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The plague had large scale social and economic effects... People abandoned their friends and family, fled cities, and shut themselves off from the world. Funeral rites became perfunctory [superficial] or stopped altogether, and work ceased being done. Some felt that the wrath of God was descending upon man, and so fought the plague with prayer. Some felt that they should obey the maxim [saying], "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die." The society experienced an upheaval to an extent usually only seen in controlled circumstances such as carnival [festival]. Faith in religion decreased after the plague, both because of the death of so many of the clergy and because of the failure of prayer to prevent sickness and death....

Taken from the New York State Education Department, June 2014, Global History Exam, Internet, Available [here](#), accessed July 13, 2017.

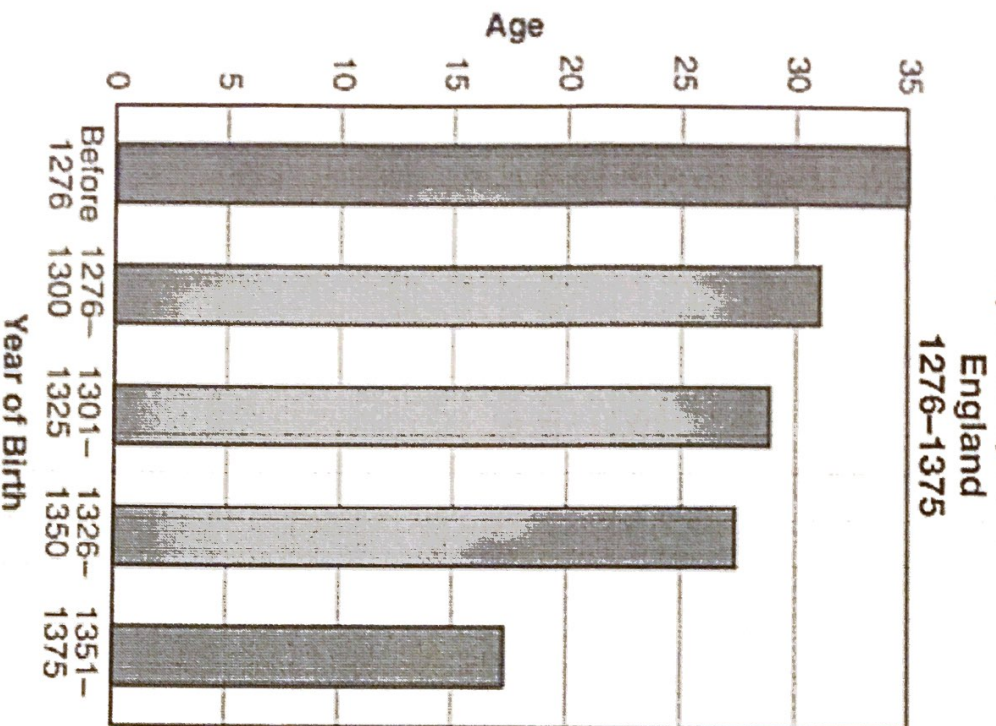
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Cities were hit hard by the plague. Financial business was disrupted as debtors died and their creditors found themselves without recourse. Not only had the debtor died, his whole family had died with him and many of his kinsmen. There was simply no one to collect from.

Construction projects stopped for a time or were abandoned altogether. Guilds [associations of professionals] lost their craftsmen and could not replace them. Mills and other special machinery might break and the one man in town who had the skill to repair it had died in the plague. We see towns advertising for specialists, offering high wages.

Source: History of Western Civilization E.L. Skip Knox. Boise State University.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20110625203607/http://www.boisestate.edu/courses/westciv/plague/16.shtml>

Life Expectancy in Medieval England



Taken from the New York State Education Department, January 2003. Global History Exam. Internet. Available [here](#); accessed July 13, 2017.

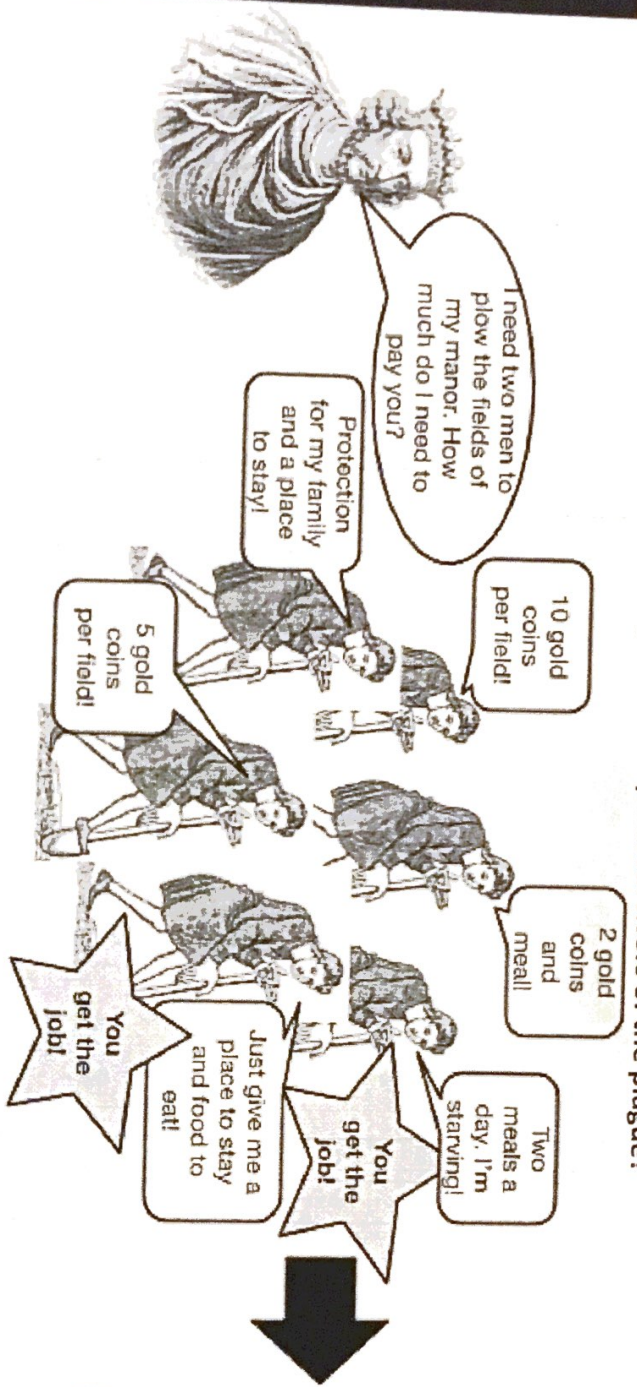
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The plague came to Europe in the fall of 1347. By 1350 it had largely passed out of western Europe. In the space of two years, one out of every three people was dead. Nothing like that has happened before or since. These general numbers disguise the uneven nature of the epidemic. Some areas suffered little, others suffered far more. Here are some examples.

Between 45% and 75% of Florence died in a single year. One-third died in the first six months. Its entire economic system collapsed for a time. In Venice, which kept excellent records, 60% died over the course of 18 months: five hundred to six hundred a day at the height. Certain professions suffered higher mortality, especially those whose duties brought them into contact with the sick--doctors and clergy. In Montpellier, only seven of 140 Dominican friars survived. In Perpignan, only one of nine physicians survived, and two of eighteen barber-surgeons. The death rate at Avignon was fifty percent and was even higher among the clergy. One-third of the cardinals died.

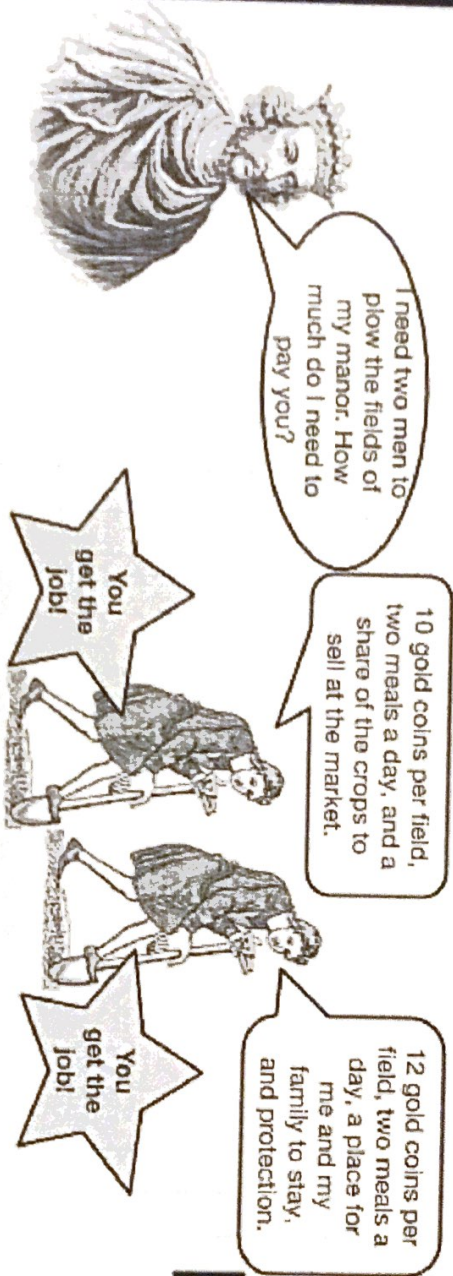
Long-term population loss is also instructive. Urban populations recovered quickly, in some cases within a couple of years, through immigration from the countryside because of increased opportunities in the cities. Rural population though, recovered itself slowly, for peasants left their farms for the cities.

BEFORE THE PLAGUE



Before the plague, high population led to a lot of competition for jobs, which meant that employers could pay workers less.

AFTER THE PLAGUE



After the plague, there were very few people left to work, so employers had to pay workers more so they would work for them. This situation is called a **labor shortage**. Many peasants became merchants and other higher-paid professions after the black death because they had more money to start businesses and those who once did those jobs died from the plague.

Modified image of King Henry is courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and is public domain.



Problems Caused by the Plague	Solutions for Feudal Lords
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the peasants who once farmed the land have died • Peasants want more money to work on the land because of the labor shortage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm less land • Grow crops like apples, olives, grapes, or vegetables (instead of wheat) or raise livestock like sheep or cows that require less labor • Pay peasants wages, instead of offering the protection and food • Lease (rent) land to peasants who can now afford it because of their higher wages

Long Term Effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peasants gained more purchasing power because of their higher wages. They became richer. • To make more money from their land, lords gave renters longer and longer leases and eventually sold acres of their manor to peasants. • Lords could no longer control the lives of peasants who owned their own land and who made money from the crops and livestock they raised on it. Over the next two hundred years, this process contributed to the end of feudalism

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