

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



aristocracy to the consolidated power of an energetic and intellectual king. The personal character of Henry gives a distinctive colour to the events of his reign, and especially in his great contest to maintain the supremacy of the civil power over the ecclesiastical. The brilliant morning of his life, compared with its dark and stormy evening, lends, also, a dramatic interest to this portion of our history. There is a remarkable unity in the whole story; and in following it out in its exhibition of individual passions and aspirations, we shall best evolve the characteristics of the age.

To repair the evils of the reign of Stephen required in the new government the rare union of vigour and moderation. Though a young man of strong passions, Henry held over them the control of a firm will and a commanding intellect. He went steadily to his great work of substituting law and order for violence and confusion. He expelled the foreign mercenaries by whom the people had been grievously plundered. He demolished the castles which had been the hiding-places of privileged robbers. He recovered those lands of the crown which had been improvidently alienated by Stephen. He abolished the private mints which had been as numerous as the castles, and claimed the exclusive sovereign right of issuing a new coinage. Much of this counter revolution required to be effected by military force; but the arduous labour appears to have been carried through with little injustice and less cruelty. He had an able grand-justiciary in the Earl of Leicester; and the counsels of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, were those of conciliation and peace. In his own person he attended vigilantly to the administration of justice. "He did not sit still in his palace, as most other kings do, but going over the provinces examined into the actions of his subjects, chiefly forming his judgment of those whom he had appointed the judges of others."\* The chancellor of Henry, who became the most influential of his advisers, was Thomas-à-Becket.

Gilbert Becket was a citizen of London in the reign of Henry I. His son Thomas was born there in 1119. Romantic as are the vicissitudes of the career of this extraordinary man, there is also a romance attached to the lives of his father and mother, which monkish legend has embodied and sober history has not rejected.†

\* Peter of Blois.

† Lord Campbell, in his "Lives of the Chancellors," is indignant with Turner and Thierry telling the story of "Gilbert," which he calls "deluding their readers." He should have included Macintosh amongst the deluders. Are all Lord Campbell's stories "evidence?" May we ask where Lord Campbell finds that "racing, hunting, and

Gilbert Becket was in the Holy Land after the first Crusade, when the pilgrim might journey to Jerusalem without restraint. But Gilbert in his wanderings fell into the hands of a Saracen, and was held by him in long captivity. The misbeliever took a pleasure in the society of the Englishman; and the Emir's daughter bore towards him a tenderer regard. Gilbert by her aid escaped, and returned to London. A few years after, in that commercial city, to whose quays ships came from the East laden with silks and spices and frankincense, a lady was wandering through its streets and markets, who could utter no intelligible words but "London" and "Gilbert;" and so she moved on, a desolate stranger, with those sounds of fond remembrance only on her lips. Gilbert and the beautiful oriental at last met. She became Becket's wife, and the mother of his famous son. The story is found in Brompton, one of our early chroniclers. The character of Thomas-à-Becket is not inconsistent with the belief that he came of parents from whom he might derive that union of enthusiastic impulse which belonged to a Syrian mother, and of unbending obstinacy which was the characteristic of an Anglo-Saxon father.

Thomas-à-Becket received his early education at the Abbey of Merton. In the schools of London he was trained in that intellectual gladiatorship which was as remarkable as the military sports of the citizens. The disputations of these schools have been amusingly described by Fitz-Stephen. On festival days the scholars assembled in the churches, and there contended, with logical precision or rhetorical sophistry. Like many modern orators, they were "deemed clever according to their fluency of speech." They wrangled about mood and tense; assailed each other with bitter epigram and Socratic wit; and spared not even great personages in their scoffs and sarcasms. To complete his accomplishments young Becket went to Paris, and there he acquired, what was as important to his advancement as philosophy and divinity, a perfect mastery of the French language and a thorough conquest of the unhappy English accent which marked the still despised Saxon race. He returned to England with more chivalric accomplishments than entirely befitted his clerical vocation. His abilities soon commanded attention, and he re-

hawking were amusements forbidden to the Saxons?" The Forest Laws limited the chase to certain classes, whether Norman or Saxon; but the citizens of London had their especial privilege of hunting-grounds, and, therefore, Becket need not have earned the good graces of a Norman baron to be allowed to hunt, as Lord Campbell intimates.



ceived valuable benefices from Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, and became archdeacon of that diocese. By him he was employed in two difficult negotiations at Rome, one of which was to obtain a papal bull against any bishop officiating at the coronation of Eustace, the son of Stephen. When Henry II. became king this service brought Becket into favour. He had all the qualifications of a courtier—a fine person, a cultivated mind, a pleasing address, a disposition to engage in the revelry and sports in which nobles delighted, and which ecclesiastics were not severe to shun. That he was the companion of the king, when he went forth with his hounds and hawks, we may believe without attributing to him any disposition to partake the licentiousness in which the Norman kings too frequently indulged. After a short period, he was appointed chancellor. This position placed him about the king's person as the sealer of his writs, and as his secretary and adviser. Hoveden, writing under the date of 1157, says, "The said king, by the advice and entreaty of Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, conferred the chancellorship upon Thomas, archdeacon of Canterbury, and bestowed upon him many revenues, both ecclesiastical, and of a secular nature, and received him so much into his esteem and familiarity, that throughout the kingdom there was no one his equal; save the king alone." Lord Campbell, with a too ready acquiescence in the belief that all the Saxons were still aliens and serfs, says, "We may imagine the joy of the Saxon race in witnessing his elevation." The biographer of the chancellors, who has carefully looked at Lyttelton for his account of Becket, passes over the remarkable quotation which Lyttelton gives from a contemporary author, Ailredus, who says that England had now, in the middle of the twelfth century, "not only a king, but many bishops and abbots, many great earls and noble knights, who, being descended both from the Norman and English blood, were an honour to the one, and a comfort to the other." Had it been otherwise—had the Saxon race been as jealous of the Norman as if ninety years had made no change in their position and their feelings—we may imagine that the elevation of a Saxon who had adopted the Norman language; wore the Norman dress; eagerly sought all the Norman privileges, as an inmate of great houses, when he was young; and now indulged in all the Norman luxuries of delicate meats and rich wines, and displayed his gold and silver vessels in the eyes of earls and barons—we may imagine that his countrymen and fellow-citizens would regard

him as an alien and an upstart, rather than as a representative of their race, and an advocate of their rights. The ostentation of this favourite of the young king, if we are to believe Fitz-Stephen, was as remarkable as that of Wolsey, in a later age. His rooms, after the homely fashion which lasted for centuries, were covered with clean straw and hay in winter, and with clean rushes and boughs in summer. But they glittered with the rude magnificence of rich furniture, amidst which the chancellor and his retainers moved in sumptuous apparel, and sate at costly banquets. These demonstrations of wealth and hospitality were common to many of the privileged classes. But when we are told that "many nobles and knights paid homage to the chancellor, which he received with a saving of their allegiance to the king," and "he then maintained and supported them as their patron," we may suspect Fitz-Stephen of a little of that exaggeration which tempted him to assign eighty thousand fighting men to London. There is a little inconsistency, too, about the relation of Becket's excessive familiarity with Henry: "Serious business being finished, the king and he consorted as young comrades of the same station—whether in the palace, in church, in private society, or in excursions on horseback." Young comrades they certainly were not. Hoveden gives the date 1157 as that of Becket's elevation to the chancellorship. Becket was then thirty-eight years of age—Henry twenty-four. Henry is recorded by Fitz-Stephen to have pulled Becket's scarlet cloak from his back to give to a beggar in the public streets. But Becket was neither a young comrade, nor of the same station as the author of the practical joke. The incident is related to show the excessive favour with which Becket was regarded, and how he and the king stood in the relation of equal friends. Kings, even to very recent times, have indulged in this horse-play with their table companions. But Henry was not a man to encourage such dangerous familiarity. We have a very minute picture of this king at a later period of his life, but before he had lost the alacrity of spirit which was as much a portion of his nature as his solid understanding and inflexible will. He is of middle size, inclined to corpulency, if he had not subdued the tendency by constant exercise. His head is spherical. His hair, slightly red, is not scant, but it is closely cut, and is now touched with grey. His face is lion-like, and almost square. His round eyes are gentle in his moods of calm, but when he is angry they flash fire. His broad chest and brawny arms proclaim his strength and activity. His feet are arched, and his shins



like a horse's. His ungloved hands are coarse from constant exposure; and his legs are bruised by the kicks of the wild steeds that he rides. He stands on his feet from morning to night, when engaged in business; but if his plans require his presence he will make in one day a journey that would usually occupy four or five days, and tires out the strongest man by his excursions. His dress is of the plainest character—no peaked boots or flowing mantles, but all tight and serviceable. No one is shrewder in council, readier in speaking, more self-possessed in danger, more careful in prosperity, more firm in adversity. His court is a daily school, where he constantly discusses hard questions, and obtains a knowledge from learned men. His moderation in eating and drinking is habitual. No one is more gentle and affable to the poor and distressed; but no one is more overbearing to the proud. By the carriage of himself like a deity, it has always been his study to put down the insolent, to encourage the oppressed, and to repress the swellings of pride by continual and deadly persecution. If this portrait be true to the life, we can scarcely reconcile the character of the Plantagenet with the indulgence of those undignified freedoms towards Becket, which assume that the king had no self-respect, and had no desire to make the ministers of his power respected by his subjects. Still less can we reconcile that character with the accredited stories of his disposition to pamper the "unbounded stomach" of his chancellor. Henry sent Becket to the court of France to contract an alliance of marriage with his eldest son and the daughter of the French king. We can understand how Becket would naturally have been accompanied by a splendid retinue, and have the means of making lavish gifts. But according to Fitz-Stephen, he took with him two hundred knights and nobles, forming his body-guard, with a train amounting altogether to a thousand persons—marching through the towns of France with laden waggons and sumpter horses, bearing coffers of money and plate, and holy vessels of his chapel, with the strange accompaniments of a monkey on each horse; whilst two hundred and fifty pages sang verses, and standards waved, and esquires bore the shields of the knights, and soldiers and priests rode two and two. All this pomp appears to be rather more for the honour of the sovereign's representative, than a sovereign who studied to put down the insolent and repress the swellings of pride would be willing to encourage. Henry himself was a hater of pomp and ceremony; and we doubt whether he would readily have borne the ex-

pense of this display for the barren gratification of hearing that the French people exclaimed, "How wonderful must be the King of England himself, whose chancellor travels in such state." A little later in Becket's history we find that he raised a force of seven hundred knights at his own expense, and marched at their head to the siege of Toulouse; and in a subsequent campaign we learn that the chancellor, beside seven hundred knights of his own family, had under his command twelve hundred cavalry, whom he had taken into pay, and four thousand infantry, for the space of forty days. In five years, then, we see an adventurer, a deacon only in the Church, and therefore an ecclesiastic who might, without offence, be a courtier and a soldier, and indulge in the license of courts and camps,—we see this London citizen having earls to do him homage, and knights to follow in his train. Exaggerated as all this may be, a love of display was a part of his character. He did everything for effect, at every period of his life. Of unbounded ambition, of overbearing pride, and we will venture to believe of very doubtful honesty, he followed for eight years the path of secular greatness, having the confidence of the king in his undoubted ability, and securing that confidence by his agreeable qualities. His predilections were not in the least towards that Church of which he received the revenues almost in the capacity of lay-impropriator. When the bishops and abbots, who had declined the old personal service in the field as barons, refused to pay a commutation-tax, Becket, as chancellor, enforced their submission. He then laughed at the threat of excommunication. He had the profits of his Church preferments, and he cared for little more. Archdeacon of Canterbury, Dean of Hastings, Provost of Beverley, Prebendary of many stalls, he had an interest in the Church; but he had little love for the essentials of religion. Undazzled with the power and ambition of this man, we as yet see only the unscrupulous favourite of a king who was too wise long to trust himself to favourites.

The first seven years of Henry's reign were not without the vicissitudes of policy and the difficulties of war. His continental dominions made him a dangerous rival to his feudal superior, the King of France; and he aimed at the extension of his power rather than its concentration. Normandy was his, by the same right as England. He derived the sovereignty of Aquitaine from his marriage. His father was Count of Anjou, Maine, and Touraine; and he would have lawfully inherited these possessions had he not sworn that he would perform every article of his father's will. One



article was that he should resign these territories to his younger brother, Geoffrey, should Henry obtain possession of England. Henry applied to the Roman see to give him a dispensation from his oath, which he said he had blindly taken; and the obsequious pontiff granted the formidable king's desire. Geoffrey was not so easily satisfied, and assembled an army; but his brother quickly subjected him, and gave him a pension to compensate for the loss of his coronet. Henry did homage to Louis, of France, for all these vast possessions; and Louis "had reason to tremble" whilst he received Henry's fealty.\*

On his return to England in 1157, the king, not unnaturally sought to recover that power which England had lost to Scotland during the reign of Stephen. The counties of Cumberland and Northumberland had passed into the possession of the Scottish crown, either as fiefs or by especial grant. There was an oath in the way of their resumption, which had been imposed upon Henry when a youth under the protection of his great-uncle, the Scottish king. But the surrender of the northern counties, which Henry demanded, could not be resisted; and the young king Malcolm also did homage to Henry for Lothian. This homage, according to Sir Walter Scott, "was done by the Scottish kings for Lothian, simply because it had been a part or moiety of Northumberland ceded by Eadulf Cudel, a Saxon earl of Northumberland, to Malcolm II., on condition of amity and support in war, for which, as feudal institutions gained ground, feudal homage was the natural substitute and emblem." †

But there was a part of the British dominions which did not promise so easy a settlement of ancient rivalries as in the case of Scotland. Wales, during the contest between Stephen and Matilda, had, under brave chieftains, recovered much of its ancient territory from the English. It was the policy of Henry's government to obliterate the remembrance of the evil time that had interposed between the reign of his grandfather and his own accession. To assert the authority of England over the Welsh princes was a part of this policy. In 1157, the king led a powerful army into Flintshire. He had previously strengthened the Flemish colony of sturdy artisans in Pembrokeshire, who had maintained their ground against the Welsh till the end of the reign of Stephen. When Henry marched into North Wales, to encounter the chief Owen

\* Daniel, quoted in Lyttelton, vol. ii. p. 316.

† "History of Scotland," in "Lardner's Cyclopædia," vol. i. p. 36.

Gwynneth, Owen was encamped at Basingwerk. Henry, somewhat rashly, entered a narrow and woody defile, called Eulo, near Coleshill, in the parish of Holywell. The Welsh, with all the advantage of local knowledge, routed the king's forces. Henry then marched along the coast, but gained no advantage, because "he was principally advised by people remote from the marches, and ignorant of the manners and customs of the natives." Thus writes Giraldus de Barri, called Giraldus Cambrensis, who accompanied Archbishop Baldwin to preach the Crusade in Wales, 1188, and has given us a description of the country and its inhabitants. Very unimportant changes would have been effected in the social condition of the people in thirty years after Henry II. went upon his first expedition; and we may therefore, with this authority, here take a general view of these interesting descendants of the early Britons.

Giraldus, in his journey from Radnor through the district between the Wye and the Usk, sees lands abounding with grain, and well stored with pastures and woods. There are salmon and trout in the rivers, and there are wild and domestic animals. The people are perpetually engaged in bloody conflicts; though churches are numerous. The ploughman sings to his oxen as they work, and the maidens spin the thread and throw the shuttle. At Lanthoni Abbey the monks, sitting in their cloisters, look upon the mountains, with herds of wild deer feeding on their summits. At Caerleon, near Newport, he saw the vestiges of Roman architectural magnificence—temples and theatres, vaults and aqueducts, and stoves contrived with wonderful art. Keeping near the coast from Llandaff, the cavalcade crossed the sands by the estuary of the Nith, which Giraldus calls the most dangerous and inaccessible river in South Wales; and here his pack-horse sank in the quick-sands, but was happily extricated, without the loss of the books which he bore. Swansea then had its castle, at which the pilgrims slept; but there was no sound of industry, and the mineral riches of that region lay hidden. At Haverford, Giraldus takes occasion to speak of the Flemings,—a people well versed in commerce and woollen manufactures—a hardy race, equally fitted for the plough or the sword—who inhabited this province of Ros. Menorbeer, a small village on the coast between Tenbigh and Pembroke, the birth-place of Giraldus, is affectionately described by him as the pleasantest spot in Wales. Journeying from St. David's to Cardigan, he records the marvels of the Teivi, where the salmon leap up



a river cataract, falling from a height equal to the longest spear. But the Teivi has a greater curiosity in natural history. It is the only river in Wales, or even in England, which has beavers. In Scotland they are said to be found, he remarks, in one river only. His description of the beaver's habits differs little from the observations of more accurate naturalists. Merionethshire is the rudest and roughest district of all Wales; and here the people display the military attribute of North Wales, in throwing a long lance with prodigious power, whilst those of the South excel in the use of the bow. As he journeys on to Caernarvon he hears the woodpecker, but the nightingale is never heard. Mona (Anglesea) contains three hundred and forty-three villages; and, though a dry and stony land, is so fertile in corn, as to be called "the mother of Wales." Crossing the Dee below Chester, he proceeds into Powys. In this district there is a breed of horses of remarkable fleetness, deriving their origin from Spanish horses brought into these parts by Robert de Belèsme, earl of Shrewsbury. The archbishop and his train, having thus made the circuit of the country by the coast and border lands, with little observation of the interior, reach the point from which they set out, having signed three thousand men with the cross, well skilled in the use of arrows and lances. Let us glean a few particulars of these people from the "Description of Wales," by the same writer.

Light and active, hardy rather than strong, the nation universally is trained to arms. Flesh is consumed by the people more than bread, with milk, cheese, and butter. With this pastoral character, having little agriculture, they are always ready for war; and they have neither commerce nor manufactures. They fish with the little wicker boats which they carry to their rivers. Lightly armed with small breastplates, helmets, and shields, they attack their mailed foes with lance and arrow. They have some cavalry, but the marshy nature of the soil compels the greater number to fight on foot. Abstemious both in food and drink, frugal, and capable of bearing great privations, they watch their enemies through the cold and stormy nights, always bent upon defence or plunder. Their hospitality is universal; for the houses of all are common to all. The conversation of the young women, and the music of the harp, give a charm to their humble fare; and no jealousy interferes with the freedom with which a stranger is welcomed by the females of the household. When the evening meal is finished, a bed of rushes is placed in the side of the room, and

all without distinction lie down to sleep. The men and women cut their hair close round to the ears and eyes; and the men shave all their beard except the whiskers. Of their white teeth they are particularly careful. They are of an acute intellect, and excel in whatever studies they pursue. They have three musical instruments, the harp, the pipe, and the crowd; and their performances are executed with such celerity and delicacy of modulation, that they produce a perfect consonance from the rapidity of seemingly discordant touches. Their bards, in their rhymed songs, and their orators, in their set speeches, make use of alliteration in preference to all other ornament. In their musical concerts they do not sing in unison, but in many different parts; and it is unusual to hear a simple melody well sung. The heads of families think it their duty to amuse their guests by their facetiousness. The highest, as well as the lowest of the people, have a remarkable boldness and confidence in speaking and answering; and their natural warmth of temper is distinguished from the English coldness of disposition. They have many soothsayers amongst them. Noble birth, and generous descent, they esteem above all things. Even the common people retain genealogy. They revenge with vehemence any injuries which may tend to the disgrace of their blood, whether an ancient or a recent affront. They are universally devout, and they show a greater respect than other nations to churches and ecclesiastical persons, and especially revere relics of saints. Giraldus, having described at much length the particulars which redound to the credit of the British nation (for so he calls the Welsh), then proceeds to those things which pass the line of encomium. The people, he says, are inconstant, and regardless of any covenant. They commit acts of plunder, not only against foreigners and hostile nations, but against their own countrymen. Bold in their warlike onsets, they cannot bear a repulse, and trust to flight for safety; but defeated one day, they are ready to resume the conflict on the next. Their ancient national custom of dividing property amongst all the brothers of a house leads to perpetual contest for possessions, and frequent fratricides. They constantly intermarry within the forbidden degrees, uniting themselves to their own people, presuming on their own superiority of blood and family; and they rarely marry without previous cohabitation. Their churches have almost as many parties and parsons as there are principal men in the parish; the sons, after the decease of the father, succeed to the ecclesiastical benefices, not by election, but by assumed hered-



itary right. Finally, in setting forth how this people is to be subdued, and preserved to the English crown, Giraldus says that from the pride and obstinacy of their dispositions they will not, like other nations, subject themselves to the dominion of one lord and king. How long a time it was before that subjection was even imperfectly accomplished, will be seen as we proceed in our narrative.\*

It is not within the scope of this history, nor would it add greatly to its interest, to follow out the negotiations and wars in which the Norman princes were engaged with regard to their continental dominions. Henry II., having a larger extent of territory to defend, and a stronger disposition to acquire more, than any of his predecessors, had at this period abundant need of his talent and energy. His pretensions to Toulouse roused the hostility of Louis of France. Becket was his boldest adviser in this war; for he counselled Henry to take Toulouse by assault, and secure Louis as his prisoner. Henry had scruples about a direct attack on his feudal superior, and resisted the dangerous counsel. He went to Normandy, and then Becket, in company with Henry, Earl of Essex, stormed castles and fought battles with his own hundreds of knights and thousands of mercenaries. It would be difficult to say how the people of England were governed in the absence of the king and his favourite chancellor, if we placed implicit credit in the common opinion that Becket, in England, presided in the *Aula Regis*, superintended the domestic administration of the kingdom, was preceptor to the king's sons, and altogether the great master-spirit of the government. We believe that he was a most convenient instrument in the hands of the sagacious king—having one heart, and one mind, as Peter of Blois writes—because the chancellor was wholly moulded by the inflexible regal will, as long as he stood in a position of dependence. Whether he partook Henry's pleasures, assumed his port and state as an ambassador, or fought his battles as a military chief, the ambitious deacon was still a servant, and, in all probability, subject to the passionate outbursts of a lord who is described as "a lamb when in good humour, but a lion, or worse than a lion, when seriously angry."† The capricious energy of the king was often most harassing to his courtiers. He would announce his intention to take a journey in three days, and

\* We have condensed this view of Wales and the Welsh of the twelfth century from the two volumes of Giraldus, translated by Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

† Peter of Blois.

would start the next morning at daybreak, when every one must start with him; and therefore the good Peter of Blois thus prays,—“Make him know that he is a man, and let him have and practise the grace of royal bounty and kindness to those who are compelled to follow him, not from ambition but from necessity.” It is not difficult to understand how the haughty spirit of Becket would silently rebel under this servile yoke. But wealth flowed in upon him. In addition to his vast pluralities in the Church, he was warden of the Tower, and had other lay offices. But the time of his life was come when the desire of power is a stronger motive than the excitement of acquiring riches or the seduction of luxurious gratifications. Becket, in 1162, was forty-three years of age. Henry, upon the death of Theobald, the archbishop of Canterbury, had offered his chancellor the primacy. He, known only in the Church as a deacon, never having discharged any clerical office—a soldier more than a priest—one who had devoted himself rather to hunting and falconry than to the study of the scriptures—for so runs a protest against Becket's appointment—was not exactly the man to raise the honour of a Church against whose corruptions that spirit of satire which is most dangerous under repression had already burst forth. There was a certain Walter Mapes living in those times, who is popularly known as the writer of a drinking-song, but who was one of many who from the days of Henry II. poured out his scholarly invective in bitter rhymes against the corruptions of the monastic orders, and the encroachments of the ecclesiastical power. A Latin poem, ascribed to Walter Mapes, entitled “*Apocalypsis Goliæ*,” describes the Pope as a lion that thirsts after gold,—the bishop as a calf that feeds on other men's pastures,—the archdeacon as an eagle that sees afar off his prey,—the dean with the shape of a man, but full of fraud and deceit. The satires of the days of the Revolution were thus preceded by those of the twelfth century.\* Did Becket cast off the sleeved cloak of the gay courtier, to put on the hair-shirt of the penitent archbishop, that he might effect that change in the Church which in moderating her worldly pretensions would have increased her spiritual power over the hearts and consciences of men? The dignity of the primacy was forced upon him, it is said. Henry knew that he had a great battle to fight against an authority out of his realm which claimed to hold in subjection the mightiest order within his realm. The

\* See the “Latin Poems attributed to Walter Mapes,” published by the Camden Society.



civil power, too, had been gradually encroached upon by the ecclesiastical, for nearly a century. The first William, in separating the civil and ecclesiastical tribunals, had made a political mistake. In the abuse of that separation, those who belonged to the priesthood were not subject to the laws of the state for the punishment of crime. They claimed to be tried by their own courts, and those courts were partial. The inequality required adjustment; and Becket was chosen as Henry's reliable agent, to bring the Church within the bounds of its lawful authority and influence.

There is nothing more difficult than to form an impartial judgment of the men of a past age, if we do not wholly lay aside the tests which we apply to the motives and principles of the men of our own age. Lord Campbell, in speaking of the sincerity of Becket's devotion to the Church, says: "Let us consider the sudden effect of the touch of the mitre on men of honour in our own time." How can such a comparison in the least enable us to understand the case of Becket? A newly-created bishop may give a vote against the minister who raised him, with perfect satisfaction to his own conscience. But Becket, in accepting the primacy, must have thoroughly known that he must take one of two courses—either to be a moderator between the State and the Church, or to precipitate the Church into a contest with the State. His biographer, Fitz-Stephen, relates that Becket thought he should be driven, if he accepted the primacy, to lose the king's favour, or to sacrifice the service of God. It is said that the king's mother warned her son that Becket would become a rival, and disturb the peace of the kingdom. Becket paused a year before he accepted the archbishopric. What struggles must that mind have undergone before he resolved to enter upon that dangerous course which his enthusiasm saw before him! After his election and consecration, he resigned his office of chancellor, to the great offence of the king. Through that common mistake of judging extraordinary men and actions by a familiar standard, an acute historian writes, "By continuing to flatter the king's wishes, and by uniting in himself the offices of chancellor and archbishop, he might, in all probability, have ruled without control both in Church and State."\* What would such a rule have been to Becket? There were two thrones to be filled in England, as we venture to interpret the views of the archbishop—the throne of Canterbury and the throne of Westminster. It was

\* Lingard, "History of England," vol. ii. chap. 5.

not with him a question of revenue, a question of self-gratification, a question of the best management of a mixed and subordinate power. He well knew the character of the man with whom he should have to contend. He had a just estimate of the strength of the nobles who would be banded against him. But the authority of the universal Church had already made kings hold the Pope's stirrup; and Gregory VII. had excommunicated an emperor of Germany, and compelled him to wait his pleasure, for three winter days, in his outer courts, with all the humiliation of naked feet and the penitent's woollen shirt. What Pope Gregory was in the eleventh century, Pope Alexander would be in the twelfth, if Henry were contumacious. It was no vulgar ambition that precipitated a contest in which the Saxon priest should defy the Norman king, and make all Christendom look on with wonder at his courage and unequalled self-reliance. Coleridge calls this contest "the struggle between the men of arms and of letters, in the persons of Henry and Becket."\* The poetical critic suggests this as the subject of a drama. But a true historical play would not marshal a fiery king and an ignorant nobility on one side, and a mild prelate and a learned clergy on the other. It would show an almost unprecedented battle between a wise and accomplished statesman, strong in the possession of powers almost despotic, and a most fearless and proud ecclesiastic, confident in his own intellectual strength, and fortified by the support of his spiritual superior. The two great principles upon which the world was to be governed had come into mortal conflict, instead of each moderating the other, and harmonising for the common good. The men of arms and the men of letters looked on with fear and wonder.

\* "Literary Remains," vol. ii. p. 162. 8vo.