

"valiant and sturdy beggars," who numbered among their ranks, evicted peasants, unfrocked monks, pilgrims and disbanded soldiers, and who got their living by begging or stealing. Crime and violence were so rife, that a contemporaneous writer tells us, "*that there was no country in the world, where there were so many thieves and robbers as there were in England.*"

To suppress this vagrancy, the Parliament adopted strong coercive measures. In 1547, it passed the **Vagrant Act**. By this statute it was enacted—(a) That any determinately idle and able-bodied vagrant might be adjudged by two magistrates to any one wanting him as a slave, branded with a letter V, and kept in slavery for two years; (b) If he still refused to work, he might be made a slave for life, or finally punished as a felon.

The Vagrant Act was a most oppressive measure. It does not seem to have as yet been understood by the legislature, that it was useless to make laws to punish men for not working, when there was no work to be done. Even Sir Thomas More, in his "Utopia" bitterly complains of its injustice. "If," says he, "*you do not remedy the evils which produce thieves, the rigorous execution of justice in punishing thieves is vain.*"

(3) **Ket's Rebellion in Norfolk, 1549.** This was a great agrarian movement. The sympathy, which Somerset had shown towards the people in the matter of the enclosures, encouraged them to take up arms against their oppressive landlords. Accordingly, a body of peasants numbering 16,000 men, under the leadership of one, **Robert Ket**, a tanner, who called himself "King of Norfolk and Suffolk," took up their position on Mousehold Hill outside Norwich. They demanded—(1) That evil counsellors should be removed; (2) That common lands should not be enclosed; and (3) That the grievances of the poor should be speedily redressed. Raids were made into the surrounding country, palings of the "enclosed lands" demolished, property seized and brought into the camp for the general use of the troops, and obnoxious landlords arraigned before a tribunal, where Ket and the Mayor of Norwich sat as judges. In an oak tree near the camp, called the "*Oak of Reformation*," a pulpit was erected, and sermons were preached by the