





## SECTION 3. THE AGE OF PROPERTY: ANGLO-NORMAN AND ANGEVIN ENGLAND

### A. MAP AND CHRONOLOGY

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|  | William I — 1066–1087   |
|  | sons of:  |
|  | William II (Rufus) — 1087–1100  |
| “Anglo-Norman” kings   | Henry I — 1100–1135   |
|  | Stephen (Henry I’s nephew) and Matilda (Henry I’s daughter) — 1135–1154 |
| (The latter part of Stephen’s reign is frequently referred to as “the anarchy.”) |   |
|  | Henry II (Henry I’s grandson) — 1154–1189                               |
| “Angevin” kings  | Henry II’s sons   |
|  | Richard I (the “Lion-hearted”) — 1189–1199                              |
|  | John — 1199–1216  |

From 1066–1087 and 1106–1205, the Kings of England were also dukes of Normandy (but only nominally during Stephen’s reign).

### B. ANGLO-NORMAN ENGLAND, 1035–1154

*in C. BROOKE, FROM ALFRED TO HENRY III, 871–1272*  
*The Norton Library History of England (New York, 1961) 82–93, 153–72*

#### 5. THE NORMAN CONQUEST

ACROSS the English Channel, at its narrowest point, lay another great Viking state, the duchy of Normandy. A Norman princess, Emma, had successively married both Ethelred and Cnut. A Norman duke, Robert I, amiably known to later tradition as Robert the Devil, had gone through a form of marriage with a sister of Cnut. Duke Robert was naturally interested in English politics, all the more because the young sons of Ethelred, Alfred and Edward, were exiles living in his duchy. Had Robert not died on his way back from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1035, it is highly probable that he would have staged an invasion of England on these young men’s behalf.

In 1035 Duke Robert died, and his illegitimate son, William, succeeded at the age of seven. His chances of survival seemed slender. His early years were spent in dealing with troubles at home: first with rebellious subjects and then with a dangerous overlord. His duchy was not free from internal and external dangers until 1060, and even then his attention was concentrated on the conquest of Maine until at least 1063. In that year he began to look seriously at his chances of the English throne. He had been in touch with England since his childhood friend, Edward the Aetheling, had become king in 1042; he may have visited it in 1051 or 1052, but before 1063 he was too closely engaged in the affairs of his own duchy to think much of foreign adventure. Nature and his fearful upbringing had made William a stern practical man, who ruled by force and not by dreams. But he was also provided with imagination—the imagination needed by a great constructive ruler.

England had been conquered by a Viking leader in 1016, and Cnut’s success, and his care to rule in the tradition of his English predecessors, might seem to have left his kingdom secure against another similar conquest. But there were potential weaknesses in Cnut’s England which might, if occasion offered, have given a foreign pretender a chance to succeed.

In the first place Cnut died young (1035), and left an uncertain succession. His throne was disputed between his two sons: Harold, his son by his concubine, Aelfgifu, and Harthacnut, his son by his queen,

Emma. Each was strongly supported by his mother. In addition, Ethelred's sons, Alfred and Edward, were awaiting their chance. In the event, Harold and Harthacnut succeeded in turn, and Alfred, attempting to intervene, was arrested and cruelly maltreated, and shortly afterwards died. Cnut's two sons each died very young after a short and violent reign, and the way was clear for Edward, later known as Edward the Confessor (1042–66).

Edward the Confessor stepped into an exceedingly difficult inheritance. He had spent most of his life in Normandy and elsewhere on the Continent, and was not personally known to the English leaders. This meant that he could not hope, in his early years at least, to outshine in personal prestige the great earls whom he had inherited from Cnut. In fact they were bound to dominate him until he had proved himself. Edward had some ability, but lacked perhaps the energy and ruthless determination of a successful king. He was not a great warrior, and he never succeeded in mastering the earls. This did not mean that his throne was insecure. He never consummated his marriage, and had no close heirs or rivals—his one nephew died well before him, and his great-nephew was never seriously considered for the throne. There were in fact only two possible alternatives to Edward seriously canvassed before the last years of his reign, the Duke of Normandy and the King of Norway. Duke William was Edward's own choice for his successor, and there was no question of William's trying to usurp Edward's throne. So far as we know, the King of Norway, Harold Hardrada, was not favoured by any of the earls before 1065. It may even be true that it was the threat of foreign invasion which kept them loyal to Edward.

But their loyalty did not make his government easy. In his early years the most powerful of the earls was Godwin of Wessex, the king-maker: the man who had secured the succession of Harold I to Cnut, and probably played a leading part in Edward's own succession. He and his family dominated the south of England and ruled the King; Godwin's daughter, Edith, was married to Edward. It is clear, nevertheless, that Edward was eager to throw off the tutelage. In itself it was doubtless irksome; and he knew Godwin to have been responsible for the death of his elder brother, Alfred. Edward waited, gathering round him a group of followers, both lay and clerical, from all over north-western Europe, especially from Lorraine, Brittany, and Normandy. The English court was cosmopolitan as never before. Half the clergy of the royal chapel were recruited from abroad, and it was recognised over a wide area as a place in which an ambitious man might seek wealth and promotion.

In 1051 a Norman, Robert of Jumièges, Bishop of London, was promoted to the see of Canterbury, and Edward received a visit from a leading Norman count, Eustace of Boulogne. These events did not rouse a feeling of national distrust, as some historians have thought; but they made clear to Godwin and his family that Edward was deliberately surrounding himself with influences more congenial than themselves. Trouble arose between Godwin and the King; Godwin raised an army and tried to force Edward's hand. But Edward was supported by the earls of Mercia and Northumbria in this crisis, and by skilful manoeuvring he forced the family of Godwin into exile—all save Queen Edith, who was sent into enforced retreat among the nuns of Wherwell. Within a few months Edward had promised Duke William the crown.

Before 1052 was over, Earl Godwin had managed to return and dictate his terms to the King. These included the restoration to the family of their earldoms and to the Queen of her place at court. The brief spell of personal government was over. Godwin himself died in 1053, but his earldom and his standing passed to his eldest surviving son, Harold. The King was no mere cypher in his last years, as he has sometimes been pictured. It is true that he appeared less prone to intrigue, and even less active than before; that his central interest was the re-founding and rebuilding of Westminster Abbey. He was also compelled in 1052 to dismiss some of his Frenchmen from court, including the Archbishop of Canterbury. But other events seem to show Edward still in control, and a part of Godwin's earldom went to Edward's Norman nephew, Ralph, who organised Herefordshire on the model of a Norman frontier province. Harold, however, was undoubtedly the first man in the kingdom, the 'under-king' as one writer calls him, the leader of the English army. Necessity or circumstances had led to something like a true reconciliation between Edward and his wife's family. It may even be that Edward had partly reconciled Harold to Duke William's succession. For some reason now past explaining Harold crossed the Channel in 1064, was captured by the Count of Ponthieu, and rescued by William. Then followed the mysterious arrangement so graphically portrayed in the Bayeux Tapestry. Duke William somehow found the opportunity to cajole or compel Harold into an oath, sworn on the relics of Bayeux Cathedral, to support William's claim to the throne.

The crisis of 1066 came swiftly and with only the slightest of warnings. Tostig, Harold's brother, had been Earl of Northumbria since old Siward's death in 1055. But the Northumbrians owed no natural allegiance to a son of Godwin, and they proved intractable subjects. In 1065 they rebelled and forced the King to appoint Morcar, brother of Edwin, Earl of Mercia, and grandson of Cnut's earl, Leofric, in Tostig's place. At the end of the year the King was known to be dying, and the vultures began to collect. Three men were known to have the ambition to be king: Harold Hardrada of Norway, William of Normandy, and Harold of Wessex. What happened in the King's court at Christmas we shall never know. But in the end he designated Harold of Wessex as his successor; and on the day after the King's death (6th January 1066) Harold was duly accepted by the magnates and crowned. We do not know what caused the King to change his mind. Either he or those about him must have reckoned that the confusion of the country, the uncertain state of Northumbria, and the threatened invasion of Harold Hardrada, demanded a king who could instantly command the allegiance of a great part of England.

Their calculations were very nearly justified. In his brief reign Harold revealed his skill, determination, and generalship to the full. He is first recorded at York in the early months of the year. Then in May he dealt with an attack by his brother, Tostig, on the south-east coast. This raid was presumed by Harold to be the precursor of an invasion from Normandy, and he mobilised all the military and naval resources at his disposal to meet an attack by William. But these forces could not be held in readiness indefinitely. Early in September the militia was disbanded, and the ships were moved towards London—many of them being lost on the way. Before the end of the month both Harold Hardrada (now in alliance with Tostig) and William of Normandy had landed in England.

The Norwegian came first, and somehow achieved surprise. Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar gathered an army against him, but were checked in a violent battle at Fulford. From now on Harold of England had to rely on his own resources. He was in the south, organising the dispersal of the militia, when the news was brought to him of the Norwegian landing. He marched north with great rapidity, and fell on the enemy before they could have expected him at Stamford Bridge, near York. Three hundred ships or more brought the Norwegian host to England; twenty-five sufficed to take away the survivors of Fulford and Stamford Bridge. Both Tostig and Harold of Norway were among the slain. Harold of England had won a great and decisive victory. The threat which had hung over the country for twenty years was removed, and rebellion from within his family had been scotched. Harold might well look forward to the fruit of so great a victory: to the prestige of a great warrior and the unquestioned obedience which had been the lot of Athelstan and Cnut after their victories. A few days later he learned of the landing of William of Normandy.

William's preparations had been very swiftly made. He needed ships and supplies, an army more considerable than could be levied in Normandy alone, and he needed moral and spiritual support. To many his scheme must have seemed a desperate adventure. With the resources of a single duchy William was planning to attack one of the richest and most powerful kingdoms in northern Europe, controlled by a soldier as experienced and competent as himself. The odds were heavily against him, and clearly some of his followers told him as much. His critics were, what we should call realists, but the destinies of Europe have rarely been decided by *Realpolitik*. William was allowed to go ahead with his plans, and set about gathering support from outside the duchy. The army which assembled on the Norman coast in the summer had been recruited from Normandy, Brittany, Maine (recently made a subject principality), and Flanders, the county of his father-in-law; with a sprinkling from all over northern France and even from the recently formed Norman states in southern Italy. It was the greatest adventure of the day, and William had given it a coat of respectability by winning papal support. He had claimed at Rome that England was rightly his, that Harold was a perjurer and usurper. The nominal leader of the English Church, Archbishop Stigand, had acquired his see irregularly on the removal of his predecessor in 1052 and held it in plurality with that of Winchester and in defiance of a papal sentence of deposition.<sup>1</sup> William had already won the reputation of being friendly to reform in the Church; he was in a position to tempt the papacy. The idea was gaining ground in papal circles that even apparently aggressive wars, if fought in a just and holy cause, could be blessed; the Pope,

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<sup>1</sup> There was precedent for holding two sees at the same time in the career of St. Oswald in the tenth century (and of more than one of his successors), who combined the bishopric of Worcester with the archbishopric of York. But the circumstances were entirely different. York in the tenth century was a very poor diocese, with a strong Danish element in its population, still in process of conversion to Christianity. Worcester gave Oswald a secure base in the Christian West Country and an income suited to his standing in the kingdom. Stigand had no such excuse: the see of Canterbury had an income sufficient for its needs, and Winchester was probably the richest in the land.

urged on by Hildebrand, the future Pope Gregory VII, gave William his blessing, and so made the campaign of Hastings something very like a Crusade. The Duke's material preparations—the felling of trees, the building of ships, and gathering of arms and other stores—are very vividly shown in the Bayeux Tapestry. For a number of weeks in August and September the army was held up on the Norman coast by contrary winds. At last, on 27th September, two days after the battle of Stamford Bridge, the wind changed, and William was able to slip across the Channel. He landed at Pevensey, but rapidly established his base at Hastings.

The battle of Hastings was fought on Saturday, 14th October, sixteen days after William's landing, nineteen days after the battle of Stamford Bridge. The campaign was extraordinarily rapid. After the briefest of pauses Harold hurried south. He left himself no time to collect a substantial army; but apparently marched into Sussex with his own and his brothers' housecarles, such thegns as had been able to answer his hasty summons and the local levies of the immediate neighbourhood. Nobody has ever explained his haste; had he waited, he could have collected a far larger army. He may have doubted the loyalty of the southern counties; he may have wished to protect his own estates, so many of which lay near Pevensey and Hastings. We do not know what intelligence he had; nor do we know how large a force William had landed. William was reinforced very soon after the battle; it may be that he had landed only a part of his army, and that Harold calculated on pushing it into the sea before reinforcements came. It is probable in any case that Harold underestimated the Norman strength, and that his great victory in the north had made him overconfident.

The decisive battle was fought between very small forces. Harold had camped his army for the night in a natural defensive position on the edge of the Weald, the great forest of Kent and Sussex and Surrey, nine miles from Hastings, where the town of Battle now lies. It was camped on a promontory of hill, with the forest behind it, and a front of only 500 or 600 yards. Beyond this front lay slopes of varying steepness, up which an advancing enemy must come. It was a strong position, but a very narrow one. Its size suggests that the English army was not much more than 3,000 strong; and it is unlikely that the effective Norman strength was very much greater. The battle of Hastings was an altogether slighter affair than Stamford Bridge.

Early in the morning of 14th October the Normans began the attack. It seems that they had achieved tactical surprise. Harold hastily organised his camp as a defensive position, placing his best troops, dismounted, shoulder to shoulder along the crest of the hill. Their shields formed a solid and impenetrable wall, and the axes of the housecarles were formidable weapons against the chain mail of the Norman knights.

The battle continued from early morning until dusk. The Norman attacks were beaten off as steadily as the French charges at Waterloo. At one moment the Normans retreated in some confusion, and were only rallied by Duke William's prompt intervention. This retreat proved the undoing of the English army. A number of the English broke ranks and pursued the Normans, who, when they had recovered, turned and cut them down. Later in the day, we are told, the Normans twice repeated the manoeuvre: they feigned retreat, and then turned on their pursuers. By such means the English 'shield wall' was gradually whittled away; and its morale was constantly impaired by showers of arrows from the Norman archers. As dusk was falling King Harold himself was killed. This was decisive. The English resisted some time longer; and even in their retreat did much damage to the Norman attackers. But in the end 'the French had possession of the place of slaughter'.

The death of Harold and his two brothers in the battle was a vital stroke of fortune for William. If Harold had still been at large after the battle, William would have had many difficulties to face. Even so, the English Witan did not immediately take William as seriously as he had hoped. The legitimate adults of the large house of Godwin were now virtually extinct, and the only native heir was Edward the Confessor's great-nephew, Edgar the Aetheling, whom no-one had seriously considered hitherto. The Archbishop of York the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria, and the citizens of London all declared for Edgar. At this stage they seem to have regarded William as little more than a lucky adventurer.

William meanwhile returned to Hastings, 'and waited there to see if there would be any surrender', and also to collect his reinforcements. He then began a long roundabout march on London, via Dover and Southwark, the middle Thames, and Berkhamstead. This gave him time to subdue the land between his coastal bases and the city, and to give England due notice of his methods. William was a pious man; but he

was also utterly ruthless. He knew from experience that a successful ruler had to be feared, and he reckoned that this was even more true of a successful usurper. He harried the country side as he went, and twenty years later in the signs of declining value and devastation recorded in the description of the manors in Domesday Book, the route of his march can still be traced. By the time William reached Berkhamstead most of the English leaders had decided to submit, and on Christmas Day he was anointed and crowned in Westminster Abbey. The ceremony was performed by the Archbishop of York. Stigand of Canterbury had submitted to William, and was left in possession of his see until 1070; but as his irregularities had been one of the grounds of papal support for William, the new King could hardly accept anointing from him.

William claimed to have stepped into his rightful inheritance, and at first he took some steps to maintain continuity of rule, as Cnut had done. The main points in the old system of local and central government were continued, but rapidly adapted and developed. For a time the native English earls and thegns mostly remained in possession of their properties. A sufficient number of them had fallen at Hastings to provide the King with land to reward the most outstanding or grasping of his followers. He and his lieutenants began at once to build castles at key places and in many of the larger towns; symbols to the Normans of normal military organisation, to the English of the beginnings of foreign domination.

William's hopes of succeeding as an English king accepted by the English leaders rapidly disappeared. From 1068 to 1070 he had to deal with almost continuous rebellion in Northumbria and sporadic outbreaks in Wessex and Mercia. The revolt in the north in 1069–70 was made all the more serious by Danish intervention. It was joined by Waltheof, old Siward's son, now the chief power in Northumbria, and royal suspicion drove Edwin and Morcar into the alliance. In the end Waltheof and most of his associates submitted, Edwin was killed by his own men, and Morcar became a fugitive. After 1070 resistance was reduced to guerrilla warfare under such leaders as the celebrated Hereward the Wake, who held out for a time in the Isle of Ely. William's subjection of Mercia and the north was sealed in the same fashion as his original conquest of the south-east, by devastation. His army harried extensive areas in the west Midlands, and he laid waste the vale of York so effectively that large areas of it had to be re-colonised in the twelfth century.

By 1070 England had been conquered and had learned to fear its conqueror. This did not mean that William was free from wars and rebellions. In France, his position in 1066 had been made secure by the minority of King Philip I, the alliance of Flanders, the submission of Brittany and Maine, and anarchy in Anjou. None of these circumstances was lasting, and in his later years war with Anjou, difficulties in Maine, and the rebellion of his eldest son, Robert, often supported by King Philip, kept him occupied in indecisive campaigns. In England the northern frontier was never entirely quiescent until Robert (in an interval between rebellions), led a punitive expedition in 1080 into Scotland, and strengthened the defences of Northumbria by building a fortress on the north bank of the Tyne at the place still called Newcastle. In England as a whole, the only serious rebellion after 1070 came in 1075. In that year Earl Waltheof allied with the Earl of East Anglia a Breton whose family had been settled in England by Edward the Confessor, and the Earl of Hereford, son of William's leading viceroy on the Welsh marches, William FitzOsbern; and the three earls expected support from the Danes, which came too late to help them. Their rebellion was swiftly suppressed. The Breton fled to Brittany; the Norman, according to Norman custom, was imprisoned and lost his lands; Earl Waltheof, according to English custom, was beheaded. With him the last of the native earls disappeared from the scene, and although the title of earl has survived from that day to this, the power of Cnut's earldoms was never revived outside the frontier marches of Wales and Scotland.

In 1085 the Conqueror prepared to face the last serious threat to his authority in England, a final attempt at invasion from Scandinavia. Internal troubles in Denmark prevented the attack from developing. But it may well have been this crisis which led William to the great stock-taking which formed the climax of his reign, and underlined the strength of his control over England and the magnitude of the changes he and his followers had made.

In this year the King spent Christmas at Gloucester, and there was had important deliberations and exhaustive discussions with his council about this land, how it was peopled, and with what sort of men.' Then he sent groups of commissioners to every part of England to collect details of each village from sworn inquests of local men—details which included not only who held what land, but much information about the value of each holding and its stock. These details were collected county by county and then digested in local centres; and the digests were sent to Winchester for the final version to be made. One of the digests,

that for East Anglia, apparently came too late to be included. And so the great survey—‘called by the natives “Domesday”’, as a twelfth-century writer tells us, because it was reckoned to be the final court of appeal in questions of tenure—has been preserved ever since in the national archives in two volumes. Volume I contains the final version of most English counties, volume II is the local digest of East Anglia, never finally revised. There are errors, inequalities, omissions, and incoherences in Domesday Book. But it remains the most impressive record of royal administration in the Europe of its day. It makes modern English historians of the period the envy of continental colleagues. It reminds us that in every sphere of government the elaborate foundations of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy were retained and expanded by the vivid energy of the Normans. Last and not least it is a monument to the imaginative vision and energy of the Conqueror. He may not have conceived the idea, or worked out all its details himself. But only he could have had the energy and confidence to organise so vast an inquiry so swiftly. It is likely that Domesday Book was completed in substantially its present form in little more than a year. While it was being compiled, William confirmed his authority in another way, by a great gathering of landowners at Salisbury, who did homage and renewed their fealty to him. At the end of the year 1086 he left England for his last war in Normandy; on 9th September 1087 he died.

William was more feared than loved in his lifetime, and his English subjects remembered his oppression, his castle building, his exactions, his avarice. They remembered, too, some more human qualities: his love of the chase—‘he loved the stags as dearly as though he had been their father’—and his love of justice, his piety, and rectitude. ‘Though stern beyond measure to those who opposed his will, he was kind to those good men who loved God’—and the chronicler goes on to describe William’s benefactions to monasteries, in particular his foundation of Battle Abbey on the site of his victory over Harold. The chronicler might have added that William was the only one of his line who was faithful to his wife. To his enemies he was utterly relentless; but the final impression is not one of unrelieved oppression. Successful kings in the eleventh century were rarely admirable in their public dealings. But in government William showed the imagination of a creative statesman—crude perhaps, but none the less remarkable for that. Only a fuller analysis of the effects of the Norman Conquest can reveal his essential achievement. ...

## 9. WILLIAM II, HENRY I, AND STEPHEN

### (1) *William II, 1087–1100*

IN THE last three chapters we have tried to give a broad sketch of Norman England. We have seen continuity in some parts of English life, rapid and catastrophic change in others. The Normans who settled in England were comparatively few in number; they came as war-lords, royal servants, bishops, abbots, archdeacons, canons, and clerks. They did not come as peasants. Naturally they altered the feudal structure more fundamentally than the manorial, the cathedral more than the parish. By the Conqueror’s death the main lines of change were clear. English and Norman were still distinct—the story of assimilation will come later. But there was no longer an English aristocracy to engineer an English restoration. Not that the English were negligible or their royalty extinct; St. Margaret, the Queen of Scotland, was descended from Alfred, Edgar, and Ethelred; and her brother, Edgar Aetheling, had nearly become king for an hour in 1066. Henry I found it prudent to marry Queen Margaret’s daughter immediately after his accession. But Henry I lacked even a clear Norman title at that stage. His queen was much loved by the English and helped her husband in many ways; but we must not attribute too much political significance to the match.

The Conqueror had done his work thoroughly. Deep scars in the landscape of England still reminded men what it meant to resist the Norman will; none of his children needed to be so ruthless in devastation as he had been. After his death his sons quarrelled and fought for his inheritance; but when Henry, the youngest, finally won Normandy as well as England in 1106, he was able to build a state to all appearances even stronger than William’s.

The quarrels began at the father’s deathbed. The eldest son, Robert, was in rebellion, and his father knew his incapacity. The old king reckoned that he could not pass his whole inheritance to William, his second surviving son, known as Rufus, and so gave his voice for Robert as Duke of Normandy for William as King of England. William left his father’s side even before his death, and within a little over a fortnight he had presented his credentials to Archbishop Lanfranc and been crowned in Westminster Abbey. It was the final act of the great partnership of Lanfranc and William I; the crucial importance of having the old king’s voice, and of taking rapid possession of throne and crown were never so clearly expressed. The Norman barons



had never given their formal consent to the Conqueror's arrangements; to many of them, with their estates divided between the two lands, a divided allegiance must have seemed exceedingly inconvenient. A party of them, headed by the new King's uncle, Odo of Bayeux, were more inclined to Robert than to William.

Early in 1088 William II faced the most dangerous rebellion of his reign. Most of his father's closest followers, the archbishop excepted, were against him. If Robert had acted with the same energy as William, he would probably have won the throne. But William kept a few great men on his side, a large number of lesser folk, and the bulk of the English who still counted—to whom Norman politics meant nothing. In the course of this campaign William's subjects were forcibly reminded that their King was a great warrior and a remarkable personality, and that the English king, whoever he might be, still counted for more in the country at large than any of the barons. In a few months the rebellion was crushed and only the Bishop of Durham still resisted. Under safe conduct he appeared before the King and claimed exemption, as a bishop, from trial in a royal court. He appealed to Rome. Already the force of the new canon law was a weapon which could be turned against the King. The bishop, however, had little support from his own colleagues. In 1082 Odo of Bayeux had been imprisoned, not as a bishop, but as Earl of Kent, as the Conqueror had neatly explained; and Lanfranc and the English bishops seem to have accepted this view of the Bishop of Durham, too—it was as a baron, for his lay fiefs, that he was tried. The end of the case was a compromise; nor was the bishop again to be found defending ultramontane principles.

William II's government was strict and severe, and in 1095 he again provoked some of the barons to rebel. With the suppression of the second rebellion—a more stringent suppression than had been possible in 1088—he was secure, as secure as ever his father had been, in his English kingdom, and could turn his attention to the conquest of Normandy.

By 1095 King William was thoroughly established in his reputation as king, Duke Robert thoroughly discredited in his reputation as duke. Both were fine soldiers. But in William the knightly qualities were only one aspect of a complex personality; Robert was strong in nothing else. Robert enjoyed a battle too much to worry about its consequences; he always forgave an enemy as soon as the enemy was beaten. He was incapable of controlling the Norman barons. But he was, though not a moral man, a pious one, and other events of the year 1095 gave him the opportunity for a far more promising adventure than petty war in Normandy provided. The pope was preaching the first Crusade, and found a ready listener in Duke Robert. Robert's only difficulty was money; and this he found by the happy expedient of pawning his duchy to William. To the Crusade went Robert, and made a good name for himself, so to speak, as a brigade commander; nor did he return until after William's death.

William was a splendid knight by the standard of the day, but no crusader. To his own knights he was lavish; and he was never happier than when on campaign or in the hunting field. As a soldier he was loyal to his subordinates, in the way that he himself had been loyal to his father. He was a strict upholder of the soldier's code as he understood it. It was the only code he knew or cared for. He had nothing of chivalry in the modern sense; cared not a rap for religion or the Church; and knew no restraints save those of the camp. And so he was remembered in knightly circles as the greatest leader of his day; by churchmen as a depraved tyrant. Granted the standards of the two communities, there is little to quarrel with in their judgments.

In fairness to Rufus, it must be acknowledged that his worst fault in the eyes of the Church was material: his rapacity. His boundless generosity to his followers, and the expensive adventures of his last years, made money a constant and urgent need. Since he cared nothing for the Church he did what he could to mulct it. He left abbeys and bishoprics vacant, including the see of Canterbury itself, and took a substantial share of their revenues. He was thus provided with a plentiful store of silver, and was spared for the time the unwanted advice of another Lanfranc.

None the less, the chroniclers' portrait of Rufus is not inhuman. They hated him for his oppression, but they enjoyed telling stories about him; he was an engaging ruffian. He lacked his father's dignity and presence; he stammered and blustered when in difficulties. But he had a sharp sense of humour and a gay abandon in blasphemy which several chroniclers recorded. The London Jews brought him a present one day, and asked leave to hold a disputation with Christians in his presence. 'God's face,' said the King, with great delight, and announced that if they had the better of it, he would change his faith. A more serious tale was told against him by the historian Eadmer, that Rufus was once bribed by a Jew to compel his son, who had been converted, to abjure his Christianity, which the King—to his own intense annoyance—failed to do. These stories have given rise to a theory that Rufus was a thoroughgoing sceptic, but this is doubtful.

He was what the Elizabethans called an atheist: not an unbeliever, but a blasphemer. When secure from fear of death he scoffed at the Church and ignored it: he was also a wit, who kept no control of his tongue.

It is a strange irony that Rufus, of all English kings, should have invited one of the most attractive, distinguished, and saintly of possible candidates to occupy the see of Canterbury. In 1092–3 many of the leaders in Church and state were in a conspiracy to fill the see, vacant since Lanfranc's death in 1089. They were attracted by the immense prestige of the abbot of Bec, Anselm of Aosta, and he was invited to visit England. Anselm suspected what was afoot, and refused to come, although his abbey's possessions in England required his presence. Eventually the importunity of the savage old Earl of Chester, who swore he was on his deathbed, compelled Anselm to come. A sudden and violent illness made Rufus a party to the plot, and Anselm found himself, very much against his will, constrained to accept the archbishopric. 'You would yoke a weak old sheep to an untamed bull', he said. Small wonder that he resisted: he was already an old man, and it needed no deep prescience to foresee that he would have to dedicate his last years to a fearful task. In the event he lived sixteen years, and spent them in resisting two of the most strong-willed and unscrupulous monarchs in the Europe of his day.

One cannot read either of Eadmer's books about him, nor any contemporary description, nor his own writings, without feeling the impact of Anselm's charm. The division of clerical and lay was never more sharply exemplified than in the contrast of Anselm and Rufus. Yet Anselm was no sheep. He did not fancy himself as a politician; and he gives the impression of always striving to find some way out of the endless battles in which he was involved. But it was not for nothing that he was the finest philosopher whom Europe had seen for many centuries. He saw vital points of principle with extreme clarity and precision, and never wavered in defending what he regarded as essential. As a monk, spiritual director, thinker, and theologian, Anselm held and deserved an immense reputation. There seems at first sight something wasteful in the way he was pulled from his cloister and set in the militant theatre in which his last years were passed. But if we wish to understand the Middle Ages, Anselm's career is worth careful reflection. The Earl of Chester was not given to basing essential choices on sentiment. Nor were he and his like driven by fear alone, as was Rufus. It may be that Earl Hugh's chief wish was to stand before God's judgment seat and claim to have won for the English Church a saintly head. But in addition to this the story of Anselm shows that, however sharp the contrast between the two worlds of clergy and laity, men like Anselm and Earl Hugh could communicate.

The immediate result was a violent reaction by Rufus, who felt that he had been tricked into appointing Anselm, and used every trick he knew to be rid of him. There was trouble about the way Anselm should receive his pallium of office. There were two rival popes at the time, and the King claimed the right to choose which one should have the English allegiance. Anselm, however, had already accepted Urban II while abbot of Bec, as had the whole Norman church. This dispute was followed by other difficulties, until a number of bishops and a few barons reckoned that there would be no peace till Anselm had withdrawn from the archbishopric. In the end Anselm found his position untenable, and went abroad in 1097 to consult the pope. King and archbishop agreed to part; Rufus was saved from excommunication by Anselm; but it must have appeared that the English Church would be without an archbishop until either Rufus or Anselm died; and since Rufus was barely forty and Anselm about sixty-five, the outcome seemed clearly predictable.

Rufus was himself so anti-clerical that historians for long ignored the evidence that his clerical supporters were extremely active in developing some of the literate aspects of government. It may even have been in his time that the new system of accounting came in at the Exchequer. What is certain is that it was in response to his urgent need for money that his notorious chaplain, Ranulph Flambard, developed and enforced the machinery for levying and manipulating taxes. Ranulph was as hardly treated by the chroniclers as was his master, and he was evidently unscrupulous; but his long period of office in Chancery and Treasury marked an important stage in the development of royal government. What is uncertain is how much part the King played in these activities. Clearly his real interests lay elsewhere.

While Duke Robert was on Crusade, William set to work to restore order and expand the frontiers of his new principality in Normandy. He had only temporary possession of the duchy, but evidently intended to retain it altogether if he could. A series of campaigns against the heir to the French throne, the future Louis VI (1108–37) brought him the exercise that he and his followers loved, but no decisive advantage. Normandy became secure, however, and he was successful in reducing Maine to submission. England was

secure as never before: in 1099 King Edgar of Scotland bore William's sword before him at the crown-wearing at Westminster, and the faithful Ranulph Flambard was rewarded with the frontier bishopric of Durham. There was talk of the Duke of Aquitaine following Duke Robert's example, and pawning his duchy to Rufus. In the summer of 1100 Rufus boasted that he would spend Christmas in Poitiers. But on 2nd August he was shot by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest, and instantly died.

Contemporaries ascribed the event to an accident, but they saw in it God's judgment on his blasphemies and oppression. Some recent historians have suspected conspiracy. William and Robert had made each the other's heir, to the exclusion of their youngest brother Henry. Henry had no hope of William's nomination; his only chance of the throne was to seize it by force when Robert was in no position to intervene. At the time of Rufus's death Robert's return from the Crusade was imminent, and he brought with him a bride who might bear him a son. Henry was a member of the fatal hunting party; they were only a short distance from the royal treasure house at Winchester. The arrow was discharged by Walter Tirel, whose relations were treated by Henry with great favour. All the circumstances were singularly fortunate for Henry, and a suspicion attaches to him of conspiring to have his brother cut off. Of this we may probably acquit him. We might believe him capable of murdering to win the crown; but to murder one's brother and liege lord was an act of treachery, the suspicion of which would have blasted his reputation. The stigma of quite a remote acquiescence in his brother's murder never left Ethelred II; it is hard to believe that Henry could have been in a conspiracy and no wind of it reach us from contemporaries. If conspiracy there was, it was extraordinarily well concealed.

## (2) *HENRY I, 1100–35*

Henry succeeded only just in time. Rufus died on the afternoon of 2nd August. By 5th August Henry had seized the Treasury at Winchester and had had himself elected and crowned at Westminster. Within a few weeks Robert was back in Normandy, and preparing to punish his upstart brother. Henry had still much to do to win sufficient support to face the threat. He made a bid for the barons and the Church by issuing an elaborate charter repudiating the notorious abuses of Rufus's regime; like Rufus he made more promises than he had any hope or intention of keeping. He pursued his advantage with the Church by speeding the return of Anselm he conciliated his English subjects by marrying Edith (alias Matilda), daughter of St. Margaret of Scotland and niece of Edgar Aetheling. He won recognition from Louis of France who was not sorry to see the Anglo-Norman Empire divided. But his position remained very insecure. Some of the great barons, with estates in both England and Normandy, feared that civil war between the two brothers would not be in their interest, and hoped that Robert would quickly unite kingdom and duchy again; others saw advantage in civil war, and encouraged Robert to invade for a different reason; others again felt that a crusader's rights should have been better respected.

At first the peacemakers had the better of the argument. Robert came, and at Alton peace was arranged between the brothers before the situation had come to a fight. Robert was to have Normandy and a large pension, Henry England and a Norman castle; both were to forgive their rebels. Whether this was regarded as a lasting settlement is not clear. In any case Henry rapidly set to work to undermine it. Robert's fame as a crusader gave him a momentary return of prestige, which his incompetence soon dissipated. Henry meanwhile was proving himself a strong, capable, and just ruler. After his death he was known as the lion of justice. The title implies the nostalgia of men oppressed by the chaos of Stephen's reign which followed, and is in part a formal symbol. But the lion is not a kindly beast, and Henry succeeded, like his father, because he rapidly inspired fear and respect. He was capable, thorough, and ruthless. Like his father, he was also pious, he liked to be on good terms with the Church—if the Church would respect and obey him in turn—and he took a real interest in endowing religious houses, a taste he shared with Queen Matilda. But his piety did not affect his morals; though less systematic in destruction than his father, Henry was not a merciful man; unlike his father, he was not a good husband. He acknowledged upward of twenty illegitimate children. Henry I was a constructive monarch in his way; but as a person he is unattractive. It must be remembered to his credit that he kept men's allegiance; after 1102 there were no more rebellions in England until his death. Partly this was because, unlike King Stephen, he was feared and respected, but partly too, because, unlike King John, he was trusted.

Duke Robert was no match for his brother. Henry quietly wove a fabric of alliances round Normandy, so as to ensure that his conquest of the duchy should be uninterrupted; he also used every opportunity to

prepare Normandy to accept him as duke. Rufus's old minister, Ranulph Flambard, was engaged in clerical intrigue on his own account and political intrigue on Henry's in Normandy in these years; Henry's most distinguished lay supporter, Robert of Meulan, was sent to help Robert suppress disorder. In 1105 Henry openly invaded the duchy, and again in 1106. At the end of September Henry and Robert met at Tinchebrai, and the battle ended in Robert's capture and Henry's conquest of Normandy. Robert ended his days a prisoner in Britain; Henry became Duke of Normandy; the Anglo-Norman barons were freed from their divided allegiance; and Ranulph Flambard returned to Durham to enjoy the novelty of being a respectable bishop. The nave of Durham Cathedral is a striking monument to the artistic unity of the Norman dominions, to the prosperity of Henry's kingdom, and to the ability and munificence of Bishop Ranulph.

Like his father in 1066, or William of Orange in 1688, Henry had achieved his conquest because of the temporary quiescence of neighbouring powers. Like them, he found himself in his triumph suddenly ringed with enemies. Some of his further schemes came to nothing, and he made no headway on the frontier between Normandy and the royal domain of France against the rising star of Louis VI. But he held his own in Maine, and continued to practise his diplomacy against the other powers of northern and central France. His diplomacy in Anjou was later to spoil his plans for the succession to his throne.

Meanwhile in England, Henry had made his peace with the Church. Anselm's return at the beginning of the reign had revealed a fundamental difference of principle between king and primate, which soon led the latter into exile again. Papal councils of the last decade of the eleventh century had been condemning with ever growing urgency the practice of lay investiture, first called in question by Gregory VII in 1075. It was the custom in most European kingdoms and many principalities for a new bishop or a new abbot to be granted his office by king or prince in a symbolic ceremony in which ring and pastoral staff were presented to the elect. Symbol and reality were felt in the Middle Ages to inhere in one another to a degree we find difficult to comprehend; and staff and ring were the essential symbols of pastoral Office. For those churchmen who were concerned to emphasise the distinction of lay and clerical, to free the Church (as he saw it) from lay control, this symbol was in every way offensive. Anselm had been present at two of the councils of the ten-nineties and could not ignore the problem. He refused to consecrate bishops who had been invested by the King. On the other side, many royal supporters thought the symbol as precious as the reality, and there was stout resistance to Anselm's demands. Many churchmen thought any kind of royal influence as offensive as its symbol, and the declared papal policy was to make the offices of bishop and abbot purely spiritual—to cut off the lay power from any say in the making of spiritual officials. To the King this was intolerable. He relied on the bishops for counsel and for knights as well as for prayers; they were among his leading barons, usually his most faithful barons. It was essential to his government that he should choose them.

The impasse was solved by the desire of Anselm and Henry for peace. Anselm was weary of exile, anxious to return to his flock and perform his proper function as archbishop. Henry preferred to be on good terms with the Church, and needed all the support he could get for his attack on Normandy. And so in 1105 the basis for agreement was found. It was suggested to Henry that he give up investiture but retain the essential custom of receiving homage and fealty from the bishops. Anselm, after some hesitation, agreed to submit the proposal to the Pope, who accepted the condition, so long as it remained a personal grant to Henry alone. In 1107 Anselm was finally able to return to England, to consecrate the many bishops elected in his absence, to hold a last council and pass stringent decrees on clerical discipline (1108), before he died in 1109.

The compromise between Henry and Anselm later provided pattern for the compromise between the Pope and Henry's son-in-law, the Emperor Henry V, in 1122. In both a formal renunciation of investiture was made in exchange for a personal grant of the right of a symbol devoid of spiritual significance. In both cases the right survived, because the King's successors regarded it as the immemorial custom of their realms. Their actual influence on elections depended on political circumstances; by and large the English kings had no difficulty in managing elections before the fourteenth century. But it rarely happened in the Middle Ages that a symbol was surrendered without cost. A profound movement was in progress; clerical education was bringing men more and more to assume a measure of clerical independence. These new assumptions rarely came into the open except at times of conflict. But men about the English court must have noticed the disappearance of this well-known ceremony. It marked a stage in the process by which the king ceased to be undisputed master in the English Church. Henry I still got his way in later years; but papal envoys—or legates, as they were called—and church councils became commoner.

Henry governed England by the fullest use of every traditional instrument. Like all the English kings of the twelfth century, he was a feudal king in a feudal age. His tastes lay in hunting, and preparing for war, like those of all his line. His natural associates were barons: Robert of Meulan and his family, and others like them, were constantly about him. Rebels he treated severely after his first two years; he even broke the great house of Belleme-Montgomery, who had held semi-independent sway in the marches of Normandy and Wales under his father and brother. He broke them because they were rebels, not out of an 'anti-feudal' policy. If the greater baronage was weaker in 1135 than in 1100, the explanation lies in the fullness with which Henry used all the other instruments of government, not in any conscious effort to weaken his fellow feudatories.

The feudal aristocracy was certainly no caste. Henry himself was accused by Orderic of promoting men from the dust. But in practice his new barons were not yeomen or peasants; they had all, by definition, to be trained to knightly pursuits, to be brought up in the traditions of the feudal classes. Henry undoubtedly added to the numbers of the barons, endowing them when possible by marrying them to heiresses; when heiresses were lacking, he gave them portions of royal demesne. This was partly the fruit of necessity, partly of choice. The prestige of a usurper or of a newcomer to the throne was always liable to be weak if the great luminaries of the court in no way reflected his glory. It no doubt gave Henry strength in his own and other men's eyes that not all the great men of his court owed their place to his father or brother.

Henry's most important creations were able royal servants. The English royal council, be it Alfred's Witan or the Tudor Privy Council, has always contained an element freely chosen by the king and an element with something like an inherited claim to be invited. In a measure the English king always retained the right to consult and be counselled by whom he would. One of the most notable features of Henry I's court was the distinction of his councillors, both clerical and lay. We have already glanced at the achievement of Bishop Roger of Salisbury and his family in the Exchequer and elsewhere. Most English bishops of this time were recruited from the royal Chancery or some other office of state—with the singular exception of Canterbury, which always had a monk or canon regular before 1162. Greatest among Henry's lay officials were Aubrey de Vere and Richard Basset, who were given a roving commission in the late eleven-twenties to reform the sheriffdoms of much of England. Richard was a royal justice and perhaps for a time Chief Justiciar—a new office, carrying with it supremacy in judicial and administrative affairs in the king's absence; Aubrey was made Master Chamberlain, that is, chief financial officer of the royal household, in 1133. In the next reign Aubrey's son acquired an earldom, and the Veres were earls of Oxford until 1604. The origins of Vere and Basset are an interesting commentary on Orderic's sneers. Aubrey's barony was not of Henry's creation. The founder of the family came from Ver near Coutances in western Normandy, and doubtless owed his promotion to the Bishop of Coutances; by 1086 the first Aubrey was already established as a tenant-in-chief in his own right as well as tenant of the bishop in two counties. The Bassets held a small fee in southern Normandy, and Richard's father had already attracted William II's notice before Henry came to the throne. Their sensational rise, and wide English possessions (with one very valuable marriage to an English heiress), they owed to Henry I. Henry did not choose his subordinates haphazardly; he selected men who had already proved themselves in a lower capacity. The man who owed most to him was his nephew Stephen, who can only be described as a favourite. Stephen was the son of Adela, Henry's sister, and Stephen, Count of Blois; his elder brother, Count Theobald, was a constant ally of Henry against the French king. Two large English fiefs, and two of the richest fiefs of Normandy came Stephen's way before 1118; and in 1125 he married the heiress of Boulogne, Matilda, niece of Henry's first queen, and so sprung from the Old English and the Scottish kings. Count Stephen was a magnate after the order of Earl Godwin or Earl Harold.

As Henry's nephew, Stephen had a place in the queue for his succession. It was not at first a very lofty place, since Stephen had an elder brother and Henry had children. But circumstances favoured him. In 1120 a boat carrying Henry's only legitimate son, William the Aetheling, and many leading men of his court, struck a rock in the Channel and sank. The wreck of the White Ship made a deep impression on contemporaries, and was a fearful shock to Henry. He married again, but had no children by his second wife; it was the pitiful irony of his later years that he should be surrounded by bastard sons, whom neither the custom of the land nor the Church would allow to succeed him. In spite of his evident affection for Stephen, he was very slow to think of him as a possible heir, and it is doubtful if Stephen took his own claims seriously before the very end of the reign.

There remained Matilda, Henry's only legitimate daughter. Matilda, at the tender age of eleven, had a taste of a higher office than any other member of her family; she was married to the Emperor Henry V. The marriage was childless, and on her husband's death in 1125 the Empress returned to her father's court, to be prepared for the English succession. On 1st January 1127 the English barons, including Stephen, swore to recognise her as Lady of England if Henry died without male heirs. Later in the year Henry betrothed her to Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, and capped a year of triumph over enemies in France by marrying her to Count Geoffrey in June 1128.

For once Henry had overreached himself. The marriage was exceedingly unpopular. The terms allowed Geoffrey to become King of England and Duke of Normandy. To this the English barons had not given their consent. The Norman barons, many of them also English barons, reacted violently to the prospect of being ruled by their traditional enemy, the Count of Anjou. The French king naturally disapproved of an alliance between two leading powers of northern France. Finally, the Empress herself objected to an entanglement with a mere count ten years her junior. The English barons were threatening to repudiate their oath to Matilda when, in 1131, Henry found an opportunity for cajoling them to confirm it. Geoffrey repudiated his wife, and Matilda returned to England apparently free of the Angevin yoke. The barons renewed their oath. But very shortly after, Matilda and Geoffrey were reunited, and on 5th March 1133 the future Henry II was born. The English barons had sworn to acknowledge Matilda, not her husband; the King had promised the succession to Geoffrey, and Geoffrey was at first determined to have it. It is likely that Henry was beginning to repent of his offers to Geoffrey, and he certainly refused him an immediate share in government. The result was that Henry and Geoffrey were at war when the old King died (of a surfeit of lampreys) in December 1135.

### (3) *Stephen, 1135–54*

Stephen won the throne by a rapid and forceful manoeuvre, comparable to the manoeuvres of 1087 and 1100. But he was never able to assert his supremacy in England as his uncles had done. From 1039 to 1148 the Empress Matilda was in the country, and never lacked supporters; after her departure her eldest son was always plotting and executing dashing invasions. After 1144 Normandy was irrevocably lost: it had been conquered by Count Geoffrey. In England Stephen's reign was remembered, with some exaggeration, as nineteen years of chaos, anarchy, and suffering. In fact, the anarchy was intermittent and often local, and the later years of the reign were less severe than those which followed the Empress's invasion in 1139. But anarchy there was, such as England had not seen since the Conquest.

The anarchy has sometimes been viewed merely as a reflection of Stephen's weakness of character; sometimes as the inevitable outcome of the circumstances in which he took the throne, and of the disputed succession; sometimes as a natural reaction against the excessively autocratic rule of Henry I. Let us look at these aspects in turn.

'When the traitors saw that Stephen was a good-humoured, kindly, and easy-going man who inflicted no punishment,' wrote the Peterborough chronicler, 'then they committed all manner of horrible crimes. They had done him homage and worn oaths of fealty to him, but not one of their oaths was kept. They were all forsworn and their oaths broken. For every great man built him castles and held them against the king; and they filled the whole land with these castles. They sorely burdened the unhappy people of the country with forced labour on the castles; and when the castles were built, they filled them with devils and wicked men.... Never did a country endure greater misery, and never did the heathen act more vilely than they did. Contrary to custom, they spared neither church nor churchyard, but seized everything of value that was in it, and afterwards burned the church and all it contained.... And men said openly that Christ and his saints slept. Such things and others more than we know how to relate we suffered nineteen years for our sins.'<sup>2</sup>

King Stephen was easy-going, though a good knight and in his way a pious man. In fact, he resembled his uncle Duke Robert, save that he had more than Robert's share of energy and determination. Indeed, he achieved more than Robert while lacking most of Robert's advantages. His right to the throne is not easily assessed. Matilda was nearer in blood to Henry than was Stephen; she had been designated by Henry and received the oaths of the barons. It is true she was a woman, and would not be expected to rule alone; and the barons had never accepted her husband as king. But Matilda and Geoffrey jointly had Henry's voice,

<sup>2</sup> Peterborough Chronicle, under the year 1137 (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, trans. G.N. Garmonsway, pp. 263–5).

and their children would have a far better hereditary claim than Stephen. But Stephen's claim was not negligible. It was solemnly debated before the pope in 1139) and upheld. Hereditarily it was weak, but heredity was only one of the elements in king-making and not the most important. Some of the Norman barons were for Count Theobald, who became duke for a day; but when news came that Stephen had been crowned King of England, Theobald gave way to his younger brother, and for the time Stephen was accepted as *de facto* duke in Normandy as well as king in England.

In putting himself at the head of the English baronage in their rejection of the deep-seated plans of Henry I, Stephen stored up for himself future trouble. Henry I had been increasingly autocratic in later years; his rule had grown harsh and oppressive. He had used his rights arbitrarily to extort money from the powerful, and they had come to resent his rule. The course of Stephen's reign shows that the English aristocracy saw little advantage to themselves in strong government; and bitterly distrusted the financial organisation developed under Roger of Salisbury. Stephen was carried to success on the shoulders of a baronial reaction, and had to show the barons some return for their support, in the shape of a milder government. More important, perhaps, he had the prejudices of his class—the feudal hierarchy meant more to him than royal authority, and he had the layman's distrust of the literate clerical civil servants.

In 1138 Count Geoffrey had invaded Normandy and at the same time rebellion first showed in England, headed by Matilda's half-brother, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and timed to coincide with an invasion by David, King of the Scots. But the two attacks were beaten off; the Scots were defeated in the famous 'battle of the Standard'; and Stephen seemed secure. Rebellion had aroused his suspicions against Roger of Salisbury and his family, and he proceeded to throw his own administration into confusion, and embroil himself with the Church by picking a quarrel with Roger himself, with Roger's son, who had been royal Chancellor, and his two episcopal nephews of Ely and Lincoln. Roger only survived his arrest four months, to die in December 1139. Meanwhile Stephen's brother, Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, at this time head of the English Church in virtue of his office of papal legate, had attempted unsuccessfully to rouse a Church council to condemn his brother's action; and the Empress had landed in England.

From 1139 to 1145 there was anarchy in England. Fighting took place sporadically in many parts of the country, especially in the west and west Midlands, where the Empress's following was strong, and in East Anglia, where one of the most powerful of the robber barons, Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex, was at large. In 1141 Stephen was captured at the battle of Lincoln; for a moment the Empress was triumphant, and she marched to London to be crowned. But some of Matilda's difficulties were of her own making: by temperament she was self-willed and haughty, disinclined to make concessions to her subjects' demands or even to good manners. Within a week she was forced out of London, and a few months later, after a hazardous march, she was established once again in the western strongholds of her half-brother, Robert, Earl of Gloucester. A powerful counter-attack under forces organised by Stephen's queen led to Robert's capture late in 1141. Robert and Stephen were exchanged, and the Empress's brief triumph was at an end. But not the anarchy; it continued unabated, and rose to its height in 1144. In that year Geoffrey de Mandeville died. He had played one side off against the other, exacting bribes and favours from each in turn, and so had won large estates, royal offices, and an earldom. The same game was played more subtly for even higher stakes by the Earl of Chester, who fancied himself as a king-maker. He remained a power to be reckoned with until his death in 1153, but after a brief arrest in 1146 his activities were somewhat curtailed. From 1145, indeed, the anarchy began to subside; the arrest of the Earl of Chester in 1146 and the death of the Earl of Gloucester in 1147 marked important stages in its decline; when the Empress finally abandoned the struggle in 1148 and returned to her husband, the way seemed clear for a return of peaceful government. But Stephen's difficulties were far from over.

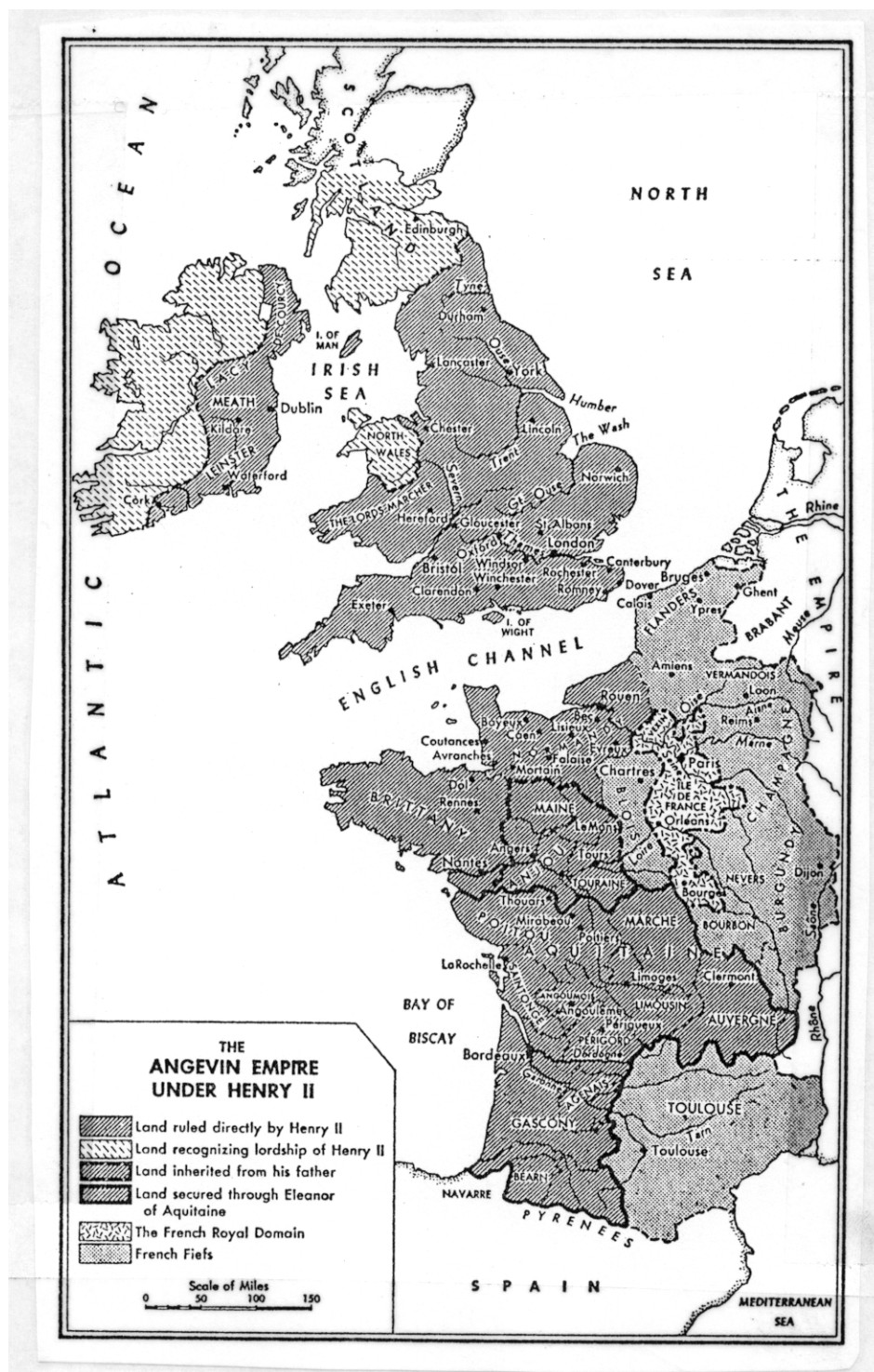
The greater barons had tasted liberty and many of them were still disinclined for a stronger regime. They met threats to the peace of their own domains by organising pacts with their neighbours. By the end of the reign a generation was growing up which had forgotten both the peace and the oppressions of Henry I. Some were prepared to accept a stronger yoke and the security which went with it; others rejoiced in present opportunities for plunder and promotion. The anarchy was a rare interval when the strong government of Norman kings was relaxed, and some of the more violent potentialities of feudal society could come into the open. Many tendencies in twelfth-century society fought against such violence; but the great barons in whose hands lay the decision of the conflict needed to be convinced that it was not to their interests to let it continue.

As Stephen grew older he made more and more urgent efforts to settle the succession. Following a practice common on the Continent, he wished to have his elder son, Eustace crowned in his own lifetime. To Stephen the deciding factor on this occasion was heredity and his own voice; he had decided, Eustace must be king. It was true that the nobles had tasted new opportunities for bargaining, had acquired a new sense of their own importance in king-making, as a result of the anarchy. Secret and open Angevins were now for the Empress's son, Henry, who made his existence known by raids in 1147 and 1149. But Angevins, for the moment, were few; and Stephen was able to win his barons' consent for the succession of Eustace. The only determined opposition came from the Church. The papacy had never withdrawn its acceptance of Stephen, and never agreed to reopen the case after 1139. But formal processes of king-making were not of major concern to the Church; its essential interest lay in the suitability of the candidate for his lofty office, especially suitability as the Church's protector, and the Church's own part in the business, the ceremonies of anointing and coronation. In 1152, acting on the Pope's specific prohibition, the Archbishop of Canterbury refused to crown Eustace, and fled the country.

Archbishop Theobald's refusal was the culmination of a remarkable effort to maintain a consistent front in the circumstances of the anarchy. When he first became archbishop, he was compelled to take orders from his subordinate, the Bishop of Winchester, because the Bishop was papal legate. Theobald had done homage to Stephen, and even in 1141, when Stephen was imprisoned, and the Church rallied round the Empress, Theobald refused to give up his allegiance without Stephen's permission. He remained throughout the reign a reluctant supporter of the King. At the same time, he attempted to maintain the unity of his province in a divided country and against the encroachments of rebellious bishops. After 1143 Henry of Blois was no longer legate, but he continued to strive for independence from Canterbury; so did the Bishop of St. David's. To maintain his position, Theobald had to enter into correspondence with the Empress's supporters. Presumably for this reason, he became the object of violent suspicion to the King, and was forced into temporary exile two or three times and once took refuge in Angevin territory. Stephen's attempts to resume control of the Church became increasingly ineffective, even episcopal elections took place behind his back. Meanwhile the Angevin cause, though weak in England, had prospered in Normandy, which was conquered by Count Geoffrey in the early eleven-forties. Prolonged war between Stephen and Geoffrey would in effect be civil war, since the leading barons held fiefs on both sides of the Channel. It is clear that at some date in the eleven-forties Theobald and his circle made up their minds to work for an Angevin succession. It can only have been at their instance that the pope forbade Eustace's coronation.

The factors which told against Eustace helped his rival in other ways as well. Henry returned to England in 1153 under very different circumstances from those of his earlier visits. He was now Duke of Normandy in his own right, and since his father's death in 1151, Count of Anjou; he had recently married the ex-Queen of France, Eleanor, heiress of Aquitaine, whose marriage to King Louis VII had been annulled. Henry was lord of half France, and a mature warrior of nineteen. For those who wished for lasting peace, he offered some prospect of a return to the days of his grandfather. For those barons with extensive Norman domains, he held out a threat of blackmail. The solution was either the immediate defeat of Stephen or a compromise by which Henry should be recognised as Stephen's heir. But Stephen was not easy to defeat, and Eustace's ambition prevented a compromise. The impasse was solved by Eustace's sudden death. Stephen's younger son, like his father, was a great feudal baron at heart, and was





From B. LYON, A CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL ENGLAND 2d ed. (New York, 1980) 216

satisfied with the many lordships which Henry I had granted to his father. Great trouble-makers like the Earl of Chester trembled for their Norman lands, and joined the Archbishop in negotiating peace. Stephen was to be king until his death, and Henry was then to succeed. Stephen died in the next year, and on 19th December 1154 Archbishop Theobald had the satisfaction of crowning Henry king.

### C. ANGEVIN ENGLAND, 1154–1216

*in* C. BROOKE, FROM ALFRED TO HENRY III, 871–1272  
The Norton Library History of England (1961) 173–88, 211–23

#### 10. HENRY II, 1154–89

##### (1) *Henry II and Thomas Becket*

HENRY II was one of the most remarkable characters in English history. We know a great deal about him. He lived in an age when it was fashionable to comment on the activities of kings, when history and especially contemporary history was popular; and Henry impressed his contemporaries so strongly that they could not refrain from saying what they thought of him. Most of them disliked him. His enemies found him too brilliant and mercurial, too overwhelming to be forgiven; those close to him feared both his charm and his occasional outbursts of wild anger, and were exasperated by his unpredictable activity. But they all admired him. He was a great figure in European society, comparable in prestige to the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. He married his daughters to kings of Sicily and Castile and to Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony; the Duke was father to the Emperor Otto IV, the King of Sicily cousin to Otto's famous rival and supplanter, the Emperor Frederick II. Henry's wife was Eleanor of Aquitaine, 'divorced' wife of the King of France—Eleanor's children and grandchildren became kings or queens of most countries between England and the Holy Land.

Henry had been named after his grandfather, and in many ways resembled him. Both were ruthless and cunning, yet both were fundamentally trusted as well as feared by their followers. Both had an exceptional capacity for choosing men to serve them; both had a ferocious eagerness to see justice done. Few men have done more for the peace and security of the English kingdom. The resemblance is in part increased by the younger Henry's admiration for his grandfather, whose reign provided a model for his own. Henry II had many friends, and some intimates. But he was not an easy man to live with. Like Henry I, he was unfaithful to his wife; nevertheless, he had seven children by her before they finally quarrelled. Eleanor was probably as difficult as Henry, but when the breach came the sons, on the whole, followed Eleanor. For ordinary courtiers Henry's behaviour could be a nightmare. Peter of Blois has left a vivid account of the horrors of living in a court always on the move—the constant uncertainty, the stale food, difficulties with the billeting officers, 'and if the king promises to spend the day anywhere, especially if a herald has published the royal will, you may be sure that the king will leave the place bright and early, and upset everyone's calculations in his haste. It frequently happens, that those who are having bloodletting, or receiving treatment, leave their cure and follow the prince, and chance their life, as it were, on the throw of a dice, risking to lose themselves rather than lose what they haven't got and are not going to get. You may see men rushing madly about, urging on the pack-horses, fitting the teams to their wagons; everyone in utter confusion—a perfect portrait of hell. But if the prince has announced that he is setting off early to reach a particular place, beyond doubt he will change his mind and sleep till noon. You will see the pack-horses waiting loaded, the wagons silent, the runners asleep, the court merchants in a pother, everyone grumbling.' He goes on to describe the throng of camp followers waiting for news of the king's movements. Then word came<sup>1</sup> that the next night would be spent in such a place, and hopes rose, because shelter and food were to be found there. But as the day drew in, the King changed his mind, and 'turned aside to another place, where there was maybe a single house, and no food for anyone else. And I believe our plight added to the king's pleasure.' Peter had seen enough of court life: 'I shall dedicate the remainder of my days to study and peace.' But the King's perversity and sudden changes of plan were not the only qualities which had impressed Peter of Blois. Elsewhere he fills out the picture. The physical description is famous: the hair once reddish, now turning to grey, of middle height, round-headed, his eyes brilliant as lightning when roused, his face lion-like, surmounted by a fine mane, his deep chest, strong arms and bow legs. The legs were constantly sore because he was so often in the saddle, yet he never sat down, not even at mass or in council—he was tirelessly

<sup>1</sup> The change of tense is Peter's; he switches from a generalised picture to a particular memory.