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ENGLISH RURAL LIFE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

HISTORY sometimes has scattered poppy without merit. We know little of many who were once great in the earth, and still less of the life of the people in their times. The life of the past must be visualized by piecing together detached and scattered fragments from many sources. The result is a composite picture, not a portrait. It is only now and then that the student of history is able to penetrate behind the veil of obscurity and get glimpses of intimate personal life and learn to know the men and women of the past with some degree of acquaintance.

A rare opportunity to know English provincial life in the fifteenth century is afforded in that wonderful collection known as "The Paston Letters." This familiar correspondence of a Norfolk family, whose position was that of small gentry, covers three generations in some of the most stirring years of English history. It was the age when England's empire in France was wrested from her by Joan of Arc; the age when the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster were dyed a common color on the battlefields of Barnet, Towton, Wakefield Heath, and Bosworth Field. It was the century of Warwick the kingmaker, and Henry Tudor; of Sir Thomas More's birth and of Caxton's "Game of Chess."

The intense human interest of these letters has commanded the admiration of readers ever since John Fenn edited

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them, or those then known, in 1787. More than a hundred additional letters have since been discovered and the story of the errant ways of the flying leaves of this famous correspondence is a little *Odyssey* in itself. In a letter to his friend Vigfússon, in 1883, the late Professor York Powell of Oxford wrote:

"I have just read through the Paston letters. They are interesting like a novel. Old Madam Paston, the managing mother; the scape-grace eldest son; the practical younger son, who after many trials at last gets a rich wife (good honest girl, who is full of fun and writes him the most amusing letters) and ultimately comes into the property. A grasping uncle, who is always trying to cheat the two young fellows, who outwit him in the end. The father and grandmother, too, great characters in their day, shrewd, wordly, but honestly sticking to their work, and above all determined to die richer than they were born.

"Then the Oxford student, as shrewd as the others but dying young; the lad at Eton; the servant-bailiff who falls in love with the sister of his masters, and with great courage (on the girl's part) is enabled to marry her. The funny old friar, who is a sworn friend of the Paston father, and writes scandal in Latin and English mixed. Then the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk, who try by main force to oust the Pastons from the estates they got by Sir John Fastolf's will; and thus arises a crop of lawsuits, processes, distresses, armed occupation and resistance, court solicitation, backstair jobbing, appeals to bishops, chamberlains, queens, kings, and lawyers, which last for generations, but end in the Pastons getting all they claimed. 'It's dogged does it' (as the old fellow said in the story), and there is no better example. The whole story as set forth in those old bundles of letters is quite a good novel, and strikingly like bits of the best of

Thackeray; the women especially. You must read them some day, all at once, quickly, so one does not lose the thread and keeps the characters before one."

The Pastons came of peasant, and, it may have been, of servile, stock. Be this as it may, in the reign of Richard II (1377-99) and Henry IV (1399-1413) history records that:

"First, There was one Clement Paston dwelling in Paston, and he was a good plain husband (i. e., husbandman), and lived upon his land that he had in Paston, and kept thereon a plough all times in the year, and sometimes in barlysell two ploughs. The said Clement yede (i. e., went) at one plough both winter and summer, and he rode to mill on the bare horseback with his corn under him, and brought home meal again under him, and also drove his cart with divers corns to Wynterton to sell, as a good husband (man) ought to do. Also, he had in Paston a five score or a six score acres of land at the most, and much thereof bond land to Gemyngham Hall, with a little poor water-mill running by a little river there, as it appeareth there of old time. Other livelode nor manors had he none there, nor in none other place. . . . Also, the said Clement had a son William, which that he set to school, and often he borrowed money to find him to school; and after that he yede (went) to court with the help of Geoffrey Somerton, his uncle, and learned the law, and there begat he much good; and then he was made a serjeant, and afterwards made a justice, and a right cunning man in the law."

Education in the law was a necessary accomplishment in those days for one who possessed land. Moreover, it was regarded as a stepping-stone to higher things. As Sir John Fortescue, who was Chief Justiciar of the King's Bench in this century, wrote:

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"Knights, barons, and the greatest nobility of the kingdom often placed their children in those Inns of Court; not so much to make the law their study, much less to live by the profession, having large patrimonies of their own, but to form their manners and to preserve them from the contagion of vice."

William Paston acquired local distinction in Norfolk, was a landed proprietor of some degree, became a judge of common pleas in 1429, was trustee for numerous properties in the neighborhood, and married Agnes, daughter of Sir Edmund Barry, of Harlingbury Hall in Hertfordshire. The correspondence opens in 1440 with a letter of Dame Agnes to her "worshepfful housbond"—note the original meaning of the word husband, i. e. houseboundman—in regard to the marriage of their son John to a young woman named Margaret Mauteby. She must have been a likely lass and well pleasing to the old folks, for Agnes Paston writes:

"Blessed be God, I send you good tidings of the coming and the bringing home of the gentlewoman . . . and as for the first acquaintance between John Paston and the said gentlewoman, she made him gentle cheer in gentle wise . . . and so I hope there shall need no great treat betwixt them . . . If you would buy her a gown, her mother would give thereto a goodly fur. The gown needeth for to be had, and of color it would be a goodly blue or else a bright sanguine."

The fifteenth century was not an age of sentiment. Marriages were not so much from the heart as from the head. Property interests and family name were prevailing factors in them and they were generally negotiated by the parents of the pair. But John and Margaret Paston were happy together. When he was away from home their first year of married life, she writes him "with all mine simple heart."

A son was born in 1442 and in the same year John went up to London where he fell sick, to Margaret's great anxiety. She writes: "By my troth, my muder and I were not in heart from the time we woste of your sickness till we woste verily of your amending. . . . I would ye wern at home—I pray that if your sore be whole so that ye may endure the ride that ye wole come home for I hope ye shall be kept as tenderly here as ye ben at London. . . . I may not leisure have to do writing half a quarter so much as I should say to you if I might speak with you. . . . Remember my girdle and that ye will write to me at the time, for I suppose the writing was not easy to you. . . . I pray you also that ye be well dieted of meat and drink for that is the greatest help that ye may have now to your health-ward. Your son faireth well."

Perhaps it was a comfort to John Paston to know that at the same time Sir John Fortescue also "had a sciatica that letted him a great while to ride," and he dared not ride horseback but "purveyed" to travel by water.

John Paston was much of the time away from home on business and his faithful wife duly informs him of the local news. The Vicar of Paston and his father in Lent, 1445, "sette doolis" i. e. dolestones or landmarks, a word still in use in Norfolk, to show "how broad the highway should ben." "Keteryn Walsan shall be wedded on the Monday next after Trinity to the gallant grete Chene. I am aferd that John of Squarham is so shuttle-witted that he will set his goods to mortgage. Hodge Feke told me that Sym Schepherd is still with Wylly."

England was in parlous times under the last Lancaster. Abroad was alternat war and truce with France. The French, Picards and Flemings ravaged the English coast. At home the greater baronage, lay and clerical, oppressed

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the smaller proprietors and struggled in and out of the law courts to enlarge their lands. In 1448 John Paston fell foul of Robert Hungerford, Lord Moleyns, over the title to Gresham Manor. In May of that year the parson of Oxened, a benefice of Gresham Manor "being at mass even at Levation of the Sakeryng" was mobbed by some of Moleyns' hirelings and driven into Paston's house for refuge. John Paston's wife and mother, with the noise of this, came out of the "sakeryng" and were outrageously insulted by the leader of the gang. Life and property had ceased to be safe. In the same month, near Coventry, Sir Robert Harcourt with hired assassins murdered Sir Humphrey Stafford and his son in the most brutal manner. No wonder Margaret begged for better protection at home. She writes:

"Right worshipful husband, I recommend me to you and pray you to get some crossbows and wyndacs (grappling irons with which to draw the bowstring home) to bind them with, and quarrels—(iron slugs shot out of crossbows), for your house here ben so low that there may no man be shut out with no long bow though we had ever so much need. I suppose you should have such things of Sir John Fastolf if you would send to him; and also I would you would get two or three short pole-axes."

But the precaution was unavailing. Gresham Manor was attacked and forcibly entered by Lord Moleyns, as we learn later in a petition to the King and Parliament.

In 1450 things came to a double climax in England. The Duke of Suffolk, once popular, fell into disfavor owing to English reverses in France where Charles VII overran the greater part of Normandy and all Anjou. He was impeached and banished. So high did hatred of him run with the populace of London that he barely escaped to the coast.

Even then he was pursued, overtaken in the channel off Dover, and—but let William Lomner, Margaret Paston's secretary, tell the tragic story.

"In the sight of all his men, he was drawn out of the great ship into the boat; and there was an ax and a stoke. And one of the lewdest of the ship bade him lay down his head, and he should be 'fair ferd wyth,' and die on a sword; and took a rusty sword and smote off his head within half a dozen strokes and took away his gown of russet and his doublet of velvet 'mayled' and laid his body on the sands of Dover and some say his head was set on a pole by it."

Poor Suffolk! He was no man to hold the helm of England in such whirlpool times, but he was a true gentleman. The farewell letter he wrote his son, a child of eight, is one of the imperishable memorials of English manhood.

Sad was "the rule and governance of England" as the Earl of Oxford complained to the Duke of Norfolk in these times. In the same year, 1450, Jack Cade's rebellion took place. Into the history of that insurrection there is no need to go. Unlike the revolt of 1381 it was not wholly, or even in chief, a peasant rising. Many small gentry and even local constabulary took part in it, among them John Paston's future brother-in-law, Robert Poynings. In Norfolk Sir John Fastolf's property narrowly escaped destruction by the rioters, as we learn from the letter of a faithful steward, John Pain, to John Paston, which is as vivid as any page of Stevenson's *Black Arrow*. Many there were who fished in the troubled waters. The powerful Richard, Duke of York, Lord Lieutenant in Ireland, came over sea with an army, demanded the dismissal of Somerset, the King's new minister, now almost as unpopular as the unfortunate Suffolk, owing to the utter loss of all English territory in France except Calais, threw the Speaker of the House of Commons

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into prison with Somerset and forced the frightened peers to appoint him protector of the realm for poor Henry VI whose wits had now left him. The change was a fortunate one for John Paston who was no friend to Lord Moleyns and his Lancastrian crew, and Paston recovered the manor of Gresham.

Among John Paston's intimate friends was Sir John Fastolf. In these pages Sir John Falstaff—or Fastolf, as the name is properly spelled—appears in veritable reality, not as a type of the pseudo-chivalry of the fifteenth century. Judge Paston was executor of Fastolf's will, and the latter left his fairest possession, Caister Castle, to him, with the understanding that the property be ultimately devoted to the founding of a college wherein were to be maintained "seven priests and seven poor folk." The spirit of the will was faithfully kept by his executor, who, finding it impracticable to found an independent institution in Norfolk, devoted Caister to the support of Magdalen College. If Shakespeare perverted Falstaff in order to point the moral of decadent feudalism, yet in one particular he was not altogether unfaithful to his character. For Fastolf was fond of interlarding his conversation with legal terms. His numerous letters to Judge Paston regarding the execution of his will attest his familiarity with the intricacies of the law touching property.

Instead of the jovial tipster of the Blue Boar Inn, as Shakespeare represents him, Fastolf had been a brave soldier abroad; at home he was an overbearing, avaricious landlord, irritable and testy to the last degree. There are interesting glimpses of him in these letters. Once, having heard that he had been "very vilely spoken of" he writes for information concerning those "who dare to be so hardy to kick. . . . They shall be quit as far as law and reason will. And if they will not dread or obey that, than they shall be quit by Black-

beard or Whitebeard, that is to say by God or the devil." He complains of "that old shrew Dallyng, for he is at my stomach." Again he writes to John Paston:

"Please you to-wit that I am advertised that at a dinner in Norwich there were certain persons, gentlemen, which uttered scornful language of me What their meaning was I know well to no good intent to meet with; wherefore, cousin, I pray you as my trust is in you, that you give me knowledge by writing what gentlemen they be that have this report, with more and what more gentlemen were present and with God's grace I shall so purvey for them as they shall not all be well pleased."

But there is a light side to this Norfolk life in the fifteenth century. Margaret Paston was a watchful overseer of her husband's property in his absence and a good, old-fashioned housekeeper. In Lent, 1451, when much fish was consumed in place of meat, she writes him: "As for herring I have bought a horseload for four shillings sixpence. I can get none eel yet; as for bever, i. e. drinkables, there is promised me some that I might not get it yet." On St. Peter's Day she was away to dinner at her cousin's. "There my lady Felbrygg and other 'jantyl' women desired to have had you there. They said they all should have been merrier if ye had been there I pray you heartily that ye woll send me a pot with treacle in haste; for I have been right evil at ease and your daughter both 'syth that ye yeden hens,' and one of the tallest young men of this parish lieth sick and hath a 'grete myrr.'"

She is careful to buy "hey chepe," and as reward for her economy asks her husband to bring home a "sugor loff" and a "gyrdle" for her daughter. Also two dozen trenchers, for she can get none in town and a "booke," i. e. "boke"—ten lbs.—wyth chardeqweyns (spiced quinces) that I may have

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of in the monynggs" (mornings). The absent husband is sent a minute account of building operations going on upon his land. The good wife was not sure the arrangement of the house would suit him but she evidently did her best.

"I have taken measure," she writes, "in the draute chamer (draught chamber), there as ye would your coffers and counter desks should be set for the while; and there is no space beside the bed though the bed were removed to the door for to set both your board and your coffers there and to have to space to go and to sit beside." The letter is filled with petty household details and the end is characteristic. "I pray you that ye be not strange of writing of letters to me betwixt this and that ye come home."

Womanlike, she often reminds him of a woman's fondness for dress. "I pray you," she writes in 1453, "that ye will do your cost on me against Whitsuntide that I may have something for my neck. When the Queen was here I borrowed my cousin's Elizabeth Clere's, for I durst not for shame go with my beads among so many fresh gentlewomen as here were at that time."

The claims of property are continually thrust upon the reader of these letters. Betrothal or marriage where the question of dowry was not considered, even between those outside the aristocracy, was deemed scandalous, and the finer sensibilities of both men and women were singularly blunt.

In those days even a well-to-do maiden was a Cinderella without a fairy godmother and a younger son often regarded as an ugly duckling; for, as the law of primogeniture prevailed, the younger sons and daughters of even a rich inheritance were at the mercy of the elder brother. This was the lot of Elizabeth Paston and young Stephen Scrope, Fastolf's step-son. Wardship was a matter of bargain and

sale in those times. Fastolf sold his wardship of Scrope to Chief Justice Gascoigne for five hundred marks, who intended to marry him to one of his own daughters. "He bought me and sold me as a beast," Scrope bitterly wrote of his guardian. Yet the experience seems not to have softened him. For when he was married—not to Gascoigne's daughter, however—he was "fain to sell a little daughter he had for so much less than he should have done by possibility."

Elizabeth Paston was less fortunate than a peasant girl, having nothing and from whom nothing was expected. Her mother took her to see Queen Margaret in the spring of 1453 when the latter was in Norfolk "and when she come into the Queen's presence, the Queen made right much of her and desired her to have an husband. But as to that, she was never any nearer than she was before." The girl's stern-hearted mother disciplined her in Spartan fashion for being a useless piece of household lumber after reaching marriageable age, so that it moved the heart of her cousin, Elizabeth Clere to write on her behalf to John Paston.

"She was never in so great sorrow as she is nowaways," she writes, "and she hath since Easter the most part been beaten the once in the week, or twice and sometimes twice in one day and her head broken in two or three places." It is a pathetic letter, written "by candle light" which indicates the urgency of the appeal for daylight was cheap and candles dear. Elizabeth's sister-in-law Margaret, at almost the same time, wrote her husband "it seemeth by my mother's language that she was never so feign to have to be delivered of her (Elizabeth) as she will now," and appealed to John Paston to hasten to find her a husband. In 1454 a suitor appeared in the person of Sir Willaim Oldhall, and Dame Agnes urged young John to "do your dever to bring it to a good conclusion." Fastolf's step-son Scrope, by this time a

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battered widower of fifty, also appeared, but it was regarded by the family as "an unlikely marriage" though Fastolf urged it. Nothing came of various overtures so that the old lady's temper grew sharper than ever and she spitefully told her daughter that "she must use herself to work readily as other gentlewomen done, and somewhat to help herself therewith." Finally Elizabeth found a husband in Robert Poynings, who had been one of Jack Cade's followers. That the marriage was approved by the Paston family shows the quality which was engaged in Cade's rebellion.

One is glad to know that the hardships the girl had suffered at her mother's hands were soon forgotten and forgiven, for she writes to her affectionately of her own happiness. "As for my master, my best beloved that ye call, and I must needs call him so now for I find none other cause, and as I trust to Jesus none shall; for he is full kind unto me and is as busy as he can to make sure of my jointure." But her happiness was short-lived. The War of the Roses had broken out. Poynings was killed in 1461 in the second battle of St. Albans after two years of wedded life, and his widow was dispossessed of her husband's lands by Eleanor, Countess of Northumberland who was Baroness Poynings in her own right. She afterwards married Sir George Brown of Getchworth Castle in Surrey.

The utter absence of any poetry or sentiment in English literature of the fifteenth century is easily understood in the light of such practice of the tenderest emotions of the heart as here portrayed. But sentiment was even harder than this. The ravishment of Jane Boys, a Norfolk lady, by a ruffian suitor who had purchased marriage possession of her, which is described in the Paston Letters, stirred the countryside. Nor was this case unique. Still more celebrated was the

ravishing of Joan Beaumont which so aroused public interest that the case came up in Parliament, in the rolls of which the amazing account of the manners of our forefathers may be read at length.

There is no romance in life like this. It is hard, brutal reality. Yet hard and commercial as the age was, the English heart was not wholly dead to the finest sentiment of mankind. The love story of Richard Calle, the servant bailiff of the Pastons, who fell in love with Margery Paston and whom the girl had the courage to marry in the face of family opposition and loss of social station is a real romance. Calle was an honest servant who fell in love with old John Paston's youngest daughter, Margery. We first learn of the family's suspicion of the matter in a letter of her mother's to Margery's oldest brother, Sir John Paston, in 1469, in which she begs him "to purvey for your sister . . . I shall tell you more when I speak with you." The girl favored Calle in spite of the wrath of the family whose pride was cut to the quick, as we perceive from a letter of her younger brother to his elder brother and head of the family after his father's death. He writes:

"I can see that ye have heard of R. C.'s labor which he maketh by our ungracious sister's account, but whereas they write that they have my good will therein, they falsely lie of it, for they never spoke to me of that matter nor none other body in their name . . . I answered Calle that he should never have my good will for to make my sister to sell candle and mustard in Framlynghan."

Poor Calle was downhearted at the rebuff he might have expected and there is simple pathos in the letter he wrote Margery begging her "as soon as ye have redde it lete it be brent." Fortunate are we to have had spared unto us this gleam of true romance out of a hard age.

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Margery's brothers urged securing a church decree to dissolve the engagement and the two were summoned before the Bishop of Norwich, but the girl stood her ground bravely, as did her lover, to the mother's furious indignation. In the issue Margaret Paston hardened her heart and drove her daughter forth. It sounds strange to see a mother so write as did this proud dame of Norfolk to her son:

"I pray you and require you that ye take it not 'pensyly,' for I wot not well it goeth right near your heart, and so doeth it to mine and to other; but remember you and so do I, that we have lost of her but a 'brethele' (brotheling!) and set it the less to heart, for and she had to be good where-soever she had to be, it should not abeen as it is, for and he were dead at this hour, she should never be at mine heart as she was."

This love story has carried the thread of the narrative a generation beyond. We must go back to the beginning of the War of the Roses. The first battle of St. Albans, in 1455, threw England into the throes of civil war. York's proclamation was a clarion blast. "The king, our sovereign lord, will not be reformed at our beseeching nor prayer nor will. . . . And therefore since it will be none otherwise but that we shall utterly die, better it is for us to die in the field than cowardly to be put to a great rebuke and a shameful death; moreover, considering in what peril England stands in at this hour, therefore every man help to help power for the right thereof, to redress the mischief which now reigneth, and to quit us like men."

The land was full of spies, many in the guise of wandering friars. Granges were moated and jack and mail and small arms distributed. The Pastons were drawn into the struggle. Old John Paston, the father, tried to be neutral, though inclined to York, and so hoped to live in peace. But

his eldest son John (he had two sons of the same name, the elder of whom was Sir John) as he grew up proved a headstrong, wayward lad, and broke away from home control and joined the king's party. The mother sought to pacify the irate father in a quaint, maternal letter to her husband. But to her favorite son, young John, as fine a gentleman as there was in England in those days, the mother wrote in sadder and truer strain:

"By my council dispose yourself as much as ye may to have less to do in the world. In little business lies much rest. This world is but a thoroughfare and full of woes; and when we depart therefrom right naught bear with us but our good deeds and ills. And there knoweth no man how soon God will 'clepe' him and therefor it is good for every creature to be ready. Whom God visiteth him he loveth."

In this depressed household the breezy letters of Friar Brackley, a staunch friend to old John who wrote gossipy scandal in mingled Latin and English, must have been welcome visitors. "By my feth, here is a coysy world," i. e. unsettled world, he writes on one occasion. The old fellow was a strong Yorkist. When Warwick was driven out and the Lancastrians were temporarily in power in 1450, he burst out: "Jesu mercy, Marie help, *cum sanctis omnibus*. Amen!" No wonder that in such uncertain times Margaret Paston should write to her husband, "Ye have many good prayers of the poor people that God should speed you at this Parliament, for they live in hope that ye should help to set away that they might live in better peace in this country than they have do before . . . and then shall the poor people more live better than they have do."

The sharp alternations in the struggle of the partisans between victory and defeat bewildered the country. After the first battle of St. Albans the king for a season recovered his

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wits and his lioness wife, Margaret, by intriguing with Scotland and France, gained a partial ascendancy over the Yorkists. But her attempt to arrest the Earl of Salisbury precipitated the war again in 1459. In July, 1460, Warwick crossed from Calais whither he had retired, won the battle of Northampton, took Henry VI prisoner and York was recognized as heir to the throne by Parliament. But the battle of Wakefield in December reversed everything again, and York was killed. The undaunted Warwick, backed by the Londoners and Parliament, carried York's son Edward to London and crowned him as Edward IV (1461-83). There was fierce fighting in the north country in the next three years, especially at Towton. At home Margaret Paston watched over her husband's interests and anxiously awaited his coming, "for my heart shall never be in ease till I have tidings from him." Prices were high, "And as for gathering of money, never a worse season. They that may pay best, they pay worst. They fare as though they hope to have a new world," wrote Margaret Paston. At renewal of hostilities in the autumn of 1461 John Paston was imprisoned in the Fleet in October. He and his wife took it philosophically. Inconveniences like that were part of the order of the day, and release came after Christmas with a general pardon issued by Edward IV.

For the next four years (1462-65) England was relatively in a state of peace. Yet the air was thick with rumors. Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville and his promotion of his wife's relatives made a breach between him and Warwick who had made him King; Clarence, the King's brother, sided with Warwick and married his daughter Isabella Neville. Edward, to strengthen himself, sought an alliance abroad and married his sister Margaret to Charles the Bold of Burgundy and Flanders. The peace was like that

of a beleaguered town beyond the reach of the shells. "Make as merry as you can," wrote young John to his elder brother in December, 1462, "for there is no 'joperte' (jeopardy) toward as yet. And there be any 'joperte' I shall soon send you word." Anxiety told on the brave wife at home who struggled to protect the property against legal and marauding attack. We find her faithful serving-man John Russe writing his master: "Sir, at the reverence of Jesus, labor the means to have peace. The continuance of this trouble shall shorten the days of my mistress for certain she is in great heaviness." Margaret's heaviness of heart appears in a letter of the same month. "I would fain do well if I could," she writes her husband, "and as I can I will do to your pleasure and profit; and in such things as I cannot skill of, I will take advice from such as I know that be your friends and do as well as I can. By your faint housewife at this time."

Troubles thickened. The Duke of Suffolk's men harried the Paston manors in Norfolk and threatened his servants; the sheriffs and judges of the county court were either intimidated or partisans.

The winter of 1465-66 was very severe and the "pestilence was fervent" in Norwich. Neither life nor property was safe. "Men cut large thongs here of other men's leather," Margaret quaintly wrote. In September, 1465, the wife, fearful of the plague in the country, for "they sweat sore at Cambridge," and full of lonely longing, one may believe, went down to London to be with her husband. She made him "great cheer," he admits, but his thrifty heart was not unmindful of the "great costs and charge and labor." John did not begrudge the expense though, for good Margaret, in advising him of her return home, gratefully writes: "Ye did more cost than my will was that ye should do but that

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it pleased you to do so." Her husband writes her funny rollicking verse in his absence to cheer her up, the concluding lines of which are:

No more to you at this tyme,
But God hym save that made this ryme.

John Paston's lightness of heart vanished, though, the next month, when the "dogbolts"—servile followers of the Duke—beat down the lodge and remnant of his place at Hellesden and "fetchd away feather beds and all the stuff, ransacked the Church and bare away all the goods that were left there, both of ours and of the tenants, and left not so much but that they stood upon the high altar and ransacked the images as well as lead, brass, pewter, iron doors, gates, and other stuff of the house . . . and that they might not carry, they have hewn it asunder." The blow was a heavy one to old John Paston and saddened his last days, for he died the next year.

The student of culture history will find much interesting data in the minute account of his funeral expenses.—3s. 4d. for "grownedying"; 4s. for "dyeng"; 38 priests at the "dyrge"; 39 "schyldern" in surplices; 2s. for the "ryngers ageyn the cors"; 20d. for "VIII peces of peuter lost of the priors"; 12s. for "fyssh"; 12s. 11d. for "a roundlet of red wine"; 16d. for the "barbor"; 4d. to "XII pore men beryng torches"; 20d. to the "glaser for takyng owte 11 panys of the windows of the schyrche for to late owte the reke of the torches"; 4 marks for wax candles "for to brenne upon the grave"; 8s. 4d. for a pardon from Rome to pray "for alle our friend's sowles."

The estate fell to the eldest son John who, if it had not been for the careful oversight of his mother and younger brother, also named John and known as the younger, would have wasted the inheritance. Each was a soldier and each

was raised to knighthood under Edward IV. The youngest son William was a boy who was later sent to Eton and to whom the eldest brother grudgingly gave a slender maintenance. We find him asking for "a hosedcloth, one for the holiday of some color, and another for the working days, how coarse soever it be maketh no matter; and a stomacher and two shirts and a pair of slippers." Once he asks if he may come "and sport with you in London." In the winter he asks for "fyggs" and "reysons." As for his coming down from Eton he lacks nothing but "wersy-fynge," (i. e. to complete his Latin exercises) which he trusts to have completed "with a little continuance," and encloses four lines of Latin verse "of mine own making."

The new Sir John was a vain, showy, spendthrift knight in the entourage of Edward IV whose waywardness was a source of grief to his parents. He had run away from home to join Henry VI without his father's consent. His mother stretched her conscience to shield him and the errant prodigal wrote in repentance, but his ways were never mended. His ambition in life was to make a rich marriage. One of his friends twitted him with being "the best chaser of gentlewomen that I know." For a time he cast his eyes at Lady Anne Boleyn, widow of Sir Geoffrey Boleyn. Failing her, he sought the hand of a Mistress Anne Haute, of English birth, but who had lived so long in Calais she had almost forgotten her mother tongue. Actual betrothal followed this acquaintance, though his cautious mother advised him to go slow. The cool-headed younger John was downright angry. "I pray you send me word," he writes "whether you shall be made a Chrysten man or you come home." Both parties to the contract soon grew tired of it and Sir John luckily secured his release without benefit of clergy by the lady's false declaration that they never were engaged. He went to

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Flanders in the escort of Edward IV's sister Margaret, where the brilliance of the Burgundian court—the richest in Europe at this time—fascinated him. The English princess was married to Charles the Bold at Damme, the port of Bruges, at five o'clock in the morning of July 3, 1468. The young ne'er-do-well wrote thence to his mother: "Many pageants were played to her welcoming, the best that I ever see. Of such gear and gold and pearl and stones they of the Duke's court, neither gentlemen nor gentlewomen, they want none. And as for the Duke's court, as of lords, ladies, gentlewomen, knights, squires and gentlemen, I heard never of none like to it, save King Arthur's court."

Meanwhile the property at home had become again endangered and his mother wrote him a sharp letter of reproof. "I have little help nor comfort of none of you yet," she wrote. "God give me grace to have it hereafter. I would ye should essay whether it be more profitable for you to serve me than for to serve such masters as ye have served afore this." This was in 1470. The country was again in war. Both brothers fought at Barnet in April where Warwick was killed. Tewkesbury in the next month broke the Lancastrian power forever and England settled into peace once more for twelve years until Richard III rose to vex her again. The eldest brother lived a life of idleness, of hunting, hawking, gambling, flirtation, and playing at soldiery for Edward IV who was soon involved with Louis XI of France in behalf of his new brother-in-law Charles the Bold, the French king's arch-enemy. This gratuitous waste of English blood abroad, after so much civil war at home, stirred the anger of Margaret Paston. "Some of them be but young soldiers and wot full little what it meaneth to be as a soldier nor for to endure to do as a soldier should."

From a renegade like this it is a relief to turn to the

younger John, a true gentleman, and read the prettiest romance of England of the fifteenth century of which we have record. The love letters of young John Paston and Margery Brews are a curious compound of sense and sentiment and wonderfully depict the manners of the time. Margery was as well born as her lover. It was love at first sight, for he wrote her a letter of passionate devotion before he had met her, bashfully giving it to a friend to deliver. Part of it reads:

"Mistress, though so be that I, unacquainted with you as yet, take upon me to be thus bold as to write unto you without your knowledge and leave, yet, Mistress, for such poor service as I now in my mind owe you, purposing, ye not displeased, during my life to continue the same, I beseech you to pardon my boldness, and not to disdain, but to accept this simple to recommend me to you in such wise as best I can or may imagine to your most pleasure. And, Mistress, I beseech you, in easing of the poor heart that one time was at my rule, which now is yours, that in as short time as can be, that I have knowledge of your intent and how ye will have me demeaned in this matter."

Then follows in this unique correspondence the gem of all, Margery's letter written on Valentine's Day, 1477.

"Right reverend and worshipful, and my right well-beloved Valentine, I recommend me unto you, full heartily desiring to hear of your welfare, which I beseech Almighty God long for to preserve unto His pleasure and your heart's desire. And if it please you to hear of my welfare, I am not in good heal of body nor of heart, nor shall I be till I hear from you.

For there wots no creature what fain that I endure,
And for to be did, I dare it not discure (discover).

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If that ye had not half the livlihood that ye have, for to do the greatest labour that any women alive might, I would not forsake you. No more to you at this time, but the Holy Trinity have you in keeping. And I beseech you that this bill be not seen of none earthly creature save only yourself. And this letter was indite at Hopcroft with full heavy heart. By your own Margery Brews."

The girl's father, Sir Thomas Brews, held back with reference to the match for a while. There were several daughters and the question of property arrangement was somewhat intricate. His sweetheart writes Young John:

"Only to have a conclusion of the matter betwixt my father and you I could be most glad of any creature alive. If that ye could be content with that good (100 pounds sterling) and my poor person I would be the merriest maiden on ground, good true and loving Valentine."

At the same time Sir Thomas wrote to the elder John who, it must be remembered was the head of the family estate, in regard to the proposed property arrangement.

The eldest brother's attitude is typical of his selfish indifference: "I think not the matter happy nor well handled nor 'poletyky dalte with,' " he wrote young John, "when it can never be finished without an inconvenience. This matter is driven thus far forth without my counsel. I pray you make an end without my counsel." But to his mother he wrote in better strain:

"I would be as glad as any man and am better content now that he should have her than any other that ever he was heretofore about to have had, considered her person, her youth and the stock that she is come off, the love on both sides, and the tender favor that she is in with her father and mother."

It is singular that after so much negotiation we have no

information as to when this real love match in a hard age was happily crowned. When the veil is again lifted, John Paston and Margery Brews are married. On Dec. 18, 1477 she writes to her absent husband:

"I pray you that you will wear the ring with the image of Saint Margaret, that I sent you for a remembrance, till ye come home; ye have left me such a remembrance, that maketh me to think upon you both day and night when I would sleep."

A babe who was named Christopher was born in July, 1478. There were large families in those days and the children followed fast. "All your babies are in good health," we learn from a letter in 1482, the postscript to which reads:

"I pray you, if ye tarry longe at London, that it will plesse to sende for me, for I thynke longe sen I lay in your arms."

In conformity with the custom of the time, the two elder boys were placed at a tender age in "places of worship," that is, families of distinction, for their better education. Margery's letter to her husband is very informing. Puritan ideas this early were beginning to obtain. In the household of Lady Morley, where the boys were over Christmas in 1484, "there were no dicings nor harpings, nor luting, nor singing, nor none lewd disports, but playing at the tables and chess and cards." The postscript reads: "I am sorry that ye shall not be at home for Christmas. I shall think myself half a widow because ye shall not be at home."

Young John Paston prospered as he deserved. He was a large landowner and a large wool grower. For eighteen years he and his wife lived a happy married life. The friend who brought them together was never forgotten by them. This was James Hobart who rose to be King's attorney in 1486. One of the quaintest letters of the series is this, written when Sir John was away from home.

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"Mistress Margery, I recommend me to you. And I pray you in all haste possible to send me, by the next sure messenger that ye can get, a large 'playster' of your *flose un-gwentorum* for King's attorney, James Hobart, for all his disease is but an ache in his knee. He is the man that brought me and you together, and I had leaver than forty pound ye could with your 'playster' depart him and his pain. But when ye send me the 'playster,' ye must send me writing how it should be laid to and taken from his knee, and how long the 'playster' will last good, and whether he must lap any more clothes about the 'playster' to keep it warm or not."

Young John Paston was knighted by Edward IV and lived to receive distinguished honor from Henry VII. In 1500 he was appointed under the royal signet to be one of a company of gentlemen to receive Catherine of Aragon when she came into England "for the solemnization of matrimony," as the King's warrant runs, "with our dearest son, the Prince Arthur."

Our knowledge of the social life of the men and women of the Middle Ages is not great; but so much is known that it is not for us to cast imputation upon either our forefathers' knowledge or their culture or their attainments in the fifteenth century. In an age of blood and iron, they yet felt that the essence of civilization was not in material invention or mere political achievement, but in the sway of principles of mind and heart. We may admire the simplicity and honesty of the people as a whole. One John Gwyne, a servant, finds a purse on the highway near Cambridge, and sends it to his master at Trinity College to know "if any of his knowledge, or any other, have lost such a purse, and that the tokens thereof being told he shall have it again." An unknown man, evidently young, writes to his friend in London, who is of superior station, in a letter of straightforward

friendship and manly purpose: "A man shall never have love of God, nor love nor dread of good men for miskeeping of much good as though it were his own; but where it is truly dealt with and goodly disposed then followeth both great merit and worship."

The student of economic and social history, the purely political historian, the genealogist, and the antiquarian will all find a mine of profitable study in these pages, which so conclusively prove that history is not the study of dead peoples but the mirror of humanity.