

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Arrival of Stephen.—Temporary confusion.—Adherents of Matilda.—Castles.—Scottish invasion.—Battle of the Standard.—Ecclesiastical power.—Religious foundations since the Conquest.—Cistercian Abbeys.—Cathedrals.—Norman bishops.—Arrest of bishops.—Synod.—Landing of Matilda.—Partisan war.—Battle of Lincoln.—Stephen a prisoner.—Bishop of Winchester swears fealty to Matilda.—Revolt of the Londoners.—The rout of Winchester.—Leaders of the war.—Matilda's flight from Oxford.—Turmoil and desolation.—Henry of Anjou.—Death of Stephen.

OF the reign of Stephen, Sir James Mackintosh has said, "It perhaps contains the most perfect condensation of all the ills of feudality to be found in history." He adds, "The whole narrative would have been rejected, as devoid of all likeness to truth, if it had been hazarded in fiction."\* As a picture of "all the ills of feudality," this narrative is a picture of the entire social state—the monarchy, the church, the aristocracy, the people; and appears to us, therefore, to demand a more careful examination than if the historical interest were chiefly centred in the battles and adventures belonging to a disputed succession, and in the personal characters of a courageous princess and her knightly rival.

Stephen, earl of Boulogne, the nephew of King Henry I., was no stranger to the country which he aspired to rule. He had lived much in England, and was an universal favourite. "From his complacency of manners, and his readiness to joke, and sit and regale even with low people, he had gained so much on their affections as is hardly to be conceived." † This popular man was at the death-bed of his uncle; but before the royal body was borne on the shoulders of nobles from the castle of Lions to Rouen, Stephen was on his road to England. He embarked at Whitsand, undeterred by boisterous weather; and landed during a winter storm of thunder and lightning. It was a more evil omen when Dover and Canterbury shut their gates against him. But he went boldly on to London. There can be no doubt that his proceedings were not the result of a sudden impulse; and that his usurpation of the crown was successful, through a very powerful organisation. His brother

\* "History of England," in "Lardner's Cyclopædia."

† Malmesbury.

Henry was bishop of Winchester; and his influence with the other dignitaries of the Church was mainly instrumental in the election of Stephen to be king, in open disregard of the oaths taken a few years before to recognise the succession of Matilda and of her son. Between the death of a king and the coronation of his successor, there was usually a short interval, in which the form of election was gone through. But it is held that during that suspension of the royal functions there was usually a proclamation of "the king's peace," under which all violations of law were punished as if the head of the law were in the full exercise of his functions and dignities.\* King Henry I. died on the first of December, 1135. Stephen was crowned on the 26th of December. The death of Henry would probably have been generally known in England in a week after the event. There is a sufficient proof that this succession was considered doubtful, and, consequently, that there was an unusual delay in the proclamation of "the king's peace." The Forest Laws were the great grievance of Henry's reign. His death was the signal for their violation by the whole body of the people. "It was wonderful how so many myriads of wild animals, which in large herds before plentifully stocked the country, suddenly disappeared, so that out of the vast number scarcely two now could be found together. They seemed to be entirely extirpated." † According to the same authority, "the people also turned to plundering each other without mercy;" and "whatever the evil passions suggested in peaceable times, now that the opportunity of vengeance presented itself, was quickly executed." This is a remarkable condition of a country, which, having been governed by terror, suddenly passed out of the evils of despotism into the greater evils of anarchy. This temporary confusion must have contributed to urge on the election of Stephen. By the Londoners he was received with acclamations; and the witan chose him for king without hesitation, as one who could best fulfil the duties of the office, and put an end to the dangers of the kingdom.

Stephen succeeded to a vast amount of treasure. All the rents of Henry I. had been paid in money, instead of in necessaries; and he was rigid in enforcing the payment in coin of the best quality. With this possession of means, Stephen surrounded himself with troops from Flanders and Brittany. The objections to his want of hereditary right appear to have been altogether laid aside for a time,

\* See Hallam's "Middle Ages," vol. ii. p. 427, ed. 1855.

† "Acta Stephani," b. I., translated by Forester.

in the popularity which he derived from his personal qualities and his command of wealth. Strict hereditary claims to the choice of the nation had been disregarded since the time of the Confessor. The oath to Matilda, it was maintained, had been unwillingly given, and even extorted by force. It is easy to conceive that, both to Saxon and Norman, the notion of a female sovereign would be out of harmony with their ancient traditions and their warlike habits. The king was the great military chief, as well as the supreme dispenser of justice and guardian of property. The time was far distant when the sovereign rule might be held to be most beneficially exercised by a wise choice of administrators, civil and military; and the power of the crown, being co-ordinate with other powers, strengthening as well as controlling its final authority, might be safely and happily exercised by a discreet, energetic, and just female. King Stephen vindicated the choice of the nation at the very outset of his reign. He went in person against the robbers who were ravaging the country. The daughter of "the lion of justice" would probably have done the same. But more than three hundred years had passed since the Lady of Mercia, the sister of Alfred, had asserted the courage of her race. Norman and Saxon wanted a king; for though ladies defended castles, and showed that firmness and bravery were not the exclusive possession of one sex, no thane or baron had yet knelt before a queen, and sworn to be her "liege man of life and limb."

The unanimity which appeared to hail the accession of Stephen was soon interrupted. David, king of Scotland, had advanced to Carlisle and Newcastle, to assert the claim of Matilda which he had sworn to uphold. But Stephen came against him with a great army, and for a time there was peace. Robert, earl of Gloucester, the illegitimate son of Henry I., had done homage to Stephen; but his allegiance was very doubtful; and the general belief that he would renounce his fealty engendered secret hostility or open resistance amongst other powerful barons. Robert of Gloucester very soon defied the king's power. Within two years of his accession, the throne of Stephen was evidently becoming an insecure seat. To counteract the power of the great nobles, he made a lavish distribution of crown lands to a large number of tenants in chief. Some of them were called earls; but they had no official charge, as the greater barons had, but were mere titular lords, made by the royal bounty. All those who held direct from the crown were called barons; and these new barons, who were scattered over the

country, had permission from the king to build castles. Such permission was extended to many other lay barons. The accustomed manor-house of the land-proprietor, in which he dwelt amidst the churls and serfs of his demesne, was now replaced by a stone tower, surrounded by a moat and a wall. The wooden one-storied homestead, with its thatched roof, shaded by the "toft" of ash and elm and maple, was pulled down, and a square fortress with loopholes and battlement stood in solitary nakedness upon some bleak hill, ugly and defiant. There with a band of armed men—sometimes with a wife and children, and not unfrequently with an unhappy victim of his licentiousness,—the baron lived in gloom and gluttony, till the love of excitement, the approach of want, or the call to battle, drove him forth. His passion for hunting was not always free to be exercised. Venison was not everywhere to be obtained without danger even to the powerful and lawless. But within a ride of a few miles there was generally corn in the barns, and herds were in the pastures. The petty baron was almost invariably a robber—sometimes on his own account, often in some combined adventure of plunder. The spirit of rapine, always too prevalent under the strongest government of those times, was now universal when the government was fighting for its own existence. Bands of marauders sallied forth from the great towns, especially from Bristol; and of their proceedings the author of the "Gesta Stephani" speaks with the precision of an eye-witness. The Bristolians, under the instigation of the earl of Gloucester, were partisans of the ex-empress Matilda; and wherever the king or his adherents had estates they came to seize their oxen and sheep, and carried men of substance into Bristol as captives, with bandaged eyes and bits in their mouths. From other towns as well as Bristol came forth plunderers, with humble gait, and courteous discourse; who when they met with a lonely man having the appearance of being wealthy, would bear him off to starvation and torture, till they had mulcted him to the last farthing. These and other indications of an unsettled government took place before the landing of Matilda, to assert her claims. An invasion of England by the Scottish king, without regard to the previous pacification, was made in 1138. But this attempt, although grounded upon the oath which David had sworn to Henry, was regarded by the Northumbrians as a national hostility which demanded a national resistance. The course of this invasion has been minutely described by contemporary chroniclers.

The author of the "Gesta Stephani" says—"Scotland, also called Albany, is a country overspread by extensive moors, but containing flourishing woods and pastures, which feed large herds of cows and oxen." Of the mountainous regions he says nothing. Describing the natives as savage, swift of foot, and lightly armed, he adds, "A confused multitude of this people being assembled from the lowlands of Scotland, they were formed into an irregular army, and marched for England." From the period of the Conquest, a large number of Anglo-Saxons had been settled in the lowlands; and the border countries of Westmoreland and Cumberland were also occupied, to a considerable extent, by the same race. The people of Galloway were chiefly of the original British stock. The historians describe "the confused multitude" as exercising great cruelties in their advance through the country that lies between the Tweed and the Tees: and Matthew Paris uses a significant phrase which marks how completely they spread over the land. He calls them the "Scottish Ants." The archbishop of York, Thurstan, an aged but vigorous man, collected a large army to resist the invaders; and he made a politic appeal to the old English nationality, by calling out the population under the banners of their Saxon saints. The bishop of Durham was the leader of this army, composed of the Norman chivalry, and the English archers. The opposing forces met at Northallerton, on the 22nd of August, 1138. The Anglo-Norman army was gathered round a tall cross, raised on a car, and surrounded by the banners of Saint Cuthbert, and Saint Wilfred, and Saint John of Beverley. From this incident the bloody day of Northallerton was called "The Battle of the Standard." Hoveden has given an oration made by Ralph, bishop of Durham, in which he addresses the captains as "Brave nobles of England, Normans by birth;" and pointing to the enemy who knew not the use of armour, exclaims, "Your head is covered with the helmet, your breast with a coat of mail, your legs with greaves, and your whole body with the shield." Of the Saxon yeomanry he says nothing. Whether the oration be genuine or not, it exhibits the mode in which the mass of the people were regarded at that time. Thierry appears to consider that the bold attempt of David of Scotland was made in reliance upon the support of the Anglo-Saxon race. But it is perfectly clear that they bore the brunt of the English battle; and whatever might be their wrongs, were not disposed to yield their fields and houses to a fierce multitude who came for spoil and for possession. The Scotch

fought with darts and long spears, and attacked the solid mass of Normans and English, gathered round the standard. Prince Henry, the son of the king of Scotland, made a vigorous onslaught with a body of horse, composed of English and Normans attached to his father's household. These were, without doubt, especial partisans of the claim to the English crown of the ex-empress Matilda; and, as the king of Scotland himself is described, were "inflamed with zeal for a just cause."\* The issue of the battle was the signal defeat of the Scottish army, with the loss of eleven thousand men upon the field. A peace was concluded with King Stephen in the following year.

The issue of the battle of the Standard might have given rest to England, if Stephen had understood the spirit of his age. In 1139, he engaged in a contest more full of peril than the assaults of Scotland, or the disturbances of Wales. He had been successful against some of the disaffected barons. He had besieged and taken Hereford Castle and Shrewsbury Castle. Dover Castle had surrendered to his queen. Robert, earl of Gloucester, kept possession of the castles of Bristol and Leeds; and other nobles held out against him in various strong places. London and some of the larger towns appear to have steadily clung to his government. The influence of the Church, by which he had been chiefly raised to sovereignty, had supported him during his four years of struggle. But that influence was now to be shaken.

The rapid and steady growth of the ecclesiastical power in England, from the period of the Conquest, is one of the most remarkable characteristics of that age. This progress we must steadily keep in view, if we would rightly understand the general condition of society. All the great offices of the Church, with scarcely an exception, were filled by Normans. The Conqueror sternly resisted any attempts of bishops or abbots to control his civil government. The Red King misappropriated their revenues in many cases. Henry I. quarrelled with Anselm about the right of investiture, which the Pope declared should not be in the hands of any layman; but Henry compromised a difficult question with his usual prudence. Whatever difficulties the Church en-

\* Scott has given a picturesque account of the battle in his "Tales of a Grandfather." Writing, as he often did, from general impressions, in describing the gallant charge of Prince Henry, he states that he broke the English line "as if it had been a spider's web." Hoveden, the historian to whom Scott alludes, applies this strong image to the scattering of the men of Lothian. "For the Almighty was offended at them, and their strength was rent like a cobweb."

countered, during seventy years, and especially during the whole course of Henry's reign, wealth flowed in upon the ecclesiastics, from king and noble, from burgess and socman; and every improvement of the country increased the value of Church possessions. It was not only from the lands of the crown, and the manors of earls, that bishoprics and monasteries derived their large endowments. Henry I. founded the Abbey of Reading, but the "mimus" of Henry I. built the priory and hospital of Saint Bartholomew. This "pleasant-witted gentleman," as Stow calls the royal "mimus" (which Percy interprets "minstrel"), having, according to the legend, "diverted the palaces of princes with courtly mockeries and triflings" for many years, bethought himself at last of more serious matters, and went to do penance at Rome. He returned to London; and obtaining a grant of land in a part of the king's market of Smithfield, which was a filthy marsh where the common gallows stood, there erected the priory, whose Norman arches as satisfactorily attest its date as Henry's charter. The piety of a court jester in the twelfth century, when the science of medicine was wholly empirical, founded one of the most valuable medical schools of the nineteenth century. The desire to raise up splendid churches, in the place of the dilapidated Saxon buildings, was a passion with Normans, whether clerics or laymen. Ralph Flambard, the bold and unscrupulous minister of William II. erected the great priory of Christchurch, in his capacity of bishop. But he raised the necessary funds with his usual financial vigour. He took the revenues of the canons into his hands, and put the canons upon a short allowance till the work was completed. The Cistercian order of monks was established in England late in the reign of Henry I. Their rule was one of the most severe mortification and of the strictest discipline. Their lives were spent in labour and in prayer, and their one frugal daily meal was eaten in silence. Whilst other religious orders had their splendid abbeys amidst large communities, the Cistercians humbly asked grants of land in the most solitary places, where the recluse could meditate without interruption by his fellow-men, amidst desolate moors and in the uncultivated gorges of inaccessible mountains. In such a barren district, Walter L'Espée, who had fought at Northallerton, founded Rievaulx Abbey. It was "a solitary place in Blakemore," in the midst of hills. The Norman knight had lost his son; and here he derived a holy comfort in seeing the monastic buildings rise under his munificent care, and the waste lands become fertile under the

incessant labours of the devoted monks. The ruins of Tintern Abbey, and Melrose Abbey, whose solemn influences have inspired the poets of our own age with thoughts akin to the contemplations of their Cistercian founders, belong to a later period of ecclesiastical architecture; for the dwellings of the original monks have perished, and the "broken arches," and "shafted oriel," the "imagery," and "the scrolls that teach thee to live and die," speak of another century, when the Norman architecture, like the Norman character, was losing its distinctive features, and becoming "Early English." We dwell a little upon these Norman foundations, to show how completely the Church was spreading itself over the land, and asserting its influence in places where man had seldom trod, as well as in populous towns, where the great cathedral was crowded with earnest votaries, and the lessons of peace were proclaimed amidst the distractions of unsettled government, and the oppressions of lordly despotism. Whatever was the misery of the country, the ordinary family ties still bound the people to the universal Christian Church, whether the priest were Norman or English. The new-born infant was dipped in the great Norman font, as the children of the Confessor's time had been dipped in the ruder Saxon. The same Latin office, unintelligible in words but significant in its import, was said and sung when the bride stood at the altar, and the father was laid in his grave. The vernacular tongue gradually melted into one dialect; and the penitent and the confessor were the first to lay aside the great distinction of race and country—that of language.

The Norman prelates were men of learning and ability, of taste and magnificence; and, whatever might have been the luxury and even vices of some amongst them, the vast revenues of the great sees were not wholly devoted to worldly pomp, but were applied to noble uses. After the lapse of seven centuries we still tread with reverence those portions of our cathedrals in which the early Norman architecture is manifest. There is no English cathedral in which we are so completely impressed with the massive grandeur of the round-arched style, as by Durham. The lines of Congreve, which Johnson thought the finest piece of description in our language, especially apply to such architecture:—

How reverend is the face of this tall pile;  
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads  
To bear aloft its arched and ponderous roof,  
By its own weight made steadfast and immovable,  
Looking tranquillity."

Durham Cathedral was commenced in the middle of the reign of Rufus, and the building went on through the reign of Henry I. Canterbury was commenced by Archbishop Lanfranc, soon after the Conquest, and was enlarged and altered in various details, till it was burnt in 1174. Some portions of the original building remain. Rochester was commenced eleven years after the Conquest; and its present nave is an unaltered part of the original building. Chichester has nearly the same date of its commencement; and the building of this church was continued till its dedication in 1148. Norwich was founded in 1094, and its erection was carried forward so rapidly, that in seven years there were sixty monks here located. Winchester is one of the earliest of these noble cathedrals; but its Norman feature of the round arch is not the general characteristic of the edifice, the original piers having been re-cased in the pointed style, in the reign of Edward III. The dates of these buildings, so grand in their conception, so solid in their execution, would be sufficient of themselves to show the wealth and activity of the Church during the reigns of the Conqueror and his sons. But, during this period of seventy years, and in part of the reign of Stephen, the erection of monastic buildings was universal in England, as in continental Europe. The Crusades gave a most powerful impulse to the religious fervour. In the enthusiasm of chivalry, which covered many of its enormities with outward acts of piety, vows were frequently made by wealthy nobles that they would depart for the Holy Wars. But sometimes the vow was inconvenient. The lady of the castle wept at the almost certain perils of her lord; and his projects of ambition often kept the lord at home to look after his own especial interests. Then the vow to wear the cross might be commuted by the foundation of a religious house. Death-bed repentance for crimes of violence and a licentious life increased the number of these endowments. It has been computed that three hundred monastic establishments were founded in England during the reigns of Henry I., Stephen, and Henry II.\*

We have briefly stated these few general facts regarding the outward manifestation of the power and the wealth of the Church at this period, to show how important an influence it must have exercised upon all questions of government. But its organisation was of far greater importance than the aggregate wealth of the sees and abbeys. The English Church, during the troubled reign of Stephen, had become more completely under the papal dominion

\* Lyttelton's "Henry II.," vol. iii., p. 294, ed. 1769.

than at any previous period of its history. The king attempted, rashly perhaps, but honestly, to interpose some check to the ecclesiastical desire for supremacy; but from the hour when he entered into a contest with bishops and synods, his reign became one of kingly trouble and national misery.

The Norman bishops not only combined in their own persons the functions of the priest and of the lawyer, but were often military leaders. As barons they had knight-service to perform; and this condition of their tenures naturally surrounded them with armed retainers. That this anomalous position should have corrupted the ambitious churchman into a proud and luxurious lord was almost inevitable. The authority of the crown might have been strong enough to repress the individual discontent, or to punish the individual treason, of these great prelates; but every one of them was doubly formidable as a member of a confederacy over which a foreign head claimed to preside. There were three bishops whose intrigues King Stephen had especially to dread, at the time when an open war for the succession of Matilda was on the point of bursting forth. Roger, the bishop of Salisbury, had been promoted from the condition of a parish priest at Caen, to be chaplain, secretary, chancellor, and chief justiciary of Henry I. He was instrumental in the election of Stephen to the throne; and he was rewarded with extravagant gifts, as he had been previously rewarded by Henry. Stephen appears to have fostered his rapacity, in the conviction that his pride would have a speedier fall; the king often saying, "I would give him half England, if he asked for it: till the time be ripe, he shall tire of asking, ere I tire of giving."\* The time was ripe in 1139. The bishop had erected castles at Devizes, at Sherborne, and at Malmesbury. King Henry had given him the castle of Salisbury. This lord of four castles had powerful auxiliaries in his nephews, the bishop of Lincoln and the bishop of Ely. Alexander of Lincoln had built the castles of Newark and Sleaford, and was almost as powerful as his uncle. In July, 1139, a great council was held at Oxford; and thither came these three bishops with military and secular pomp, and with an escort that became "the wonder of all beholders." A quarrel ensued between the retainers of the bishops and those of Alain, Earl of Brittany, about a right to quarters; and the quarrel went on to a battle, in which men were slain on both sides. The bishops of Salisbury and Lincoln were arrested, as breakers of the king's

\* Malmesbury, Book II. of "Modern History."

peace. The bishop of Ely fled to his uncle's castle of Devizes. The king, under the advice of the sagacious Earl Millent, resolved to dispossess these dangerous prelates of their fortresses, which were all finally surrendered. "The bishops, humbled and mortified, and stripped of all pomp and vain-glory, were reduced to a simple ecclesiastical life, and to the possessions belonging to them as churchmen." The contemporary who writes this,—the author of the "Gesta Stephani,"—although a decided partisan of Stephen, speaks of this event as the result of mad counsels, and a grievous sin that resembled the wickedness of the sons of Korah and of Saul. The great body of the ecclesiastics were indignant at what they considered an offence to their order. The bishop of Winchester, the brother of Stephen, had become the pope's legate in England; and he summoned the king to attend a synod at Winchester. He there produced his authority as legate from Pope Innocent, and denounced the arrest of the bishops as a dreadful crime. The king had refused to attend the council, but he sent Alberic de Vere, "a man deeply versed in legal affairs," to represent him. This advocate urged that the bishop of Lincoln was the author of the tumult at Oxford; that whenever Bishop Roger came to court, his people, presuming on his power, excited tumults; that the bishop secretly favoured the king's enemies, and was ready to join the party of the empress. The council was adjourned; but on a subsequent day came the archbishop of Rouen, as the champion of the king, and contended that it was against the canons that the bishops should possess castles; and that even if they had the right, they were bound to deliver them up to the will of the king, as the times were eventful, and the king was bound to make war for the common security. The archbishop of Rouen reasoned as a statesman; the bishop of Winchester as the pope's legate. Some of the bishops threatened to proceed to Rome; and the king's advocate intimated that if they did so, their return might not be so easy. Swords were at last unsheathed. The king and the earls were now in open hostility with the legate and the bishops. Excommunication of the king was hinted at; but persuasion was resorted to. Stephen, according to one authority, made humble submission, and thus "abated the rigour of ecclesiastical discipline."\* If he did submit, his submission was too late. Within a month Earl Robert and the Empress Matilda were in England.

Matilda and the earl of Gloucester landed at Arundel, where

\* Gesta Stephani.

the widow of Henry I. was dwelling. They had a very small force to support their pretensions. The earl crossed the country to Bristol. "All England was struck with alarm, and men's minds were agitated in various ways. Those who secretly or openly favoured the invaders were roused to more than usual activity against the king, while his own partisans were terrified as if a thunder-bolt had fallen."\* Stephen invested the castle of Arundel. But in the most romantic spirit of chivalry he permitted the empress to pass out, and to set forward to join her brother at Bristol, under a safe conduct. In 1140 the whole kingdom appears to have been subjected to the horrors of a partisan warfare. The barons in their castles were making a show of "defending their neighbourhoods, but, more properly to speak, were laying them waste." The legate and the bishops were excommunicating the plunderers of churches, but the plunderers laughed at their anathemas. Freebooters came over from Flanders, not to practise the industrial arts as in the time of Henry I., but to take their part in the general pillage. There was frightful scarcity in the country, and the ordinary interchange of man with man was unsettled by the debasement of the coin. "All things," says Malmesbury, "became venal in England; and churches and abbeys were no longer secretly but even publicly exposed to sale." All things become venal, under a government too weak to repress plunder or to punish corruption. The strong aim to be rich by rapine, and the cunning by fraud, when the confusion of a kingdom is grown so great that, as is recorded of this period, "the neighbour could put no faith in his nearest neighbour, nor the friend in his friend, nor the brother in his own brother." The demoralisation of anarchy is even more terrible than its bloodshed.

The marches and sieges, the revolts and treacheries of this evil time, are occasionally varied by incidents which illustrate the state of society. Robert Fitz-Herbert, with a detachment of the earl of Gloucester's soldiers, surprised the castle of Devizes, which the king had taken from the bishop of Salisbury. Robert Fitz-Herbert varies the atrocities of his fellow-barons, by rubbing his prisoners with honey, and exposing them naked to the sun. But Robert, having obtained Devizes, refused to admit the earl of Gloucester to any advantage of its possession, and commenced the subjection of the neighbourhood on his own account. Another crafty baron, John Fitz-Gilbert, held the castle of Marlborough; and Robert Fitz-Herbert, having an anxious desire to be lord of that castle

\* Malmesbury.

also, endeavouring to cajole Fitz-Gilbert into the admission of his followers, went there as a guest but was detained as a prisoner. Upon this the earl of Gloucester came in force for revenge against his treacherous ally, Fitz-Herbert, and conducting him to Devizes there hanged him. The surprise of Lincoln Castle, upon which the events of 1141 mainly turned, is equally characteristic of the age. Ranulf, earl of Chester, and William de Roumare, his half brother, were avowed friends of King Stephen. But their ambition took a new direction for the support of Matilda. The garrison of Lincoln had no apprehension of a surprise, and were busy in those sports which hardy men enjoy even amidst the rougher sport of war. The countess of Chester and her sister-in-law, with a politeness that the ladies of the court of Louis-le-Grand could not excel, paid a visit to the wife of the knight who had the defence of the castle. While there, at this pleasant morning call, "talking and joking" with the unsuspecting matron, as Ordericus relates, the earl of Chester came in, "without his armour or even his mantle," attended only by three soldiers. His courtesy was as flattering as that of his countess and her friend. But his men-at-arms suddenly mastered the unprepared guards, and the gates were thrown open to Earl William and his numerous followers. The earls, after this stratagem, held the castle against the king, who speedily marched to Lincoln. But the earl of Chester contrived to leave the castle, and soon raised a powerful army of his own vassals. The earl of Gloucester joined him with a considerable force, and they together advanced to the relief of the besieged city. The battle of Lincoln was preceded by a trifling incident to which the chroniclers have attached importance. It was the feast of the Purification; and at the mass which was celebrated at the dawn of day, when the king was holding a lighted taper in his hand it was suddenly extinguished. "This was an omen of sorrow to the king," says Hoveden. But another chronicler, the author of the "Gesta Stephani," tells us in addition, that the wax candle was suddenly relighted; and he accordingly argues that this incident was "a token that for his sins he should be deprived of his crown, but on his repentance, through God's mercy, he should wonderfully and gloriously recover it." The king had been more than a month laying siege to the castle, and his army was encamped around the city of Lincoln. When it was ascertained that his enemies were at hand he was advised to raise the siege, and march out to strengthen his power by a general levy. He decided upon instant battle. He was then ex-

horted not to fight on the solemn festival of the Purification. But his courage was greater than his prudence or his piety. He set forth to meet the insurgent earls. The best knights were in his army; but the infantry of his rivals was far more numerous. Stephen detached a strong body of horse and foot to dispute the passage of a ford of the Trent. But Gloucester by an impetuous charge obtained possession of the ford, and the battle became general.\* The king's horsemen fled. The desperate bravery of Stephen, and the issue of the battle, have been described by Henry of Huntingdon with singular animation:—"King Stephen, therefore, with his infantry, stood alone in the midst of the enemy. These surrounded the royal troops, attacking the columns on all sides, as if they were assaulting a castle. Then the battle raged terribly round this circle; helmets and swords gleamed as they clashed, and the fearful cries and shouts re-echoed from the neighbouring hills and city walls. The cavalry, furiously charging the royal column, slew some and trampled down others; some were made prisoners. No respite, no breathing time, was allowed; except in the quarter in which the king himself had taken his stand, where the assailants recoiled from the unmatched force of his terrible arm. The earl of Chester seeing this, and envious of the glory the king was gaining, threw himself upon him with the whole weight of his men-at-arms. Even then the king's courage did not fail, but his heavy battle-axe gleamed like lightning, striking down some, bearing back others. At length it was shattered by repeated blows. Then he drew his well-tried sword, with which he wrought wonders, until that, too, was broken. Perceiving which, William de Kaims, a brave soldier, rushed on him, and seizing him by his helmet, shouted, 'Here, here, I have taken the king!' Others came to his aid, and the king was made prisoner.†"

After the capture of king Stephen, at this brief but decisive battle, he was kept a close prisoner at Bristol Castle. Then commenced what might be called the reign of queen Matilda, which lasted about eight months. The defeat of Stephen was the triumph of the greater ecclesiastics. On the third Sunday in Lent, 1141, there was a conference on the plain in the neighbourhood of Winchester,—a day dark and rainy, which portended disasters.

\* Malmesbury's statement that the earl and his followers swam across the rapid Trent, swollen by rains, seems apocryphal.

† These incidents have been dramatised by Keats, in a spirited fragment printed in Mr. Monckton Milnes' "Life of Keats."

The bishop of Winchester came forth from his city, with all the pomp of the Pope's legate; and there Matilda swore that in all matters of importance, and especially in the bestowal of bishoprics and abbeyes, she would submit to the Church; and the bishop and his supporters pledged their faith to the empress on these conditions. After Easter, a great council was held at Winchester, which the bishop called as the Pope's vicegerent. The unscrupulous churchman boldly came forward, and denounced his brother, inviting the assembly to elect a sovereign; and, with an amount of arrogance totally unprecedented, thus asserted the notorious untruth that the right of electing a king of England principally belonged to the clergy: "The case was yesterday agitated before a part of the higher clergy of England, to whose right it principally pertains to elect the sovereign, and also to crown him. First, then, as is fitting, invoking God's assistance, we elect the daughter of that peaceful, that glorious, that rich, that good, and in our times incomparable king, as sovereign of England and Normandy, and promise her fidelity and support."\* The bishop then said to the applauding assembly, "We have despatched messengers for the Londoners, who, from the importance of their city in England are almost nobles, as it were, to meet us on this business." The next day the Londoners came. They were sent, they said, by their fraternity to entreat that their lord, the king, might be liberated from captivity. The legate refused them, and repeated his oration against his brother. It was a work of great difficulty to soothe the minds of the Londoners; and Saint John's day had arrived before they would consent to acknowledge Matilda. Many parts of the kingdom had then submitted to her government; and she entered London with great state. Her nature seems to have been rash and imperious. Her first act was to demand subsidies of the citizens; and when they said that their wealth was greatly diminished by the troubled state of the kingdom, she broke forth into insufferable rage. The vigilant queen of Stephen, who kept possession of Kent, now approached the city with a numerous force; and by her envoys demanded her husband's freedom. Of course her demand was made in vain. She then put forth a front of battle. Instead of being crowned at Westminster the daughter of Henry I. fled in terror; for "the whole city flew to arms at the ringing of the bells,

\* "Ventilata est causa, coram majori parte cleri Angliæ, ad cuius jus potissimum spectat principem eligere, simulque ordinare."—Malmesbury (who appears to have been present at this Council), "Modern History," book iii.

which was the signal for war, and all with one accord rose upon the countess [of Anjou] and her adherents, as swarms of wasps issue from their hives."\*

William Fitzstephen, the biographer of Thomas-à-Becket, in his "Description of London," supposed to be written about the middle of the reign of Henry II., says of this city, "ennobled by her men, graced by her arms and peopled by a multitude of inhabitants," that "in the wars under King Stephen there went out to a muster of armed horsemen, esteemed fit for war, twenty thousand, and of infantry, sixty thousand." In general, the "Description of London" appears trustworthy, and in some instances is supported by other authorities. But this vast number of fighting men must, unquestionably, be exaggerated: unless, as Lyttelton conjectures, such a muster included the militia of Middlesex, Kent, and other counties adjacent to London.† Peter of Blois, in the reign of Henry II., reckons the inhabitants of the city at forty thousand. That the citizens were trained to warlike exercises, and that their manly sports nurtured them in the hardihood of military habits, we may well conclude from Fitzstephen's account of this community at a little later period than that of which we are writing. To the north of the city were pasture lands, with streams on whose banks the clack of many mills was pleasing to the ear; and beyond was an immense forest, with densely wooded thickets, where stags, fallow-deer, boars, and wild bulls had their coverts. We have seen that in the Charter of Henry I., the citizens had liberty to hunt through a very extensive district, and hawking was also amongst their free recreations. Foot-ball was the favourite game; and the boys of the schools, and the various guilds of craftsmen, had each their ball. The elder citizens came on horseback to see these contests of the young men. Every Sunday in Lent, a company with lances and shields went out to joust. In the Easter holidays they had river tournaments. During the summer the youths exercised themselves in leaping, archery, wrestling, stone-throwing, slinging javelins, and fighting with bucklers. When the great marsh which washed the walls of the city on the north was frozen over, sliding, sledging, and skating were the sports of crowds. They had sham fights on the ice, and legs and arms were sometimes broken. "But," says Fitzstephen, "youth is an age eager for glory and desirous of victory, and so young men engage in counterfeit battles, that they may conduct themselves more valiantly in real ones."

\* Acta Stephani.

† Life of Henry II., vol. iii. p. 272

That universal love of hardy sports, which is one of the greatest characteristics of England, and from which we derive no little of that spirit which keeps our island safe, is not of modern growth. It was one of the most important portions of the education of the people seven centuries ago.

It was this community, then, so brave, so energetic, so enriched by commerce above all the other cities of England, that resolutely abided by the fortunes of King Stephen. They had little to dread from any hostile assaults of the rival faction; for the city was strongly fortified on all sides except to the river; but on that side it was secure, after the Tower was built. The palace of Westminster had also a breastwork and bastions. After Matilda had taken her hasty departure, the indignant Londoners marched out, and they sustained a principal part in what has been called "the rout of Winchester," in which Robert, earl of Gloucester, was taken prisoner. The ex-empress escaped to Devizes. The capture of the earl of Gloucester led to important results. A convention was agreed to between the adherents of each party that the king should be exchanged for the earl. Stephen was once more "every inch a king." But still there was no peace in the land.

The bishop of Winchester had again changed his side. In the hour of success the empress Matilda had refused the reasonable request that Prince Eustace, the son of Stephen, should be put in possession of his father's earldom of Boulogne. Malmesbury says, "A misunderstanding arose between the legate and the empress which may be justly considered as the melancholy cause of every subsequent evil in England." The chief actors in this extraordinary drama present a curious study of human character. Matilda, resting her claim to the throne upon her legitimate descent from Henry I., who had himself usurped the throne,—possessing her father's courage and daring, with some of his cruelty,—haughty, vindictive,—furnishes one of the most striking portraits of the proud lady of the feudal period, who shrank from no danger by reason of her sex, but made the homage of chivalry to woman a powerful instrument for enforcing her absolute will. The earl of Gloucester, the illegitimate brother of Matilda, brave, steadfast, of a free and generous nature, a sagacious counsellor, a lover of literature, appears to have had few of the vices of that age, and most of its elevating qualities. Of Stephen it has been said, "He deserves no other reproach than that of having embraced the occupation of a captain of banditti." This appears rather a harsh judg-

ment from a philosophical writer.\* Bearing in mind that the principle of election prevailed in the choice of a king, whatever was the hereditary claim, and seeing how welcome was the advent of Stephen when he came, in 1135, to avert the dangers of the kingdom, he merits the title of "a captain of banditti" no more than Harold, or William the Conqueror. After the contests of six years—the victories, the defeats, the hostility of the Church, his capture and imprisonment—the attachment of the people of the great towns to his person and government appears to have been unshaken. When he was defeated at Lincoln, and led captive through the city, "the surrounding multitude were moved with pity, shedding tears, and uttering cries of grief."† Ordericus says, "The king's disaster filled with grief the clergy and monks and the common people; because he was condescending and courteous to those who were good and quiet; and if his treacherous nobles had allowed it, he would have put an end to their rapacious enterprises, and been a generous protector and benevolent friend of the country." The fourth, and not least remarkable personage of this history, is Henry, the Bishop of Winchester, and the Pope's legate. At that period, when the functions of churchman and statesman were united, we find this man the chief instrument for securing the crown for his brother. He subsequently becomes the viceregent of the Papal See. Stephen, with more justice than discretion, is of opinion that bishops are not doing their duty when they build castles, ride about in armour with crowds of retainers, and are not at all scrupulous in appropriating some of the booty of a lawless time. From the day when he exhibited his hostility to fighting bishops, the Pope's legate was his brother's deadly enemy. But he found that the rival whom he had set up was by no means a pliant tool in his hands, and he then turned against Matilda. When Stephen had shaken off the chains with which he was loaded in Bristol Castle, the bishop summoned a council at Westminster, on his legatine authority; and there "by great powers of eloquence, endeavoured to extenuate the odium of his own conduct;" affirming that he had supported the empress, "not from inclination but necessity." He then "commanded on the part of God and of the Pope, that they should strenuously assist the king, appointed by the will of the people, and by the approbation of the Holy See." Malmesbury, who records these doings, adds that a layman sent from the empress affirmed that "her coming to England had been

\* Sir James Mackintosh.

† Acta Stephani.

effected by the legate's frequent letters;" and that "her taking the king, and holding him in captivity, had been done principally by his connivance." The reign of Stephen is not only "the most perfect condensation of all the ills of feudality," but affords a striking picture of the ills which befall a people when an ambitious hierarchy, swayed to and fro at the will of a foreign power, regards the supremacy of the Church as the one great object to be attained, at whatever expense of treachery and falsehood, of national degradation and general suffering.

In 1142 the civil war is raging more fiercely than ever. Matilda is at Oxford, a fortified city, protected by the Thames, by a wall, and by an impregnable castle. Stephen, with a body of veterans, wades across the river, and enters the city. Matilda and her followers take refuge in the keep. For three months the king presses the siege, surrounding the fortress on all sides. Famine is approaching to the helpless garrison. It is the Christmas season. The country is covered with a deep snow. The Thames and the tributary rivers are frozen over. With a small escort Matilda contrives to escape, and passes undiscovered through the royal posts, on a dark and silent night, when no sound is heard but the clang of a trumpet or the challenge of a sentinel. In the course of the night she went to Abingdon on foot, and afterwards reached Wallingford on horseback. The author of the "Gesta Stephani" expresses his wonder at the marvellous escapes of this courageous woman. The changes of her fortune are equally remarkable. After the flight from Oxford the arms of the Earl of Gloucester are again successful. Stephen is beaten at Wilton, and retreats precipitately with his military brother, the Bishop of Winchester. There is now in the autumn of 1142 universal turmoil and desolation. Many people emigrate. Others crowd round the sanctuary of the churches, and dwell there in mean hovels. Famine is general. Fields are white with ripened corn, but the cultivators have fled, and there are none to gather the harvest. Cities are deserted and depopulated. Fierce foreign mercenaries, for whom the barons have no pay, pillage the farms and the monasteries. The bishops, for the most part, rest supine amidst all this storm of tyranny. When they rouse themselves they increase rather than mitigate the miseries of the people. Milo, Earl of Hereford, has demanded money of the Bishop of Hereford to pay his troops. The bishop refuses, and Milo seizes his lands and goods. The bishop then pronounces sentence of excommunication against Milo

and his adherents, and lays an interdict upon the country subject to the earl's authority. We might hastily think that the solemn curse pronounced against a nation, or a district, was an unmeaning ceremony, with its "bell, book, and candle" to terrify only the weak-minded. It was one of the most outrageous of the numerous ecclesiastical tyrannies. The consolations of religion were eagerly sought for and justly prized by the great body of the people, who earnestly believed that a happy future would be a reward for the patient endurance of a miserable present. As they were admitted to the Holy Communion, they recognised an acknowledgment of the equality of men before the great Father of all. Their marriages were blessed and their funerals were hallowed. Under an interdict all the churches were shut. No knell was tolled for the dead; for the dead remained unburied. No merry peals welcomed the bridal procession; for no couple could be joined in wedlock. The awe-stricken mother might have her infant baptised, and the dying might receive extreme unction. But all public offices of the Church were suspended. If we imagine such a condition of society in a village devastated by fire and sword, we may wonder how a free government and a Christian church have ever grown up amongst us.

If Stephen had quietly possessed the throne, and his heir had succeeded him, the crowns of England and Normandy would have been disconnected before the thirteenth century. Geoffrey of Anjou, whilst his duchess was in England, had become master of Normandy, and its nobles had acknowledged his son Henry as their rightful duke. The boy was in England, under the protection of the Earl of Gloucester, who attended to his education. The great earl died in 1147. For a few years there had been no decided contest between the forces of the king and the empress. After eight years of terrible hostility, and of desperate adventure, Matilda left the country. Stephen made many efforts to control the licence of the barons, but with little effect. He was now engaged in another quarrel with the Church. His brother had been superseded as legate by Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, in consequence of the death of the Pope who had supported the Bishop of Winchester. Theobald was Stephen's enemy, and his hostility was rendered formidable by his alliance with Bigod, the Earl of Norfolk. The archbishop excommunicated Stephen and his adherents, and the king was enforced to submission. In 1150, Stephen having been again reconciled to the Church, sought the recognition of his

son Eustace as the heir to the kingdom. This recognition was absolutely refused by the archbishop, who said that Stephen was regarded by the papal see as an usurper. But time was preparing a solution of the difficulties of the kingdom. Henry of Anjou was grown into manhood. Born in 1133, he had been knighted by his uncle, David of Scotland, in 1149. His father died in 1151, and he became not only Duke of Normandy, but Earl of Anjou, Touraine, and Maine. In 1152, he contracted a marriage of ambition with Eleanor, the divorced wife of Louis of France, and thus became Lord of Aquitaine and Poitou, which Eleanor possessed in her own right. Master of all the western coast of France, from the Somme to the Pyrenees, with the exception of Brittany, his ambition, thus strengthened by his power, prepared to dispute the sovereignty of England with better hopes than ever waited on his mother's career. He landed with a well-appointed band of followers in 1153, and besieged various castles. But no general encounter took place. The king and the duke had a conference, without witnesses, across a rivulet, and this meeting prepared the way for a final pacification. The negotiators were Henry, the bishop, on the one part, and Theobald, the archbishop, on the other. Finally Stephen led the prince in solemn procession through the streets of Winchester, "and all the great men of the realm, by the king's command, did homage, and pronounced the fealty due to their liege lord, to the Duke of Normandy, saving only their allegiance to King Stephen during his life."\* Stephen's son Eustace had died during the negotiations. The troublesome reign of Stephen was soon after brought to a close. He died on the 25th October, 1154. His constant and heroic queen had died three years before him.

\* Henry of Huntingdon.

## CHAPTER XIX.

Henry II. crowned.—Establishment of order.—Parentage of Becket.—Becket chancellor.—Character of Henry.—Becket ambassador to France.—Malcolm of Scotland.—Invasion of Wales.—Description of the Welsh.—Wars on the Continent.—Becket archbishop of Canterbury.—Character of Becket.

AFTER the long troubles of the reign of Stephen, it was not without hope of a quiet future that the people of England saw a young man enter upon the kingly office with an undisputed title. In those days when history, for the great mass of the community, was little more than imperfect tradition, it would still be handed down to the Anglo-Saxon people that for nearly two hundred years, since the days of King Ethelred, the succession to the throne had been ever doubtful. The Danish power had snatched the crown from the race of Alfred for a third of a century. It was restored to the ancient line for a short period; and then came another conquest, which had extinguished all chance of any other than a foreign rule, till time should confound the distinctions of birth and language. But of three successors of the Conqueror who had ruled England for sixty-seven years, no one had worn the crown by a clear hereditary right. At last one had arisen whose claim none could dare to controvert. The daughter of Henry I., indeed, was alive, and had the same title to the throne which she had so strenuously asserted in the reign of Stephen. But the convention with that king established the right of her son Henry II., beyond the possibility of any new contention. Henry was in Normandy when Stephen died; and it was six weeks after that death before he arrived in England. He was crowned at Westminster, on the 19th of December, 1154—the first king of the Plantagenet race, which ruled England for more than three centuries.

At the time of his accession Henry II. was twenty-one years of age. His reign extended over thirty-five years. It was a memorable period, in which, although the government was essentially despotic, there was a decided advance in the equal administration of justice, and in the subjection of a cruel and turbulent