Hythlodaye suggested that England's vagrants should be dealt with like the rogues and thieves of the Polylerites. Among these people, anyone who was out of work was made to work without remunerations on a public works project. They labored without being imprisoned, shackled, or humiliated; their only restriction was being locked up at night (which sounds incredibly like
incarceration!) They were fed from public stores and were supported by public revenues and alms freely and copiously bestowed. Only the lazy were whipped. However, everyone who worked on a public-sponsored project had his ear tip cut off and had to wear a badge and a certain color of clothing. Hythlodaeus claimed that every worker was diligent in the hope that he would be eventually pardoned. This indicates that More expected those without resources or a job to submit to penal servitude with the distant hope of manumission as the only positive inducement to work and behave well.29 Exactly how the emancipated worker would support himself was never specified.

The Utopian response to idleness was harsh. All Utopians were reared with every possible educational and material benefit: "distribution is simply not one of their problems; in Utopia, no men are poor, no men are beggars. Though no man owns anything, everyone is rich." These privileges ought to have instilled in every citizen an eagerness to work for the common good—and in most cases they did. But to the few shirkers who continually neglected their duties, the syphogrants (civil officials) resorted to the ultimate humiliation: bondage.30 In many respects, the Utopian loafer was more emblematic of England's greedy landlords, proud nobles, and lazy clerics than of its vagabonds, who were often only victims of circumstance. The
Utopian loafer, the English landlord, noble, and priest (often the "greatest vagabond of all,\(^{31}\)) "look out [only] for themselves rather than for others," and their failure to work for the commonwealth was more reprehensible than the hapless vagabond's idleness.\(^{32}\)

Thomas More and the reformers he later fought agreed that society should be theocentrical.\(^{33}\) However, More feared that the reformers' efforts to tamper with or dismantle certain institutions, such as monasteries, would hamper the government's own ability to function efficiently.\(^{34}\) He opposed 'heretics' not merely for their unsound theology, but because they were, overall, naive concerning "movements or even tendencies of an impersonal" nature which could affect society as much as more straight-forward happenings. More thought the habit of reformers to "measure happenings in terms of particular and individual responsibility" potentially dangerous.\(^{35}\) His fear was borne out in the initial handling of the vagrancy problem by the reformers. Their insistence on approaching the problem with blind dogmatism—the idea that all healthy vagabonds wanted to be vagabonds—only complicated the problem.

The reformers were right in considering the systematic dispensing of alms as at best only a palliative that staved off starvation among the poor and homeless. But they went too far in castigating all monasteries as dens of iniquity which
only gave example and encouragement to the dregs of society.

These abbeys did but maintain the poor which they made. For, some vagrants, accounting the Abbey-alms their own INHERITANCE, served an APPRENTICESHIP, and afterwards wrought JOURNEY-WORK to no other trade than begging...[Their] laziness [has] not as yet GOT OUT OF THEIR FLESH, which so long since was BRED in their BONES. 36

Even monasticism's most inveterate foe, the "rabid reformer" Simon Fish, ended his brief career as a controversialist by grudgingly admitting that some monks, if not whole monasteries, had done the nation a service by giving succor to the truly needy.37

Simon Fish wrote "A Supplication for Beggars" in 1528 while he was in exile in the Netherlands for having claimed authorship of a "certain play or interlude" that was offensive to Cardinal Wolsey.38 The "Supplication" was brought to England and, with other Lutheran tracts, immediately committed to the king's list of forbidden books.39 Nonetheless, Lady Anne Boleyn procured a copy and saw that the king read it. Henry VIII soon after invited Fish to return to England, whereupon the king "embraced him with loving countenance." They discussed the work for three hours, and at the close of the interview, Henry gave Fish a signet ring that would protect him from an inquisition by Lord Chancellor More.40

Henry VIII was not entirely pleased with the work's contents—the Lutheran underpinnings of the "Supplication"
were anathema to Henry—but the king was pleased with
its tone. The "Supplication" condemned monastic excesses
and urged the king to eradicate the 'Romish' intrusions
into the workings of English society just as Henry was
setting the Reformation Parliament of 1529 to its tasks;
the timing of the "Supplication" could not have been more
propitious for Henry VIII.\(^4\)

Even more so than in More's *Utopia*, the beggars
mentioned in the "Supplication" served a metaphoric as well
as a literal purpose. Fish contended that the clergy,
and particularly the mendicant monks, constituted a separate
class of vagabonds within England. They were an "idle
ravenous sort which (setting all labour aside) have begged
so importunately that they have gotten into their hands
more than the third part of [the King's] realm." They had
subverted the King's God-given authority by making the poor
and homeless almost entirely dependent upon them for
survival. Fish goaded the king by asserting that the
"strong, puissant, and counterfeit holy, and idle beggars
and vagabonds" made up a kingdom of their own within Henry's
kingdom, able to defy the king by evasiveness and chicanery.
These covert vagabonds fostered the extension of overt
vagrancy and robbery, so that the king would be distracted
from the "complaints [of the poor's] woeful misery" which he
and the monks were supposed to be ameliorating.\(^4\)
The unreformed and unmarried clergy added to the number of
vagabonds by "making an hundred thousand idle whores" who were seduced away from their families only to be eventually discarded by the oversexed clergymen. These women had then to turn to prostitution, which was thought of as one of the lewd art-forms of vagabondage.43

Fish suggested how the king could avert the "grievous shipwreck of the commonwealth" that the teachers of indolence and profligacy were directing. Henry should seize the church lands, sell them inexpensively to the poor, and force the clergy to marry—preferably to those whom they had turned into prostitutes.44 Before the clergy had come to England (presumably he was going back as far as the days before St. Augustine of Canterbury, who began preaching the Roman version of the Christian message in England in 597) there had been...

...but few poor people and yet they did not beg but there was given them enough unasked, for there was at that time none of these ravenous wolves to ask it from them as it appears in the acts of the apostles. Is it any marvel though there be now so many beggars, thieves, and idle people? Nay, truly. 45

Fish's implication was that England had been more Christian—or at least more humanistic—as a society before it began to observe Christian rites of worship than it was under the influence of the false disciples of Christ. By the sixteenth century, Fish believed, no amount of alms-giving would wipe out begging, because the "fat of the whole foundation hangs
...the sweat of their faces [might] give other idle people by their example occasion to labour. Tie these holy idle thieves to the carts to be whipped naked about every market town till they fall to labour that they by their importunate begging take not away the alms that the good Christian people would give unto us sore impotent miserable people your beadsmen. Then shall as well the number of our aforesaid monstrous sort as of the bawds, whores, thieves, and idle people decrease.... Then shall idle people be set to work.... Then shall none beg our alms from us. 47

The "Supplication for the Beggars" was intended to overstate the abuses of the unreformed church, and to level on the church responsibility for two of the nation's most persistent problems: indigence and vagrancy. 48 Nonetheless, the "Supplication" did not exaggerate the depth of official and popular fear of vagrancy. Around the time that the "Supplication" began to circulate in England, a very imaginative vagrant was brought before the king's council for concocting a treasonous recipe: he wished to boil King Henry's head in a broth which would feed himself and his cohorts. 49 Especially as hospitals and poor shelters closed after the dissolution, the government and the populace seemed to develop a paranoia about vagrants that went beyond rational economic or religious bounds. No longer were vagrants regarded merely as a drain on society's resources; they were now indiscriminately thought of as a band of cutthroats, as vipers in the bosom of the...
One treatise that offered more concrete suggestions for dealing with the poor and the vagrants was "The Forme and Maner of Subvention or Helping for Pore People." It had been written originally as a scheme for dealing with the indigent of Antwerp. In 1531 it was translated into English by William Marshall, who also adapted it slightly to make it conform with the current situation of poverty and vagrancy in England. Marshall was one of Cromwell's most trusted collaborators in mapping out the plans for the central government to take the lead in handling society's problems. Marshall presented a copy of the English edition to Queen Anne Boleyn, who this time had no need to show her husband her new acquisition, since the tract was widely and openly circulated. It was a hotly debated work that made assumptions about the shortcomings of the efforts by the church and government to care for the poor while it made surprisingly liberal assertions on the dignity of the poor and on the obligation of the government to provide work for anyone in need. This work foreshadowed the Poor Law Draft of 1535, which Marshall almost certainly had a large hand in putting together.

Marshall's version of the "Forme and Maner of Subvention" drew upon the familiar image of the country as a body, with all the citizens as organic parts of the body.
politic. If one limb of that body was injured, so were all other parts of the body affected: "even so we that are membres of Chrystes mistycall body joyned by faythe and charytie ought wyllingly and mercyfully to offre helpe to suche as have needs."

The "Forme and Maner of Subvention" recognized some legitimacy in the claim that unbridled charity had given birth to a sub-nation of malingerers. Still, while begging and the distribution of alms had to be cut back, they could not be eliminated, because true "cristen chartie is so colde and holynes and devotion so sore decayed." Begging had to be closely monitored, because there were those who had rather live off of easily-gotten alms, while at the same time employers went searching for workers. Alms should be supplied by regular, voluntary collections. Curates and preachers should urge parishioners to give generously, and the proud poor should be sought out and relieved discreetly to avoid embarrass­ment. And, above all else, "a poor man shulde after his degre (which is small and lytell) be contented with lytell."

A vagrant had to be contented with even less. His lot, if he were sturdy, was to be put to compulsory labor on public projects. His children were to be forceably educated, either in a school or at a trade, depending upon their talents. Prefects would be appointed to keep a strict watch on vagabonds and on the 'reckless' poor, to see that
they kept to their state-appointed tasks and to ensure that they could never band together and cause a commotion.

The "Forme and Maner of Subvention" was unique in urging that public officials listen willingly to the complaints of vagabonds and poor people. Once they had been set to work, Marshall argued that they were no longer vagabonds, but "members of the cyte as wel [as are] the ryche." 55

None of the proposals in the "Forme and Maner of Subvention" was formally acted upon by Henry VIII. The tract was read, reacted to, and rather quickly forgotten. Perhaps it posed too many problems to be implemented completely: problems such as how the foundering almsgiving tradition could be suitably revitalized, or how these public works projects would be financed, or what the duration of the vagrants' tenure as a forced laborer should be, or where a public official could be found who would willingly listen to the complaints of vagrants. The "Forme and Maner of Subvention" was really a potpourri of theories on how poverty and vagrancy might be eradicated, but it was novel in its premise that most vagrants were not incorrigible. 56

The perception that vagabonds were malicious resulted in the reluctance and occasionally in the refusal of hospitals for the poor to care for vagrants. Robert Copland's "The Hye Way to the Spyttelhous" (c. 1545) used an
imaginary conversation between the author and the porter of St. Bartholomew's Hospital to depict the prevalent belief that vagabonds could not be accorded even minimal comfort. Copland asked the porter why, since St. Bartholomew's took in poor people every night, there were so many people sleeping on London's streets. The porter responded that "mighty beggars and vagabonds," as well as thieves and prostitutes were denied admission to the hospital because of the harm they would be likely to inflict on the ailing and truly needy. Like animals, which they resembled in their filthiness and crude behavior, they must be made to sleep outdoors. The porter told of the tricks of their ignoble trade, which virtually all of them used to elicit money from the gullible:

They go on crutches to each market and fair... with bloody clouts about their legs, and plaisters on their skin; some counterfeit leprosy, and others put soap in their mouths to make foam, and fall down as if they had St. Cornelius's evil [epilepsy?].

Other ruses were pretending to be shipwrecked sailors, former prisoners of Henry's French wars, or impoverished students of Oxford or Cambridge. Copland's "The Hye Way to the Spyttelhouse" made almost every generalization about the vagrant that a Tudor subject of the 1540s would be likely to make. All vagrants, impotent or healthy, were highly suspect. Most vagrants were charlatans, and were usually capable
of resorting to theft or even murder if the need arose. They defrauded the poor by taking their alms, they weakened the economy by their sloth, and as their numbers increased, so did the likelihood of insurrection. Even their humanity was implicitly questioned.

Edward Seymour, the duke of Somerset, who was named protector of his nephew Edward VI in 1547, accelerated the government's pace at formulating and approving economic, social, and especially religious policies. Even his closest advisor, Sir William Paget, came to believe that Somerset was rash in moving too quickly and too incautiously in shaping a Protestant Commonwealth. But Somerset's government did not differ from Henry VIII's in its stance against vagrancy. When Somerset's regime was shaken by rebellion, he and his advisors assumed (or at least gave the impression that they were convinced) that vagabonds were the prime agitators and ringleaders of the revolt. His genuine sympathy for the poor did not prevent him from placing his stamp of approval on the most 'Draconian' piece of legislation ever enacted against vagabonds. And the preachers (Latimer, Ridley, and Hooper among them) who tried to arouse the 'Good Duke's' social conscience all, as members of the House of Lords, voted in favor of the Vagrancy Act of 1547.

This is not to say that Latimer, Ridley, Hooper and the others did not, in their sermons, plead for humane
treatment of vagabonds. Historian Conrad Russell claims that Ridley's compassion for vagabonds was matched in the sixteenth century only by William Shakespeare's. Shakespeare probably remembered the days when actors, especially strolling players, were in constant danger of being arrested as vagrants.) Unfortunately, these men were lone voices, prophets unheeded in their own land.

The leading Protestant preachers' feelings for the vagrant were very much tempered by the awareness that the spread of vagrancy since the break from Rome reflected badly on the reformers and their handiwork. They were especially sensitive to the charge of their Catholic critics that their emphasis on faith rather than merit as God's main criterion in judging souls broke down the religious impetus for easily tempted people to work. Conservatives claimed that idleness had increased disproportionately in relation to the kingdom's economic problems. They said that as much as one-third of the population was idle, and such a condition mirrored the spiritual anarchy that Protestantism had delivered.

The preachers who were invited to speak before Edward VI had a seemingly God-given opportunity to impart to the impressionable and precocious young king their ideas as to what his duties were as England's first avowedly Protestant king. They tried to bridge the gulf of ignorance that separated the courtiers from the rest of the country. And
they frankly reproved Somerset when his policies hampered the development of a Protestant Commonwealth. 67

Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and John Hooper's court sermons were astonishingly free from the obsequious diction which must always have been in the king's ear. They made no secret of their dislike of the idleness of court life, and through their unadorned language they displayed a contempt for the diplomacy and maneuvering on which the government functioned. On the other hand, they themselves were shockingly nescient and negligent in the details of church administration. 68 For them there could be "no middle ground between right and wrong, good and evil," and the details of administering a state or a church had too many morally gray areas to appeal to them. 69

Unlike conservative prelates, who were usually trained as lawyers, the reforming preachers had little interest in the concept of a national unity which came mainly through strict enforcement of the law. Because of their own sense of being among God's 'elect' (or chosen), they adopted a less conventional attitude toward the laws of society. 70 Laws, they believed, existed primarily to ensure that the elect could live unmolested amongst the unredeemed. Laws were therefore requisite. 71 But it was the task of the elect to examine the laws (many of which were drawn up by heathens) to see if they were just and necessary and to be certain that the "sustained ruthless enforcement of policy and law"
by the government was mingled with equity.72

Their commitment to mix equity with justice goes some way in explaining the reforming preachers' support of the harsh laws against vagrancy. Edmund Spencer, defending the laws England imposed on the Irish in Elizabeth I's reign, might well have been a preacher in Edward VI's court defending the measures against vagrants when he wrote: "No laws of man are just but as in regard of the evils which they prevent and the safety of the Commonwealth which they provide for."73 The preachers felt the vagrancy laws were necessary because vagrants were the basest of heathens who threatened the struggling Protestant Commonwealth. By their laziness and truculence vagrants impeded the religious and social reformation the elect were bringing about. Worst of all, they might overturn all the century's changes by starting a class war and making it seem that the reformers could not keep order in the realm.74

Still, the reforming preachers never stopped preaching about the sufferings of the impotent beggar, and they never ceased hoping to convince the sturdy beggar to mend his ways. The only way they felt this would ever be possible was to make all people—vagrants included—more godly, and this could only be brought about if preaching became so well-honed a skill that it could capture the attention of the common people while it inculcated scriptural (and
political) messages into their crude minds. Ignorance of the Bible, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer believed, "causeth all corrupt and perverse living; that is it that bringeth all things out of good order." Professor Lacey Baldwin Smith holds that the reformers' profoundly simple faith made them believe that when the Gospel message was disseminated fully, the Protestant Commonwealth would triumph:

The mere reading of the Scriptures, they thought, could not help but transform the vagrant into a worthy member of society. Wealth and power, order and security were consequent to a godly life.... It was gluttony and idleness which were the seeds of social discord, and only through the purging light of the Testament could man and his society be saved. They aimed not at transforming things, but peoples, not governments, but individuals.

It is not surprising that the messages of these preachers frequently lent themselves to misinterpretations. When Bishop Ridley wrote to William Cecil that the plight of vagabonds was "Master Christ's cause," he did not mean to infer that vagrancy was Christ-like, or that Christ had been a vagrant. But the poor and the homeless took comfort and hope in distorting sermons. When preachers called wealth a gift from God that entailed moral and social obligations, they risked being misconstrued by society's 'have-nots' that wealth could rightly be taken from those who did not uphold their responsibilities.

No preacher ran the risk of being misinterpreted
more than Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester. Latimer was the most influential preacher in England from the beginning of the Reformation until his death in 1553.\textsuperscript{81} His penchant for speaking in vivid, "muscular" language gave his sermons a picturesque quality which made them well-received by both court and country congregations.\textsuperscript{82} Part of Latimer's attraction was the fervor he brought to the pulpit; he often spoke without a prepared text and his main theme was apt to be lost amidst his many digressions.\textsuperscript{83} Perhaps what made his sermons so influential was that Latimer was primarily an orator, and unlike most other preachers of his day he was little interested in theological quibbles. Subtle theologic debates were of no consequence to him; his concern was for the broader questions of how the reformed theology might be applied to the era's social issues.\textsuperscript{84} Because he was the son of a tenant farmer of modest means, he was especially interested in the strains the government and the economy placed on the poor, and in the problems the poor in turn brought society.

If there was a central theme of Latimer's sermons, it was that everyone in a Christian society had duties assigned to them by God. Everyone was charged with obeying all secular laws except those which threatened the Protestant Commonwealth with a return to communion with Rome. Specifically it was the duty of all the king's
subjects to labor, for "it is our Savior Christ that
sendeth us living: yet we must labour, for he that
said to Peter labour, and he that bade the fishers
labour, bids all men to labour in their business."85

Latimer considered St. Paul's direction to the Thessalon-i ans to be "still a good ordinance in a commonweal: 'that
whosoever would not do the work of his vocation should
have no meat.'"86 This was Latimer the court homilist;
when he spoke from the country pulpit his tone was marked-
ly softer. In the "Sermon of the Plough," he cajoled
everyone to perform their tasks by having them visualize
the prosperity that their efforts would yield. Vagrants
"do not [their] duty, [they] follow not their vocation: let
your ploughs therefore be going, and not cease, that the
ground may bring forth fruit."87

Some sort of work-effort was demanded of every member
of society, but those in higher social stratum than manual-
laborers would by necessity have more onerous obligations.
It was the duty of the wealthy to seek out the poor and
aid them, and Latimer bemoaned the attenuated (and mis-
directed) charitable activities in England, and particular-
ly in London. God's wrath at the greed of England's wealthy
was especially acute because they had had the benefit of
being freed from Rome's grasp. Latimer predicted that the
fledgling Protestant Commonwealth would soon totter on the
brink of destruction because, just as had Nebo, it ignored
In times past men were full of pity and compassion, for in London their brother shall die in the streets for cold, he shall lie sick at the door between stock and stock, I cannot tell what to call it, and perish there for hunger: was there ever more unmercifulness in Nebo? I think not. In times past...when a man died he would bequeath great sums of money toward relief of the poor...but now charity is waxen cold. 88

This callousness, argued Latimer, could only partially be explained by the lingering influence of Catholicism, which had a sustained contempt for the poor and impotent who did not contribute much to the church's overflowing treasury. 89

The greatest duty of all was the king's. Latimer's message to Edward VI in his court sermons was similar to More's lesson to Henry VIII in the Utopia: "A king has no dignity when he exercises authority over beggars, only when he rules over happy and prosperous subjects." 90 In his first sermon before Edward VI, Latimer told of how he rebuked Henry VIII for allowing his horses to be housed in what used to be shelters for the poor. Latimer rejected Henry's rejoinder that the manner in which the horses were kept reflected on his royal glory; the king's honor, he said, was besmirched by such flagrant injustices to the poor. "In a king," Latimer claimed to have reprimanded Henry, "God requires faith, not an excess of horses." 91

Latimer spoke to Edward VI without timidity because he said their jobs were so much alike: both had to humble
"these great men and men of power, these men that are oppressors of the poor." The king and the clergy must "fear them not, but strike at the root of all evil, which is mischievous covetousness." These men, "extortioners, violent oppressors, ingrossers of tenements and lands, through whose covetousness villages decay and fall down, the king's liege people for lack of sustenance are famished and decayed," degraded the king's honor by making the spread of poverty and vagrancy a consequence of their quest for wealth. "God requireth in the King and all his magistrates a good heart," and the king must bring the defenseless poor under his special protection, hearing their supplications personally and acting upon them impartially. The king was not to leave the care of his meanest subjects in the hands of "these velvet coats, these upskips" who bought up land and drove productive individuals to poverty and idleness. Latimer stated that these men blatantly perverted justice: "There is a saying now, that money is heard everywhere; if he be rich, he shall soon have an end of his matter." The king and the Lord Protector must assure the survival of the Protestant Commonwealth by making poor folks' theoretic access to justice a reality.

Latimer explained that beginning under Henry III and Edward II, acts were passed that allowed landowners to "take away much lands from their tenants." Common grazing
lands were permitted to be enclosed provided the tenants were left with 'sufficient' lands to survive. However, this process had accelerated to the point where common lands were being frittered away. Consequently, "where as have been a great many householders and inhabitaunce, there is nowe but a shepher and his dog." Latimer claimed he knew of only one man who had reduced his rents so that his tenants would not be pushed into vagrancy. The continual escalation of rents had weakened the yeomenry, who were then forced to curtail the education of their sons. Latimer noted gravely that one day soon the weight of poor relief would come to rest most heavily on the next generation of yeomenry, and their reduced circumstances would make them less well equipped than their forehearers to cope with this burden.

Latimer recalled the days when the yeomenry cared for and fed the wandering poor routinely. His own father, though a struggling farmer, never turned away anyone in need, but the present owner of the farm could no longer even "give a cup of drink to the poor." Such a situation invited disaster, because increasingly the poor were coming to believe that their misery came not only from the greed of the rich, but from a cruel and immutable system of justice. Latimer said that the poor genuinely thought that the laws of the realm hastened their slide from
prosperous laborers to poor laborers and eventually to vagrants. "Search no more what is the cause of rebellion,"\textsuperscript{100} but stem the growth of vagrancy by "doing justice, but doing it justly...for the delaying of matters of the poor folk is as sinful before the face of God as wrong judgement."\textsuperscript{101}

Latimer was predictably vague in suggesting how the economic and social alienation of the poor could be reversed. He urged Edward VI to "see to a redress of these things so out of frame; giving example by letting down your own lands first, and then enjoining your subjects to follow." Latimer understood that this would only happen, however, after the king had come of age.\textsuperscript{102} Until that day, Latimer could only hope to frighten the king's ministers into action by predicting their downfall and destruction if they offered the poor no hope or help: "Woe worth to them that make evil laws against the poor!"\textsuperscript{103}

When Somerset's government was beset by the rebellions of 1549, Latimer offered a syllogistic analysis: "Covetousness is the root of all evil: rebellion is evil: \textit{ergo}, covetousness is the root of rebellion. And so it is indeed." These sententious words must have been small comfort to Somerset, but Latimer did go on to say that there was conspicuous greed on the commoners' part as well as the gentry's.\textsuperscript{104} But it is clear that to Latimer, the landowners were most responsible for the rebellion, because
like the rich of Nineve, they have "oppressed the poor by making slaves, peasants, villains, and bonds-men unto them." But Latimer offered a glimmer of hope to the Somerset Protectorate in its moment of supreme crisis. Just as God had given Nineve time to repent before he destroyed it completely, so too would he grant the elect sufficient time to mend their society.  

But the same as almost all his contemporaries, Latimer's sympathies for the poor did not extend to the vagrant. He seemed to understand that in many cases their condition was an involuntary, almost unavoidable result of economic dislocation, but once they became vagrants, they were pariahs. Latimer was concerned that the solace he wanted to give the poor not be mistaken for ecclesiastical sanction of idleness or sedition. This seemed to be the fear of every preacher. Most, like John Hooper in his "Third Sermon Upon Jonas," were cautious to balance their condemnation of the greedy, who "hath enough given [them] from God, and yet are not content therewithal [but] condemn and disdain the very image of God in the poor," with their recriminations against the poor who "live idle, and will not labour." But it does not seem likely that Latimer or Hooper considered the Vagrancy Act of 1547 a law that oppressed the poor or hastened the revolts of 1549. Vagrants remained a group separate from the 'worthy' poor, and Latimer was unswerving, under the regimes of both
Somerset and Northumberland, in preaching the importance of a strict enforcement of the various laws against vagrancy, "although they never be so hard, noisome, and hurtful."  

But Latimer's sermons did change in substance after Ket's Rebellion. There were fewer mentions of the social and economic happenings which were complicating life in the Protestant Commonwealth, and there was more emphasis on reconstructing society spiritually, through prayer and wholesome faith. Where Latimer left off in his social crusade, Nicholas Ridley in part took it up. Ridley was a far less exciting speaker than Latimer, and his speech was rather less polished than Cranmer's or Hooper's, but his messages were heeded by the king to a greater extent than his colleagues.

Like most reformed prelates, Nicholas Ridley was educated at Cambridge. He began his career as chaplain to the university, then to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury, and, in 1541, to Henry VIII. Thus, of all contemporary clergymen, with the possible exceptions of Cranmer and Stephen Gardiner, Ridley was the most adept at crafting court sermons. His close ties with the royal family and the court magnates taught him to choose his words judiciously, rendering his sermons more terse than others of the period. But they must also rank among the most compassionate sermons in the English church's history.
There was no shortage of platitudes in his sermons on the dignity of poverty or invectives against idleness or greed, but one feels that Ridley, more than Latimer or Hooper, understood that an effective preacher (especially before a court audience) had to offer some concrete suggestions on how the kingdom's ills might be cured.\footnote{111}

In February 1550, Archbishop Cranmer appointed Ridley to the See of London. Soon after, Ridley voted in support of Northumberland's statute to modify the harsh Vagrancy Act of 1547.\footnote{112} Immediately after this statute was passed, Northumberland ordered all the vagabonds in London and Southwark to be expelled from the city and returned to their home parishes.\footnote{113} Northumberland was eager to return a greater portion of responsibility for treating poverty and idleness to provincial governments and parish churches. Each locality was assigned a fixed rate of charitable obligations, which were to be met by congregations coaxed into generosity by their curates.\footnote{114} Gradually, poor rates, which had become compulsory in London in 1547, were levied on the countryside, but not until Elizabeth's reign were they extensive enough to check the proliferation of poverty effectively. Compulsory poor rates were themselves sources of popular discontent, because the "mayntenaunce and fynding of the poore, Sicke, and indigent persons" were regarded as yet another tax on an already overburdened populace.\footnote{115} And even though
poor rates were not meant to assist sturdy beggars, they were generally believed to be subsidies for laziness. The resentment caused by the poor rates and taxes made Northumberland's government encourage preachers—famous and obscure—to work into some of their texts a reaffirmation of the Christian duty of "rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Thus a good deal of Ridley's and Latimer's post-1549 'country' (as opposed to court) sermons concerned the people's obligation to give the king and his ministers money cheerfully and even eagerly.  

Ridley began a series of homilies before Edward VI in February 1552. Ridley believed that the king was kept ill-informed as to the extent of poverty in his realm, and Ridley felt that the fifteen-year-old king was then in a position to ameliorate things. Ridley took it upon himself to suggest to the king charitable activities in which he might take part, and the results of these efforts have been called the "first fruits of the Reformation."

Acting upon Ridley's advice, Edward VI founded sixteen grammar schools and planned to establish twelve colleges for the education of poor youths. Later in the year, Ridley spoke on how cold weather had in the past caused the deaths of innumerable vagrants, and by November 1552, it was becoming evident that the approaching winter would be unusually severe. When Northumberland, in an effort to raise crown revenues, ordered all "useless" church goods in
London to be sold and the proceeds to go to the government, Ridley wasted no time in petitioning the king that "any superfluous linen, over and above what [the king] might need" should be given to Ridley so that he might have it distributed among the poor.¹¹⁹

After the last of the series of sermons, Edward VI personally thanked Ridley:

I took myself to be especially touched by your speech, as well in regard of the abilities God hath given me, as in regard of the example which from me he will require, for as in the kingdom I am next under God, so must I most nearly approach him in goodness and mercy; for as our miseries stand most in need of aid from him, so are we the greatest debtors—debtors to all that are miserable, and shall be the greatest accountants of our dispensation therein; and therefore, my lord, as you have given me, I thank you, this general exhortation, so direct me; (I pray you), by what particular actions I may this way best discharge my duties.¹²⁰

Apparently Ridley was not prepared for this enthusiastic petition for guidance, for he asked the king to grant him time to consider how he might best advise. He then consulted the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London.¹²¹ Together they decided to help the king distinguish the different types of poor people, and then set about building or restoring shelters and hospitals for each type.¹²² Edward VI recorded the three types of poor which were to be housed separately.¹²³ The first type was the impotent poor, which was subdivided into orphans, paupers' children, the aged blind or lame, the permanently diseased (such as lepers), and idiots.
The king gave this group Grey Friars Church, near Newgate Market, to function as a school for poor orphans. Lepers were to be provided for outside of the city. The second category was the victims of illness or injury. This was composed of the seriously ill, the wounded soldiers, and 'decayed' householders. The king bestowed St. Bartholomew's Hospital on this group, and St. Thomas's Hospital in Southwark was reopened. Decayed householders were to be cared for at home. The king also made over the revenues from his property of the Savoy to run these hospitals.

The final category of poor people was the thriftless poor, including rioters, wasters "who consumeth all," vagrants "who will abide in no case," and prostitutes.124

Edward VI was reluctant to provide any royal properties for the use of this third group. Ridley enlisted the help of London's Lord Mayor to convince the king to give up the long-abandoned Palace of Bridewell for the thriftless poor.

When word of Ridley's project got round the court, a group of courtiers offered to buy Bridewell—situated on prime London property—from the king at a very cheap price.125 Ridley promptly wrote to William Cecil to head off this transaction: Christ, he said, should "lie no more abroad in the streets." The disused Bridewell could "well serve to lodge Christ in, if he might find such good friends in the court to procure his cause."126 Here, for the first and probably only time, vagrants—social outcasts—are fully
equated with Christ—the ultimate outcast of humanity. Perhaps only a mind as thoroughly imbued with the spirit of reform and Christian renewal as Bishop Ridley's could conceive such a pungent image.

A petition in the name of the citizens of London sent to "the King's Majesty's most honourable Council," reported that the use of statutes had done little to end idleness. The declaration requested the king to cede Bridewell as a labor-house for vagrants. It suggested that vagrants be employed in making, dressing, and dyeing cheap caps. Depending on their physical stamina, they could also be made to work on making nails and iron works, or knitting. Only such "travail and exercise" would positively stop the growth of vagrancy within city limits. If the king would not consent to the use of Bridewell for this purpose, the citizens requested that he put the Savoy at the disposal of city officials for the project. The force of this petition, coupled with the maneuverings of Ridley and Cecil, impelled the Privy Council to reject the offer of the group of courtiers to buy Bridewell.

Still, it was not until April 1553 that Bridewell was made available to Ridley. It was quickly transformed to a house of correction for vagrants and prostitutes, where they would be "chastened and compelled to labour." During the winter of 1552-53, Ridley ordered London churchwardens to direct relief efforts for the destitute. Regardless
of Northumberland's Proclamation of May 7, 1550 which ordered all vagrants to return to their home parishes,\textsuperscript{130} London was again crowded with vagrants. Ridley organized street patrols to direct the indigent and wandering poor to appropriate care centers and to ensure that the peace was kept.\textsuperscript{131}

Of all the poor relief programs Ridley inspired and coordinated in London, the one for the thriftless poor was the most rudimentary. Bridewell Palace was turned into nothing short of a labor camp, where the inmates were whipped and worked without ever really being prepared to assume someday a productive role in society. Still, the converted royal residence was a unique and thoughtful venture in social planning; royal government confronted the enduring reality of vagrancy, and it provided a place where vagrants could be kept under surveillance and made to work. And Bridewell did at least provide shelter, food, and basic medical care; unfortunately this experiment did not extend beyond the bishopric of London.

Any experiment which dealt with vagrants and prostitutes was bound to elicit strong reactions. Not surprisingly, some thought that sermons on the dignity of the poor and the efforts to care for the thriftless poor merely placated the idle and reduced everyone's incentive to be hard-working and acquiescent to authorities. Writers began to recall in a favorable light the order maintained under Henry VIII,
...hanged over 72,000 great thieves, pettie thieves and rogues [and who] terrified the rest; but since his death the number of them is so increased...that except some better order be taken, or the lawes alreadie made be better executed, such as dwell in upland towns and little villages shall live but in small saftie and rest. 132

Tales also abounded of the guile of the vagabond. William Turner, who had been Somerset's personal physician, reported in his New Booke of Spiritual Physick (1555) that many vagabonds had spurned his offers to treat them because "they had much leuer be sick styll with ease and ydlenes, then to be hole and withe great Payne and labour, to earne honestly theyr lyving." 133

But the body of literature which demanded a more humane society was expanding substantially. A popular poem in the reign of Edward VI was the doggerel verse "On the Evil Times of Edward II," which likened the confused state of England after Ket's Rebellion with the disastrous reign of Edward II. What had once been the failure only of England's monasteries was by the sixteenth century the failure of English society as a whole: that men were allowed to "cower there all day in hunger and in cold, and starve" was indicative of a paucity of Christian charity. 134

The ominous questions raised about the conflicting realities of poverty and wealth, and idleness and work, as well as about the proper bounds and functions of charity
and collective and individual responsibilities to uplift the poor were all examined in Robert Langland's "The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman." The reformers were intrigued by Langland's implied support for John Wyclif's call for reform of the church. They also took Langland to heart when he upbraided Christ's followers for not being humble and for being too preoccupied with acquiring worldly goods. The reformers believed that Langland's condemnation of the ostentatiousness of the rich was as relevant in 1550 as it had been in the fourteenth century. Robert Crowley's "Pyers Plowmans Exhortation, unto the Lordes, Knights and Burgoyses of the Parlyament-house" (1550) argued that "it is not agreeable with the gospel that a few persons shall live in so great abundance of wealth and suffer so many their Christian brothers to live in extreme poverty." Robert Crowley did not merely re-tell Langland's tale; he offered a radical "Christian solution to the problem of poverty." His "stewardship theory of property ownership" proposed that all surplus wealth in the kingdom should be re-distributed among the poor, enabling all men to be able to live with a "sufficient and moderate amount of wealth." Crowley lamented that the monarchy had stopped short of sharing the wealth of the dissolved monasteries with the entire commonwealth. If the young king did not look to the Bible for instruction
on how he should eliminate the realm's inequities, Crowley predicted the disgruntled poor would bring down the current order of things even before the much-anticipated Second Coming.\textsuperscript{140}

But Robert Crowley, like many reformers, had been badly frightened by the disruptions in political stability and discouraged when the energy behind Protestant spiritual and social rehabilitation seemed to flag under Somerset's unsure hand.\textsuperscript{141} Understandably, he found the rebellions of 1549 particularly unsettling. Before 1550, Crowley and many other left-wing reformers "saw in economic individualism but another expression of the laxity and license which had degraded the purity of religion, and who understood by reformation a return to the moral austerity of the primitive church, no less than to its government and doctrine."\textsuperscript{142} After 1549, some reformers came to believe that the dissolution of the monasteries had incurred an irreversible unemployment problem. Others even criticized clerical marriages for increasing the population. And like Crowley, most reformers wanted to make perfectly clear that while they still blamed the penuriousness (moral and material) of the 'chosen' for the bad state of the country, they were in no way granting the poor a carte-blanche to take up arms. Crowley warned that more revolts would shatter the social structure, and the poor would suffer the most if this were to happen:
I wol not that those ydell members of this realm which for the maintenaunce of their ydelenes would have al things in commen, shal think that I do now harpe of that string: far be such madnes from me, for that confusion would utterly extinguish all industry unto all maner of good artes and qualities, and reduce us unto a bestly trade of life. 143

Increasingly, reformers became fearful that the poor who had risen against enclosure in 1549 were coming under the sway of vagabonds and Anabaptists. Anabaptists believed in communal ownership—a concept which attracted some of society's disenfranchised, but which was unequivocally denounced by conservative and reforming religious and landowners equally.144 Even though Crowley's earlier notion of sharing surfeit wealth had parallels with Anabaptist tenets, he stopped short of outright communism.145 Robert Crowley wrote that Anabaptists and vagabonds had stirred up so much trouble that the peasants...

...know no obedience; they regard no laws, they would have no gentlemen, they would have all men like themselves, they would have all things in common. They would not have of master of that which is our own. 146

Sir John Cheke warned the poor that their 'leveler' tendencies would "take all hope away youres, to come to anye better estate, then you nowe live them." He also informed vagabond and Anabaptist agitators that riches were "a matter of God's providence; the Christian should be content with God's ordinance."147 And while reformers were busy clarifying their positions on social
issues, the conservatives noted gleefully that Protestantism, religious fanaticism, and unbridled idealism had been harbingers of that greatest manifestation of divine wrath: anarchy. 148

The adherents of the 'old' religion made some valid points in their assessment of the two Protestant regimes which governed England under Edward VI. Somerset's Protectorate was particularly hindered by its own self-contradictions. Its blending of religious fanaticism with economic avarice and its self-righteous 'mission' to return English Christianity to pristine simplicity in the face of mad scrambles by the Protector and his men to garner every perquisite of power and wealth left almost everyone feeling confused and put off. 149 Perhaps Somerset's regime doomed itself by trying to be all things to all people. Very early in the reign Somerset and his followers were accused of being interested only in "filling the king's coffers and their own," despite the (erroneous) belief, detected by the Spanish ambassador, that Henry VIII had left his son's government "much money [for he had] not spent in the late wars as much as some might think, for the reason that his people had come to his assistance." 150 Somerset's intentions and methods of aiding the poor were also questioned. His rivals accused him of demagoguery in dealing with the masses and charged that his dilatory response to the enclosure movement was
part of his grand scheme to harm the landed elite. At the same time, while he was in the process of quelling the rebellions against enclosure, he was accused by the commons of deserting them in their fight against oppression. But his problems were mostly of his own making; he was willful, imperious, contradictory, and worst of all, indecisive.¹⁵¹ The myth of Somerset's liberalism has been resoundingly demolished; he was firmly on the side of the ruling class and social conservatism, but when his military adventures in France and Scotland misfired and his administrative incompetence became too conspicuous to ignore, his foes used the fable of his radical social agenda to destroy him.¹⁵²

Sympathizers with the Duke of Somerset had long held the Vagrancy Act of 1547 to be the biggest blot on his historical escutcheon. Historians, most notably A. F. Pollard and Wilbur K. Jordan, have debated whether the Act's recourse to the threat of slavery was just the scare-tactic of a benign government which simply wished to startle sturdy beggars out of their sloth, or whether it was the first instance of the iron fist of the Protectorate coming out of its velvet glove.¹⁵³

The Vagrancy Act of 1547 was really a bit of both. And ironically, it was in the end still only a half-measure. It was a law that was unenforceable, but it is unclear whether the reformers who surrounded Somerset
grasped this. It flouted the development of England's Common Law, it alienated local officials by arrogating for the central government long-standing local rights, and it tainted the ideals of the new Protestant Commonwealth with its cruelty. It was too momentous a piece of legislation to be thought of as a governmental 'message' that official sympathy and care for the worthy poor did not extend to condoning the work-shy. Nor is it convincing to state that the act was made so ferocious only because Somerset's authority and prestige, not nearly as great as Henry VIII's, had to be augmented by laws that exaggerated both his intentions and capacities to punish malefactors. No explanation of Somerset's invocation of this act can make his motivations completely clear, but the act cannot be considered without regard to the extremely vulnerable nature of any government forced to label itself a protectorate. England's experiences with child kings and their regents (Richard II, Henry VI, and Edward V) had been uniformly disastrous, and political factions, economic growing-pains, and the dramatic religious changes of the sixteenth century gave even strong rulers only a tenuous control over events. The Vagrancy Act of 1547 was a strong-sounding measure taken against the supposed common enemy of rich and poor alike—an enemy who had no resources and was presumably too scattered to strike back at the government.
The Protectorate's delusion that it could control and eventually end vagrancy by fiat evaporated very quickly after the Act came into effect. The Act made so many loud noises about stamping out vagrancy that when it proved impractical to try to enforce fully every clause of the Act, it seemed as though the Protectorate's failure to manage the problem of vagrancy was immeasurably greater than any other government's. It was not. In terms of public relations, the Act was a debacle; it in effect staked the good name of the Protectorate on deeds it was unable to accomplish. In terms of law-making it was also an unnecessary reverse, because it made the regime look needlessly foolish, incompetent, and powerless. But the total failure of the Act did not bring on a surge of significant acts of unlawfulness or rebelliousness by bands of vagrants, nor did the number of vagrants noticeably mount during the period when the central government had no workable policy to deal with vagrancy. The problem continued to be very serious, but generally local officials were able to keep the situation from getting too far out of control. Vagabonds were mainly a nuisance by day and a danger to solitary travelers at night. In Chelsea, for instance, one who wished to cross Blandels Bridge by day might be harassed by the vagrants who congregated there to loiter or beg, but at night they might well be robbed when the vagrants turned into
'footpads' or highway robbers. 157

By 1548 Somerset was so embattled by the problems of a faltering economy and pervasive discontent that he might then have regarded vagrancy among the least of the problems confronting him. Rampant price inflation was the foremost cause of the realm's and Somerset's problems. G. R. Elton argues that in dealing with inflation, Somerset had but two choices. The correct (but much more arduous) route would have been to reduce the supply of money by reversing the debasement of the coinage. Instead he chose the easier method endorsed by John Hales: Somerset diverted attention from inflation by declaring a moral war against the greedy landowners who enclosed lands and charged exorbitant rents that ruined tenants. 153 Cranmer, Ridley, Hooper, Latimer, and other Protestant preachers took up this crusade in earnest, but for Somerset it was a sham policy designed to deflect criticisms of his policies by broadening his popular support with illusory threats and promises while putting his critics (many of whom were, like himself, wealthy, conservative landowners) on the defensive. 153 Despite the fact that the enclosure movement had tapered off by the end of Henry VIII's reign, 160 Somerset perceived that the new barrage of legislation against "antisocial practices" bought his regime precious time to advance its main objective: the waging of war against France and Scotland. 161
One of these antisocial practices was unlawful assemblies. Somerset contended that unlawful assemblies were comprised primarily of vagabonds and other 'lewd' persons who broke the peace and mocked royal authority. In the spring of 1548, the king wrote to his sheriffs and justices of the peace, instructing them to establish watches and set up beacons to suppress illegal assemblies and apprehend persons plotting sedition. The 1548-49 session of Parliament also passed a bill forbidding unlawful assemblies or physical resistance to enclosures. Somerset admonished all "his highness's good subjects of what estate, degree, or condition soever they be not only to beware who they presume at any time...to make any such riot or unlawful assemblies for any cause whatsoever." Those who intentionally misinterpreted the king's proclama-
tions as a justification to...

...pluck his highness's sword out of his hand and... chasten and correct whom they have thought good in plucking down pales, hedges, and ditches at their will and pleasure contrary to their duties of allegiance and to the danger of his majesty and all others his highness's good and loving subjects...

would be reported to the justices of the peace, who would bring about the transgressor's "utter ruin and destruction." Only those who made "humble and quiet complaints" of their grievances would have their injuries "redressed as his majesty's laws instruct and equity requireth." But these subjects were informed that the "sundry decays of houses
and enclosures made by persons contrary to the king's majesty's laws" that they complained about would be taken care of only after "the said seditious and lewd persons [have been] stayed, corrected, and punished." 164

In 1548, Somerset empowered a commission to investigate breaches in the laws on enclosure and the conversion of arable lands. It was headed by the tactless John Hales, who with Hugh Latimer aroused the anger and suspicion of most landowners by accusing them of packing and bribing every jury that deliberated on the issue. When in 1549 the commission recommended a tax on cloth and sheep to stimulate crop farming, it was accused of being Somerset's tool in stirring the commons against the gentry and nobility. 165

But Somerset was unable to prevent illicit assemblies, nor was he able to stop some assemblies from turning into riots. Charles V's ambassador, Francois Van der Delft, wrote to the emperor on May 28, 1549, that peasant assemblies in the west counties (Devon and Cornwall) were turning into risings against unfairly enclosed lands. But he added that at least in England's north there were no rumors of damage done by assemblies. 166 The news in the western counties was more frightening to the government. The Privy Council rebuked Devon's justices of the peace, saying that the social disarray wrought by "unnatural, rude" subjects was giving courage to the "Frenchmen and the Scots our
enemies." Apparently it gave some comfort to Spaniards also, because as the revolt flamed, Van der Delft averred that the rebels were fighters of a "just cause who commit no violence on anybody and profess themselves willing to obey the King and his laws." He might have added that they were very selective in choosing which of the king's laws they intended to respect. Van der Delft was cautious to disassociate the rebellion in the west counties from vagrant agitation because so many of the rebels' demands centered on their displeasure with the deviations in religious traditions, alterations mostly introduced under Somerset. Even though relations between Spain and England were fairly pacific under Somerset, the Spanish ambassador, as a Catholic observer, looked kindly (without breaking his official neutrality) on rebels who brought the aggressively Protestant Protectorate to grief.

The July rebellion in Norfolk, which ended the North's "quavering quiet," underscored Somerset's administrative incompetence. Robert Ket and his followers believed that they had Somerset's blessing in taking up arms against enclosers of lands. For this imbroglio, William Paget squarely blamed Somerset:

The king's subjects [are] out of all discipline, out of obedience, caring neither for Protector nor King, and much less for any other officer. And what is the cause? Your own lenity, your softness, your opinion to be good to the poor: the opinion of such as say to your grace, 'Oh! Sir, there was
never man had the hearts of the poor as you have. Oh! The commons pray for you, sir, they say, God save your life.' I know your gentle heart right well, and that your meaning is good and godly, however evil men list to prate here, that you have some greater enterprise in your head, that lean so much to the multitude. I know, I say, your meaning and honest virtue, but I say, sir, it is a great pity that your so much gentleness should be occasion of so great an evil as is now chanced in England by those rebels.... Where is the law used in England at liberty? Almost no where. The foote taketh upon him the parte of the head, and commons is become a king, appointing conditions and laws to the governors, saying 'Grant this and that, and we shall go home.'... I know in this matter of the commons every man of the council hath misliked your proceeding and wished it otherwise. 172

Because many considered Ket's rebellion a repudiation of Somerset's ability to govern effectively, Somerset realized that the only way he could salvage any remaining confidence in his regime was to discredit the leaders of the revolt. So at the same time the King published his intention to review the grievances concerning enclosures, the decay of houses, sheep raising, and the price of land, 173 Somerset drew up a proclamation insisting that "the King's poor subjects" had been duped into rebellion by "lewd ruffians, tale-tellers, and unruly vagabonds." Since these "disordered persons...[had]neither place to inhabit in, nor seeketh any stay to live by," they had no legitimate right to "seek to redress the commonwealth." Rather they sought to drag society down to their own wretched level, while they lived off the wealth of the honest laborers whom they had destroyed. 174
The revolt in Norfolk was not easily put down, and Somerset's frustrated commanders joined the protector in vilifying the duplicitous rebel leaders:

So impudent were they and so desperate that of theyr vagabond boyes (wyth reverens spoken) brychles and bear arssyde came among the thickett of the arrows and gathered them up when some of the arrows stuck fast in theyr leggs and other parts and did therewith most shamefully turne up theyr bare tayles agenst those which did shoote, whych see dysmayed the archers that it took theyr hart from them. 175

The protector indeed had cause for alarm if all his troops were so skittish! By the middle of July even Van der Delft agreed that the rebellion had adopted an increasingly unjust set of demands: all enclosed lands should be made available for public use, victuals should be sold at 'reasonable' (a very elastic adjective) prices, and leased lands should be set at the same value as they had had in Henry VII's time. In the middle of August, Van der Delft reported that the Norfolk rebel forces, which had dwindled to a shabby army consisting of "nothing but young serving men and riff-raff," were inflicting last-minute destruction on the countryside just before the arrival of the Earl of Warwick's troops. 176 The 12,000-man army made short work of dispersing the rebels, and by August 26, the rebels surrendered. 177

When the smoke of the rebellion had cleared, many, like Sir John Cheke, took a second look at the image the
protectorate projected and the realities that lay behind the image. Cheke, and many subsequent observers, concluded that Somerset "mistook rigidity for firmness and self-will for rational conviction."\textsuperscript{178} Specifically, Cheke had come to feel that the Vagrancy Act of 1547 was a conceptual failure.\textsuperscript{179} Its bellicose but ultimately empty threats had diluted the country's faith in the laws promulgated by the Protectorate while they did nothing to stem vagrancy.\textsuperscript{180} Indeed, the rebellions of 1549 reinforced the impression of the English population, as well as of many domestic and foreign onlookers, that vagrants were more brazen than ever before, and acted with unheard of temerity and freedom not in spite of, but because of the outlandishly harsh laws of the Protectorate.\textsuperscript{181}

In September 1549, Somerset responded to the criticisms of the Vagrancy Act. He and the Privy Council devised a letter from the king to his subjects which announced that Edward's "dearest uncle" sought the "ways and means [to restore] quiet order and well doing."

Therefore, the king granted clemency to all former rioters who had resumed "their bounden duty of allegiance." It noted that the realm was still bothered by "vagabonds and others going about raising[ing] our people" to gather unlawfully and break laws. "Idle vagabonds and others, lewd and seditious persons voided of all fear of God and
forgetting their bounden duty of allegiance to us do still loiter and use seditious and stubborn talk refuse to labour or otherwise pain themselves in any honest or virtuous work." Vagabonds who would not take advantage of the king's clemency or listen to the "good admonishments" of those who bade them to work would be "chastised [by] J.P.s, and all other our ministers, officers, and good subjects." Vagabonds who encouraged "stirrings or assemblies [would be] apprehended and as rebels and open traitors to us and our realm to be without delay hanged and executed openly to the terror of others." And vagabonds who disregarded the reprimands of honest citizens would "likewise [be] apprehended and straightly punished as vagabonds according to the tenor of the laws provided in that behalf." 182

But what laws were the Justices of the Peace to oversee? For traitors, there was no question that from the highest noble down, the sentence had to be death. But the king's open letter of September 1549 was ambiguous regarding exactly what laws the local officials were to execute against sturdy beggars who repeatedly refused to work. On the face of it local officials were to act upon the Vagrancy Act of 1547 and enslave recalcitrant idlers. But this law was a dead letter, made so by its authors' myopia, and not, as Edward VI believed, because of any "foolish pitey" on the part of local enforcers. 183
One month after the end of a threatening insurrection was
certainly too soon for the beleaguered Somerset to re-
formulate a major social policy, but the very vagueness
of his instructions on how to deal with vagabonds, whom
he had earlier said were the greatest menace of English
society, signaled to most onlookers that the Protector
was surely a spent force politically. 134

To add to Somerset's problems, the havoc inflicted
on the countryside by the rebellions of 1549 plus a
very poor harvest resulted in a food shortage—especially
of wheat. Somerset ordered barns to be searched for any-
thing that could be brought to market. He also ordered
price manipulators and hoarders to be apprehended. 135
Unfortunately, the price of subsistence foods climbed
steeply, beyond the reach of many in the underfed popula-
tion, 136 and the government's price regulating efforts
only just barely staved off famine. 137 Food shortages
outlasted Somerset's Protectorate, which was toppled
and replaced by Northumberland's faction in October 1549.
Throughout 1550 there were many short-lived risings
against high food, land, and rent costs. 138 John Hooper
despaired of the "dearth and scarcity of provisions"
which so sharply contrasted with the extravagant amounts
of money the wealthy spent on clothing, jewelry, and
 gaming. 139

But Northumberland's regime took greater pains than
had Somerset's to construct a coherent domestic agenda. He further tried to cultivate the opinion that his regime was stable and forward-looking by putting together responsive and intelligent programs; in this he was less than successful, for he carried the stigma of being something of a usurper (as regarded Somerset's legal status as the king's guardian,) and soon he became bogged down in internecine factional struggles at court. He did make headway in bringing order out of Somerset's legacy of misrule. He revitalized the Privy Council. He painstakingly began to curb inflation. To safeguard against further rebellions, he forbade peasants to possess weapons or assemble in groups larger than ten persons. He also ordered local authorities to commence periodic spot searches of every peasant dwelling.

Touching the government's response to vagrancy, Northumberland's contribution was little more than passive: he substituted a lesser 'evil,' i.e., a re-adapted Vagrancy Act of 1531, in place of a greater one. But this seemingly uninspired resolution does mark a watershed of sorts in the history of sixteenth century vagrancy legislation. The visceral, reactionary impulse to impose slavery on the idle was rejected forever; gradually laws began to reflect the realization that demography and the national and local economies had more than a casual bearing on the number of vagrants in the kingdom.
Also beginning under Northumberland was the understanding that national and local policies toward vagrancy should be made to conform, at least roughly with each other.\textsuperscript{192} By the reign of Mary I, royal government was even extending its hand into the local employment pool, instructing Justices of the Peace to ascertain the means of employment of the head of each household in Yorkshire. Where it was found the head of the house was not gainfully occupied, his family was to be provided with raw materials which they were to work into finished products.\textsuperscript{193} This provision formed the kernel of the Elizabethan Poor Laws of the 1570s, as did the practice of making contributions to the poor fund compulsory under pain of imprisonment.\textsuperscript{194} Only if the government were able to offer work to each able, idle person, and only if the annual intake of poor relief were made secure by stipulated donations could the Tudor system of poor relief begin to be successful. By grudgingly admitting that vagrancy was sometimes an involuntary state,\textsuperscript{195} the government of Elizabeth I could satisfy its objective that vagabonds "may not have any just excuse in saying that they cannot get any service or any work."\textsuperscript{196}

In an age when changes were so sudden and deep, perhaps it was comforting for the Tudor subject to allow his perception of vagabonds and vagabondage to remain
static. The vagrant was the ready-made and flawless villain: dirty, inarticulate, cursed by God, a convenient scapegoat to be blamed and punished for every unsolvable evil, small or large. And as the spokesmen for the Reformation in England emphasized that poverty was an 'honorable estate' which the poor must resign themselves to as their God-given lot, the poor were promised wealth in heaven for their earthly complacency. The preachers assured their listeners that the rogues' spiritual inheritance would certainly be eternal damnation.\textsuperscript{197}

For governments, vagabondage was a double-edged sword. Its very existence highlighted the governments' shortcomings in dealing with the pressing problems of the day. Still, vagrants, if not vagrancy itself, could be convenient; when a policy went awry, Tudor governments—and especially weak ones like Somerset's—were sure to make at least a passing reference to the subversive tactics of the vagabonds.\textsuperscript{198}

There exists, of course, no psychological profiles of Tudor vagrants. It is not hard to imagine, however, that the composition of the ranks of the vagrants must have been diverse. The majority of the vagrants was certainly victims of circumstance, perenially unable to get a grip on their economic destinies. Much of the population lived on the brink of absolute poverty, and even slight, limited malfunctions in the delicate economic
system brought many families face to face with disaster. Another portion of the vagrant population was probably the ill. Those physically too ill to hold down a steady job, but not sick enough to be constantly bedridden or hospitalized were left to choose between begging or starving. When the inmates of St. Mary of Bethlehem's insane asylum were released on account of overcrowding and lack of funds, those unable to resume their former professions would have likely joined up with bands of the wandering poor. Similarly, persons whose mental retardation was not pronounced enough for them to have been categorized as mad would have been left to their own devices if they had no family to care for them. Former prisoners were also likely candidates to join the group of misfits; they were thought to be too untrustworthy to employ, and when they became vagrants they continued to commit crimes, making it virtually impossible for vagrants as a whole to be thought of as victims of a cruel economic cycle.

Last and probably least numerous among vagabonds were those who actually wanted to avoid work and rely on charity and theft. No period in history is without persons void of ambition or self-pride, but there is positively no reason to believe that such people were unusually numerous or active in England in the first half of the sixteenth century. Anti-vagrancy laws were so stringent, enforcement of them so merciless, and poor-relief systems so
unevenly organized and inadequate that anyone in their senses should have realized that whatever pleasures or feelings of independence might be derived from petty thefts or begging were hardly worth the consequences. And with all the abuse the vagrant was subjected to, he was never derided as being stupid when it came to his own interests.

The vagrant was a ready target for the venom of social critics looking for a singular cause of the attendant social problems of economic and social changes. Writers such as Robert Greene and Thomas Dekker suggested that vagrants were constructing a 'sub-culture' of their own. They pointed to the idioms that vagrants supposedly had developed and used extensively as evidence of this. These commentators appeared to corroborate William Fleetwood's claim that vagrants were successful in averting wholesale punitive measures largely because they formed a cohesive, self-contained group, whose actions and plans were well-organized. Professor Tawney's phrase that the "sixteenth century lived in terror of the tramp" rings true less because of any actual damages vagrants and vagrancy worked on society than because it echoes the suspicion of conspiracies which was so rife in Tudor England, and which was indiscriminately activated by any unemployed, young, and healthy male. Most Englishmen assumed, wrongly, that every vagrant was a part of a larger
conspiracy to undo the prosperity of every honest subject.204

Regrettably, almost every act that addressed the problem of vagrancy set itself up as a panacea. In reality, no act or policy between 1485 and 1553 even brought about a temporary abatement of the situation. Tudor governments whipped, starved, mutilated, humiliated, dispersed, imprisoned, enslaved, tortured, and even executed vagabonds, but their ranks continued to swell. The increase in their numbers, for which no authoritative figures exist, was probably at least proportionate with the twelve-fold increase (from 1,000 in 1517 to 12,000 in 1594) in London's 'worthy' poor.205 In 1569 the number of "rogues and masterless men" in the country was put tentatively at 13,000 by Sir James Croft. This estimate was probably not too far off the mark, because other mid-century educated guesses concerning the total number of vagrants were seldom less than 10,000 and rarely more than 15,000.206

In ignoring or over-simplifying the massive and tangled roots of the problem of vagrancy, early Tudor governments only exacerbated the hatred society already felt against those whom it reckoned parasites. All the while, the frustration and sense of despondency of the vagabond hardened amidst the unshakeable hold that shame, poverty, and rootlessness had on him. Certainly the scope
of the dilemma of vagrancy was too broad to be comprehended fully by Tudor idealists, policy-shapers, or ordinary citizens, but the mean-spirited, intransigent, and overwhelmingly unsympathetic perception of the vagabond's plight doomed the oft-stated goal of a Christian, humanistic commonwealth to remain a commendable yet forever elusive quest.
Notes for Chapter II


2 "Cain said unto his brother Abel, 'Let us go out in the field.' When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord asked Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He answered, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' The Lord then said: 'What have you done! Listen: your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil! Therefore you shall be banned from the soil that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth.' Cain said to the Lord: 'My punishment is too great to bear. Since you have now banished me from the soil, and I must avoid your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, anyone may kill me at sight.'" *Gen. 4:8-14.*


4 Ibid., p. 89.

5 Ibid., p. 94.

6 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VIII, 66: (Sept. 1549).


13 Ribton-Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy, pp. 92-93.


15 Ibid., p. 239.

16 Ibid., p. 235.


18 Einstein, Tudor Ideals, p. 237.


20 Ibid., pp. 153-54.


23 Hexter, More’s Utopia, p. 81.

24 More, Utopia, p. 12.


26 Ibid., p. 15.

27 Ibid., p. 14n.

28 Ibid., p. 15.

29 Ibid., pp. 18-20.

30 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

31 Ibid., pp. 20-21.

32 Ibid., p. 88.


34 Marius, Thomas More, p. 164.


36 Ribton-Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy, p. 85.

37 Einstein, Tudor Ideals, p. 236.


40 Foxe, Acts and Monuments, "The Story of Simon Fish."


42 Ibid., p. 87.

43 Ibid., pp. 90-91.

44 Ibid., p. 91.


46 Ibid., pp. 95-96.

47 Ibid., p. 96.


49 Ribton-Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy, p. 88.

50 White, Social Criticism, pp. 256-57.

51 Ibid., p. 256.

52 Ibid., pp. 256-57.

53 Ibid., p. 257.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., p. 257.

56 Ibid., p. 252.


58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.


61 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VIII, 4: July 7, 1549.


64 Ibid., p. 175.


66 Ibid., p. 65.


69 Ibid., p. 122.

70 Ibid., pp. 260-63.

71 Ibid., pp. 117-20.


73 Ibid.


77 Ibid., p. 124.

78 Tawney and Power, eds., TED, II, p. 312 (1552).

79 White, Social Criticism, p. 82.


82 Ibid., p. 65.

83 Ibid., p. 16.

84 Ibid., pp. 193-94.


86 Ibid., p. 184.


88 Ibid., pp. 58-59.

89 Ibid., p. 64.

90 More, Utopia, p. 27.


92 Latimer, Sermons, "Last Sermon before Edward VI," p. 213.

93 Latimer, Sermons, "First Sermon before Edward VI," p. 80.

94 Ibid., p. 38.


97 Ibid., p. 222.

98 Latimer, Sermons, "First Sermon before Edward VI," p. 86.

99 Ibid., p. 91.


101 Latimer, Sermons, "Third Sermon before Edward VI," p. 121.

102 Latimer, Sermons, "First Sermon before Edward VI," p. 86.


104 Latimer, Sermons, "Last Sermon before Edward VI," p. 213.

105 Ibid., p. 211.

106 Smith, Tudor Prelates, p. 277.

107 Hooper, Writings, "Third Sermon upon Jonas," p. 466.


109 Chester, Hugh Latimer, pp. 190-91.


112 Ibid., pp. 200-01.

113 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 356: "Ordering Vagabonds to Leave London," (Greenwich, 7 May 1550, 4 Edward VI).

114 Einstein, Tudor Ideals, p. 238.


117 Ridley, Works, p. xiii (n).

118 Ibid.

119 Ridley, Nicholas Ridley, p. 289.

120 Ridley, Works, p. xiii (n).

121 Ridley, Nicholas Ridley, pp. 285-86.

122 Ridley, Works, p. xiii (n).

123 Einstein, Tudor Ideals, p. 238.


125 Ridley, Nicholas Ridley, p. 287.


127 Ibid., II, pp. 306-11.
128 Ridley, Works, p. 535.

129 Ibid., p. 536.

130 Hughes and Larkin, TRP, 356.

131 Ridley, Nicholas Ridley, p. 289.

132 Ribton-Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy, p. 89.

133 Ibid., p. 98.

134 Ibid., p. 84.

135 White, Social Criticism, pp. 3-7.

136 Ibid., p. 29.

137 King, Reformation Literature, pp. 219-20.

138 Ibid., p. 221.

139 Ibid., p. 353.

140 Ibid., p. 356.

141 Ibid., pp. 323-25.


143 White, Social Criticism, p. 30.

144 Smith, Tudor Prelates, p. 277.


146 White, Social Criticism, p. 118.
Ibid., p. 145.

Smith, Tudor Prelates, pp. 275; 278.

Ibid., p. 145.

PRO, CSP Sp., IX, June 10, 1547, p. 99.


See Bush, Government Policy of Somerset, and Hoak, "Rehabilitating Northumberland."

Russell, Crisis of Parliaments, p. 19.

Elton, Reform and Reformation, p. 345.
162 PRO, SP Dom., 10/IV, 10: May 1548.

163 Hughes and Larkin, TRP.

164 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VII, 18: May 22, 1549.


166 PRO, CSP Sp., IX, p. 383.

167 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VII, 42: June 26, 1549.

168 PRO, CSP Sp., IX, July 3, 1549, pp. 396-98.


170 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VII, 44: June 29, 1549.

171 Elton, Reform and Reformation, p. 349.

172 PRO, SP Dom., 10/VIII, 4: July 7, 1549.

173 Ibid., 10/VIII, 8: July 8(?), 1549.


176 PRO, CSP Sp., IX, July 19, 1549, p. 405.


178 Elton, Reform and Reformation, p. 335.

179 Ribton-Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy, pp. 92-93.

PRO, SP Dom., 10/VIII, 66: (Sept. 1549).

Edward VI, CPP, p. 204.


PRO, SP Dom., 10/IX, 55: November 20, 1549.

Russell, *Crisis of Parliaments*, p. 11.

PRO, SP Dom., 10/IX, 55: November 20, 1549.

PRO, CSP Sp., X, June 6, 1550, p. 97.

PRO, SP Dom., 10/ XIII, 13: April 17, 1551.

Hoak, "Rehabilitation of Northumberland," p. 50.


Williams, *Tudor Regime*, p. 199.

PRO, SR, 283 Philip and Mary, c.5.


Ibid., p. 200.


King, *Reformation Literature*, p. 166.


204 Ibid., pp. 216-17.


# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPP</td>
<td>The Chronicle and Political Papers of Edward VI, Wilbur Kitchner Jordan, ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPFD</td>
<td>The Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-1547, Brewer, Gairdner, and Browdie, eds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Public Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP Dom.</td>
<td>The Complete State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, and James I: series one, 1547-1625, SP 10 (Edward VI: 1547-1553.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>The Statutes of the Realm: 1215-1714.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>Tudor Economic Documents: Being Select Documents Illustrating the Economic and Social History of Tudor England, R. H. Tawney and Eileen Power, eds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRP</td>
<td>Tudor Royal Proclamations, Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


---------. The Later Writings of Bishop Hooper. Edited by Charles Nevinson. Cambridge: The Parker Society, 1852.


Secondary Sources


Articles


Christopher Thomas Daly


In July 1984 the author entered the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, to begin reading for an M.A. in History. Completed the Apprenticeship Program in the Editing of Historical Books and Magazines, which is co-sponsored by the Department of History and the Institute of Early American History and Culture.