

"the right and duty of every free Englishman to be ready for the defence of the Commonwealth with arms befitting his own degree in the Commonwealth."

Finally, Stubbs, in his "Constitutional History," clearly states the case in the words:—

"The host was originally the people in arms, the whole free population, whether landowners or dependents, their sons, servants, and tenants. Military service was a personal obligation . . . the obligation of freedom"; and again: "Every man who was in the King's peace was liable to be summoned to the host at the King's call."

There is no ambiguity or uncertainty about these pronouncements. The old English "fyrd," or militia, was the nation in arms. The obligation to serve was a personal one. It had no relation to the possession of land; in fact it dated back to an age in which the folk was still migratory and without a fixed territory at all. It was incumbent upon all able-bodied males between the ages of sixteen and sixty. Failure to obey the summons was punished by a heavy fine known as "fyrdwite."

There is another point of prime significance. Universal service was, if it true, an obligation. But it was more: it was *the mark of freedom*. Not to be summoned marked a man as a slave, a serf, or an alien. The famous "Assize of Arms" ends with the words: "Et præcepit rex quod nullus reciperetur ad sacramentum armorum nisi liber homo." A summons was a right quite as much as a duty. The English were a brave and martial race, proud of their ancestral liberty. Not to be called to defend it when it was endangered, not to be allowed to carry arms to maintain the integrity of the fatherland, was a degradation which branded a man as unfree.

II. The Old English Militia.

This primitive national militia was not, it must be admitted, a very efficient force. It lacked coherence and training; it was deficient both in arms and in discipline; it could not be kept together for long campaigns. The Kings, therefore, from the first supplemented it by means of a band of personal followers,