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THE NORMANS
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Finding Out About THE NORMANS

by

R. E. LATHAM

Illustrated by

ELIZABETH HAMMOND

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SETTING THE SCENE

THE NORMANS were the descendants of Norsemen, or Northmen, who settled about the year A.D. 900 in the district of northern France that has been known ever since as Normandy, and of the local inhabitants with whom they intermarried.

The settlers quickly adopted the language and customs of their new home. But for some three hundred years the Normans remained a distinct people with their own rulers and with a distinctive Norman character which is described in remarkably similar terms by all who had to do with them, whether as friends or foes. This, for instance, is how they struck an Italian monk, Geoffrey Malaterra, who knew them well in Sicily and on the whole admired them:

The Normans as a race are crafty, vengeful, fired by the hope of greater gains elsewhere to scorn their ancestral fields, greedy for wealth and lordship, adept at acting any part, steering a middle course between the open hand and the close fist, though their rulers are exceedingly open-handed through love of renown. They are gifted flatterers, so practised in eloquence that you will find them even as children quite fluent
orators. Unless tightly curbed by the yoke of justice, they are utterly ungovernable. When it is to their advantage, they do not mind toil, starvation or cold. They are devoted to hunting and hawking and take delight in horses and other accoutrements of warfare and in magnificent apparel.

More recent historians have said that they combined the roving, adventurous spirit of their Viking ancestors with something like the Roman genius for discipline, organization, and diplomacy. Certainly they were the most successful empire-builders of their age. Before we look more closely at this remarkable people, let us try to get a spaceman's view of the world on which they made their mark.

Scene from the Bayeux Tapestry: Normans hunting and hawking
We must not picture Europe in the tenth century as consisting, like Europe in the twentieth, of a patchwork of separate states whose boundaries could be clearly drawn on a map. For five hundred years there had been few fixed frontiers and not much stable government anywhere. It is hardly surprising that much of the picture consists of ruined towns and neglected fields overgrown with woodland or heath.

Far in the east the flag-end of the ancient Roman Empire still kept up a stubborn rearguard action against barbarian onslaughts from every quarter of the compass. The Emperor, safe within the impregnable walls of his capital Byzantium or Constantinople (the modern Istanbul), maintained his imperial dignity with a fabulous magnificence of purple and gold that dazzled his envious rivals. But his rule scarcely extended beyond the limits of present-day Turkey and Greece; and it was only by taxing his subjects to the last farthing that he was able to pay the officials who ran his empire and the troops who defended it.

Rome itself was still the largest city in the West, though much of it was now a mass of ruins, and the shattered aqueducts no longer supplied water to a population spread over the Seven Hills. Here there was no ruler but the Pope. It was only in the city of Rome and in a belt of land stretching across the middle of Italy that men were directly subject to the Pope as their temporal overlord. But throughout Western Europe all Christians acknowledged him as their spiritual head. And through all these wasted and war-torn
NORMAN LANDS IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY
lands the Catholic clergy (the "clerics" or "clerks") formed the one unifying force—a trained and disciplined body of men, united in theory, if not always in practice, not only by their common faith and obedience to Rome but by the use of a common language, Latin, and a control of education which made them practically the only people who could read and write. The Roman (Catholic) Church was in some ways less secure than its eastern neighbour the Greek (Orthodox) Church, which was directly subject to the Emperor; but it enjoyed far greater independence and power.

Confronting the divided forces of Christendom along the whole southern coast of the Mediterranean were the terrible Saracens—the followers of the Caliph ("Successor") of the Prophet Mohammed—whom most Christians regarded as their natural enemies. Twice already the Saracens had thrust forward their right wing in a vain attempt to capture Constantinople. In 732 their left wing, after occupying most of Spain, had advanced into the heart of France. Though they had been pushed back beyond the Pyrenees by the army of the Franks and were now weakened by quarrels among themselves, they remained masters of the Mediterranean and its trade. They were much wealthier than their adversaries, and much more highly civilized.

The Franks were now by far the strongest of the German tribes that had overrun the western provinces of the Roman Empire. Their ruler, like most rulers at this time, did not call himself king of any particular
country: he was King of the Franks, commander-in-chief of a band of warriors wherever they might happen to be. The ablest of their kings, Charles the Great (Charlemagne) made himself master over a huge area covering most of present-day France and Germany and extending into Italy. On Christmas Day of the year 800, at a solemn ceremony of coronation in Rome, Charles was invested by the Pope with the title of Emperor, so that henceforth there were two rival Roman Emperors, one reigning at Constantinople and one in Western Europe.

Charles did much to promote peace and prosperity and even education within his Empire. But after his death it grew rapidly weaker; and in A.D. 843 it was divided into three separate kingdoms. This arrangement did not last. But the main split between East and West ran along a natural line of cleavage which has been a feature in the political map of Europe ever since.

In the eastern kingdom, which developed into the Holy Roman Empire and eventually into modern Germany and Austria, most people spoke some dialect of German.

The western kingdom, which gradually came to be known as France, corresponded roughly to the old Roman province of Gaul. Here during centuries of Roman rule the Celtic language of the Gauls had died out and most people now spoke what was called "Roman" or "Romance". This was a variety (or rather a multitude of local varieties) of Latin that had developed among more or less isolated and illiterate com-
munities of peasants under barbarian rulers. It was scarcely thought of yet as a language that could be written. But minstrels and story-tellers were already beginning to enrich it with a literature of ballads and folk-tales (known as "romances"). And it was the Romance dialect spoken round Paris, not the German speech of the Franks, that became the national language of France.

Neither among the Germans nor among the French (to give them their modern names) was the ruler strong enough to maintain law and order. He could not control his own local governors and officials effectively or pay them regular salaries: most of the money that had circulated in Europe under the Roman Empire had been drained off into the more prosperous East. The best he could do was to leave them free to exploit their own districts, with the right to hold their offices for life and pass them on to their heirs. This gave them a personal interest in preserving order and in rallying round the king in an emergency. So we find the royal officials who had long been called the king's "companions" (comites) or "leaders" (duces) developing into hereditary "counts" or "dukes" endowed with the lordship and revenues of wide estates, which they were said to hold as "feifs" or "fees" (feuda) from the king in return for "fealty" (faithful service) and "homage" (acknowledgement that they were his "men"). A similar status as hereditary servants or "vassals" was often conferred on mere brigands or terrorists, whom the king found it easier to confirm in their possessions than to
dispossess. Many noble families were founded by adventurers lucky enough, like the winners of a spot-prize at a dance, to be occupying the right place when some whirligig of land-grabbing came to rest.

Whatever their origin, these "feudal" lords, if their domains were extensive, were obliged in their turn to rule through subordinates, who claimed for themselves the same sort of independence. So there grew up a new pattern of society, based on hereditary lordship over land and held together by ties of personal loyalty between lords and vassals confirmed by solemn oaths. This feudal society involved sharp class distinctions. It fostered all sorts of jealousies, which easily led to open warfare between rival lords. And it hampered the growth of a strong central government. But as an alternative to utter chaos it worked fairly well—well enough at any rate to last in varying forms for many centuries.

Such, then, was the world into which the Northmen waded ashore from their "dragon-ships" (see Plate 1). The world they came from (Norway, Sweden, and Denmark) was very different—even more unruly perhaps, but at the same time more hopeful. If it had no such tradition of ancient civilization behind it, it had passed through no such disheartening experience of complete breakdown. It was a world of skilled craftsmen in wood and metal, as we know from the ornaments buried with the dead. It had its priesthood and temples, its harpists and story-tellers. The stories were probably not written: though there was a Norse alphabet (Runic), it was apparently used only for inscriptions. But we can
get some idea of what they must have been like from the picturesque myths (Eddas) and semi-legendary family histories (Sagas) preserved by the Norse settlers in Iceland and first written down in the twelfth century. And Norse society was not altogether lawless. Indeed, to judge by the Icelandic Sagas, the Norsemen had a great body of customary law and great admiration for those who were skilled in its subtleties.

But they were fiercely individualistic. Even when they met in their democratic assemblies (or “things”), under solemn pledge of peaceful conduct, to regulate their affairs, they often indulged in brawls, which easily led to fresh complications of the never-ending blood-feuds between family and family. They were used to facing sudden death on land, and still more when they ventured out to sea in search of fish to eke out their scanty food-supply or simply as a means of passing from island to island or from fiord to fiord along their rocky coast.

It was a black day for their neighbours when they discovered that their masterly seamanship gave them the chance of reaping a much richer harvest as sea-rovers (or “Vikings”) than they could ever hope to scrape from a stony soil in a harsh climate, and with less labour and far more fun. There was nothing in their code of conduct to discourage the wholesale robbery, kidnapping, or slaughter of foreigners. And if they were tempted to loot a church or a monastery—well, as devout worshippers of Odin, Thor, and Frig, and the other gods and goddesses, they may have felt that they were waging a holy war against the Christian unbelievers.
Even to peoples long hardened to the horrors of war, the first appearance of these demons of the deep came as a stunning shock, which seems often to have paralysed the power to resist. Christians saw in them a new plague sent by Heaven to punish their sins, and in Christian churches a new verse was added to the service of prayer: “From the fury of the Northmen, good lord deliver us.” The first blast of this fury struck the British Isles, partly for geographical reasons, partly because the Frankish Empire, so long as Charlemagne lived, was better organized for defence. A later chronicler pictures the aged Emperor in a prophetic vision lamenting the evils that his country would suffer at the hands of the Northmen when he was no longer there to protect it. And after his death the blow was not long delayed.

In A.D. 841 the Viking war-bands, which had hitherto contented themselves with smash-and-grab raids on the French coast, landed there in force and sacked the town of Rouen in the lower Seine valley. In 845 a fleet of 120 ships sailed up the Seine as far as Paris, which was saved from destruction only by the payment of ransom money. In spite of some local setbacks, the numbers of the invaders increased. When they next attacked Paris, forty years later, it was with a fleet of 700 ships. But the game could not last for ever. As the victims grew poorer and warier, the profits to be made from mere looting grew less. The more far-sighted leaders began to realize that it would pay them better to settle down as conquerors in these fertile lands and exploit the labour of the conquered. They had the added
inducement that they could no longer return to the old ungoverned life in Denmark or Norway, where vigorous and interfering rulers were now struggling to establish their authority. In England, Danish settlement took place on a big scale till towards the end of the ninth century, when it was checked by the victories of King Alfred. Would-be settlers then naturally turned their attention to the other side of the Channel.

There are practically no contemporary records of the earliest settlements in France, and as yet very little archaeological evidence. Our knowledge of them is mostly derived from a chronicle by one Dudo the Dean, started at the suggestion of the Norman duke Richard I shortly before his death in A.D. 996. Duke Richard was the grandson of a certain Rollo or Rou, who figures in Norse saga (though this does not agree with Dudo's glamorized narrative) as a Norwegian sea-rover nicknamed "Ganger Hrolf"—Rolf the Walker—because he was too big to ride on the stocky Norwegian ponies. Rollo with a band of followers established himself in Rouen and in 911 was recognized by the French king Charles the Simple as ruler of this district with the status of a feudal vassal. Here is Dudo's account of the episode:

Rollo's army was encamped on one side of the River Epte, the French army with the king and the French duke Robert on the other. Rollo thereupon sent to the king archbishop Franco of Rouen with this message: "Rollo cannot make peace with you, because the land you propose to give him, from the Epte to the sea, is untilled by the ploughshare, denuded of flocks and herds and destitute of the
presence of men. There is nothing in it on which he
can live except by pillage and brigandage. Grant
him some territory from which he may win food and
clothing until the land you are giving him shall be
stored with plenty and bring forth seasonable fruits
for man and beast. Furthermore he will not come to
terms with you unless you swear on your oath as a
Christian, you and your archbishops and bishops,
counts and abbots, of all the realm, that he and his
successors shall hold the land you are giving him
as an absolute freehold for ever."

Then Robert and the counts and bishops and abbots
who were present said to the king: "You will not
win for yourself a leader of such renown unless you
do what he desires. If you will not give it for the
sake of his service, give it at least for the sake of
Christendom, so that such a mighty people may be
won to Christ from the snares of the Devil."

Then the king proposed to give him the land of
Flanders to live off; but he rejected it as too swampy.
So the king let him have Brittany, which bordered
on the land promised to him. Whereupon Robert
and the bishops surrendered everything to Rollo and,
after an exchange of hostages, brought him under
pledge of the Christian faith to King Charles. When
the French saw Rollo, the invader of all France, they
said to one another: "Here is a man of great power
and prowess, and of great wisdom and energy, to
have fought such battles against the counts of this
kingdom."

At this, impelled by their words, he put his hands
between the king's hands—a thing that his father
and grandfather and great-grandfather had never
done to any man. And the king gave him his daughter
Giselle to wife and the promised land from the Epte
to the sea in absolute freehold and the whole of Brittany to live off. When the bishops told him that one who had received so great a gift must kiss the king’s foot, he replied: “I will never bow my knee to any man’s knee or kiss any man’s foot.” But, yielding to the entreaties of the French, he bade one of his warriors kiss the king’s foot. The man promptly seized the king’s foot, raised it to his lips and kissed it standing, so that the king fell over on his back. Whereupon there broke out loud laughter and uproar.

This account cannot be taken as unvarnished fact: Dudo is far too good a propagandist for that. The princess Giselle seems to be a legendary figure. The grant in freehold of the whole of the future duchy of Normandy with a free hand to ravage Brittany can only have been invented in the light of later events. And the kissing of the king’s foot is a good story with a twofold point, illustrating at once the haughty independence of the Northmen and their barbarous ignorance of the commonplaces of feudal usage. But the tale shows us how the Normans of a later day liked to picture the occasion that brought them, whatever the actual terms of the bargain, within the framework of feudal society. Dudo describes Rollo as *dux Northmannorum*, a title that was certainly borne officially by his great-grandson Richard II. This could be translated either “leader of the Northmen”—captain of a troop of Viking marauders—or “duke of the Normans”—hereditary holder of the highest title in the kingdom of France. It began by meaning the one and ended by meaning the other.
THE NORMANS IN NORMANDY

The task allotted to Rollo and his successors was not an easy one. They had to keep up at least the appearance of loyalty to their overlord the king of France, from whom they were supposed to derive their authority. They had to assert that authority over their own followers and over new bands of immi-
grants from Norway or Denmark, who saw no reason why they should obey a man no better than themselves. They had to control a subject population, who looked upon the newcomers at first as a hostile army occupying their country. And they had to hold their own against aggressive neighbours, nominally feudatories of the same overlord, in particular the count of Flanders to the north-east and the count of Brittany to the west.

The Bretons of Brittany or “Little Britain” were desc-
cendants of Britons who had been driven out of “Great Britain” across the Channel four centuries before by the invading Saxons. They had evidently migrated in far greater numbers than the Northmen and brought their families with them, so that they had succeeded,
where the Normans failed, in establishing their own language and customs in their new homeland.

The one thing that made the task possible was that these various opponents were just as much opposed to one another, so that the Norman dukes could count on as many allies as they had enemies. So long as they could maintain law and order, their most constant supporters were the settled inhabitants of the country; when the young duke Richard I was in danger from the French king, it was the townsfolk of Rouen and the neighbouring peasantry who rallied to his aid. In addition, they were wise enough to gain the support of another very powerful ally, the Church.

Rollo himself was baptized, taking the Frankish name Robert; and no doubt many of his followers also became Christians, though there remained a strong anti-Christian party, at least among the first generation of Norse settlers. But the immigrants brought very few women with them. Most of them took French wives, and the children would normally adopt the religion of their mothers. Before long in Normandy, as in every other country within the general limits of Christendom, everyone who was not a Jew was at least nominally a Christian.

On the whole, the Normans took their new religion more seriously than most of their contemporaries. Rollo’s own son, William Longsword, is said to have been strongly attracted to the monastic way of life. If he and his successors owed a lot to the Church, they repaid the debt generously, building and endowing
churches and monasteries on a scale scarcely paralleled elsewhere.

From their wives and mothers the Northmen learnt not only the religion but also the language of the conquered. In Rouen the Norse tongue was dying out within one generation, so that when William Longsword wanted his own son Richard to learn the language of his fathers, he sent him to Bayeux. There is hardly a Norse word to be found in the Norman dialect of French, either as it appears in writings of the eleventh century or as it is spoken today. On the other hand, we can still spot the places where the invaders settled by the Norse names they bear, stretching along the coast from the “deep” harbour of Dieppe to the “how” or mound of La Hogue and in some areas penetrating quite far inland. Caudebec en Caux, like Caldebeck in Cumberland, is the “cold stream”. In Rouen itself there is a “little stream” called Le Becquet. A Norman who lived by its banks in the twelfth century, and was hence named Gilbert a Becket, emigrated to London; and his son Thomas made the surname famous throughout Christendom.

With their religion and their language the settlers lost almost everything that was distinctively Norse, except their willingness to hazard life and fortune on a promising venture. Apart from a few communities of daring fishermen, notably in the Channel Islands, they became thorough-going landsmen. For the first few generations they constituted a ruling class, directing rather than sharing the labour of the land. But the bulk
of their descendants must soon have merged in the mass of Norman peasantry, whose tireless attachment to the soil was to become proverbial.

It was the most urgent of Rollo's (or Robert's) many tasks to set the peoples of his new domain to work on its devastated fields by providing some reasonable prospect that the sower might reap in peace. With this end in view he is said to have introduced a rough-and-ready form of social security, probably based on Norwegian practice. A peasant prevented from working by the loss of his plough could claim a replacement; but the penalty for fraudulently concealing a plough was death. Dudo illustrates the working of this law with a story that breathes the spirit of the age:

A certain peasant living in Langpaon, as midday drew near, left his plough-gear in the field and went home to eat. Here he was roundly scolded by his wife for leaving behind these necessities of his labour; but
after many harsh words she served him his meal. Then, wishing to give him a scare so that he would not leave them again, she slipped out to the field and took away the yoke-harness, the ploughshare and the coulter. After hiding them away, so that her husband should not see them, she went back home, as though she were coming from some other place.

Her husband, rising fully fed, went back to the field and could not find his plough-gear. When he returned home in great distress and told his shrewish wife, she railed and scoffed at him and said: “You useless creature! Go now to duke Robert and he will soon make you a ploughman.” So he went straight to the duke and told him how he was denied all profit of his plough.

Rollo promptly summoned a steward and said to him: “Give this peasant five shillings to buy what he has lost. Then go to the village with all speed and seek out the author of the theft by the ordeal of fire.” The steward put all the villagers to the test; but, finding none of them guilty, reported back to the duke. The duke summoned archbishop Franco and said: “If nothing is hidden from the God of the Christians, in whose name I am baptized, I am surprised that he has not revealed to us the author of this theft, who has been touched with fire in his name.” Franco answered: “The fire has not yet touched the guilty.”

The duke then bade the steward apply the test in Christ’s name to the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. When this too failed, he promptly summoned the ploughman and asked whom he had told that the plough-gear had been left in the field. The peasant answered: “My wife.” When the duke sent for her and asked her what she had done with her
husband's ploughshare and coulter, she at first denied that she had touched them; but after a sound thrashing with the birch she confessed to the theft.

Duke Robert asked the peasant: "Did you know your wife was the thief? He answered: "I did." Then, said the duke: "You deserve to die on two counts: first, because you are the woman's head and it is your duty to chastise her; second, because you were an accessory to the theft and did not disclose it." Thereupon he ordered both man and wife to be put to a cruel death by hanging.

This judgement frightened the inhabitants of the land, so that no one thereafter dared to steal or rob. Thus the land was at peace without thieves or robbers. The people enjoyed unbroken tranquillity, living securely under the rule of duke Robert and growing rich in goods of every kind without fear of any hostile army.

The chroniclers certainly exaggerate the effectiveness of Rollo's policy. But they show that he was remembered as the originator of that iron-handed rule which became typical of the Normans wherever they went, and that on the whole this was accepted as a welcome change.

The pacification of Normandy suffered a setback during the troubled years of William Longsword (927-942), when the boundaries of the duchy became definitely fixed, and the minority of his son Richard the Fearless, who was a boy of ten when his father died. This gave the French king, Louis IV, a welcome opportunity to intervene. He asserted his feudal right of guardianship by keeping the lad at his own court; but if he cherished any sinister designs, they were foiled
by Richard’s Norman supporters, who smuggled him out (according to the traditional story) in a bale of hay. During his later years and the rule of his son Richard II (996–1026), Normandy enjoyed a spell of peace and prosperity.

This was followed by another stormy interlude, especially after 1035, when by the death of duke Robert the Magnificent on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land the duchy came once again under the nominal rule of a minor, Robert’s eight-year-old son William. As before, the French king (now Henri I) seized his opportunity. For years he supported the cause of the young duke in repeated campaigns against rebellious barons. Too late he discovered that, far from strengthening his own hold over the duchy, he had established in power the most energetic and effective ruler that even the house of Rollo had yet produced.

The Normandy that was thus restored about the middle of the century to order and unity was a very different place from the Normandy of a hundred years before, and it belonged to a very different world. The end of the tenth century marks a turning-point in the history not only of Normandy but of Europe. It has sometimes been supposed that Christians were so confidently expecting the end of the world to come in the year 1000 that they allowed things to go to rack and ruin, and so relieved when the fateful year passed safely that they faced their tasks with a new vigour.

It is hard to tell how deeply man’s behaviour is affected by such fears and such reliefs. It may be more
to the point that in the same year King Olaf I of Norway was engaged in imposing Christianity, with most un-Christian ferocity, on his reluctant subjects. Thus the last of the Germanic peoples, whose devastating migrations had criss-crossed the map of Europe for centuries, was brought within the comity of Christian nations—not exactly a peaceful or united family, but one with certain interests and certain standards in common.

From a trough of low pressure, invaded by one barbarian storm after another, Europe was changing into a ridge of high pressure, charged with expansive force. Externally this found vent in a thrust against the Saracens, which came to a head at the end of the eleventh century with the First Crusade—a movement in which the Normans played a star part. Internally also, and not least in Normandy, there were many symptoms of a new vitality. Life and property became safer. Population increased. New land was brought under cultivation. New crafts developed, and more solid and durable styles of building. Some of the villages, under the protection of a castle or an abbey, grew into towns with a weekly market, a few even with a yearly fair that attracted traders and entertainers from a wide area. Standards of living and behaviour began to rise. And serious efforts were made to reform the shocking state of the Church.

Five centuries later, when men spoke of reforming the Church, many thought the best way to achieve this was to bring it into closer touch with the general life of the community by subjecting it to the authority of the
State, abolishing the monasteries, allowing the secular clergy (bishops, priests, etc.) to marry, and replacing Latin as the language of worship by the living speech of the people.

In the very different world of the eleventh century the remedy proposed was almost exactly the opposite. The reformers aimed at separating the Church more sharply from the brutal and lawless life of the age, so that it might be free to enforce higher standards on its own officers and serve as a shining light and a guiding force to the laity.

The clergy, they thought, should be free from external control—not so much control by the State, which scarcely existed at this time, as by the feudal magnates of high or low degree—and made directly subject to the Pope. The monks should be recalled to a strict observance of their monastic vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. The rule of celibacy should be extended not only to bishops, among whom marriage had long been exceptional, but to parish priests, who up to now had normally been married men. And both monks and secular clergy should receive a far more thorough education, especially in the use of Latin, which was still regarded as the common language of Christendom though it had long ceased to be understood by the uneducated even in countries such as France and Italy where Romance dialects were spoken.

In Normandy the outstanding figure among these reformers was an Italian lawyer, Lanfranc of Pavia, who achieved celebrity as a teacher at the cathedral
school of Avranches, and as prior of Bec (from 1045) transformed this obscure Norman abbey into a far-famed centre of education. But he was only one of a number of remarkable men, clerics, writers, architects, judges, administrators, who under the active patronage of Duke William were putting Normandy in the forefront of a new advance of western civilization. We shall take a closer look at some aspects of this civilization in the latter part of this book.

The relatively peaceful conditions in Normandy in the eleventh century did not suit the more adventurous spirits, who were tempted to seek excitement and advancement elsewhere. We shall be following their fortunes in the next chapter. The emigration of this unruly element must have made the duchy easier to govern. But it must have been galling to Duke William, himself a born adventurer, to lose so much good fighting material which he might hope to use to his own advantage. His opportunity came in the memorable year 1066. We shall consider in due course how the events of this year affected the history of England. In Normandy their main effect was to alter the relations between the Duchy and the kingdom of France.

Up to now its dukes had given less trouble than some of the other great feudatories to successive French kings, who had been doing their best to turn their overlordship into a reality. But now that the Duke of Normandy was also king of England, he could oppose a powerful barrier to the ambitions of his rival. When William the Conqueror died and the duchy fell to his
eldest surviving son Robert while his next son William Rufus became king of England, it seemed that the link between the two countries might be permanently broken. But Robert pawned the duchy in order to raise a contingent for the First Crusade, in which he played an honourable but unprofitable part, and eventually lost it altogether to a third brother, Henry I of England, at the battle of Tinchebray (1106).

Henry's strong-minded daughter Matilda failed to make herself sovereign of England in opposition to the rival claimant Stephen. But thanks to her marriage to Geoffrey Plantagenet count of Anjou, and the marriage of their son Henry to Eleanor duchess of Aquitaine, followed by his accession to the throne of England as Henry II, the king of England became effective ruler over considerably more than half the kingdom of France.

Henry might do homage to the French king for his continental domains; but there was no way in which the nominal overlord could make his will felt there. So for half a century Normandy possessed a new importance as the middle link in a chain of empire extending from the Tweed to the Pyrenees. But the Angevin Empire was really more like a string of beads threaded together on the life of one man. Even Henry's vigorous personality could scarcely carry the strain.

For his son Richard Lionheart, whose energies were absorbed by adventures in the Holy Land as unfortunate as those of the two Roberts, the strain was even greater. And Richard was no match in diplomacy for
Philip Augustus (1180–1204), the strongest king France had yet known. Philip Augustus struggled for years to win the duchy of Normandy for himself; and in his last year, despite the efforts of Richard’s brother, John Lackland, he achieved his object. Barons and knights who held land in both Normandy and England had now to sacrifice one or the other. Before long their descendants would think of themselves accordingly either as Englishmen or as Frenchmen, rather than as Normans.

Normandy was a separate province of France down to the French Revolution (1789), when the territory of the newly formed republic was divided into départements. But apart from the Channel Islands, where many ancient Norman institutions have been rather strikingly preserved, it was directly subject to the French crown. Its history after 1204 is thus part of the general history of France. But the legacy of Norman achievement, partitioned between the two rival kingdoms, remains a vital element of their common heritage.
THE NORMANS IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN

IN FEUDAL society, as it developed in the eleventh century, the ruling class consisted of mounted warriors, highly trained and expensively equipped, who were then the decisive arm in warfare. We can picture what they looked like from that celebrated piece of Norman embroidery known, rather inaccurately, as the "Bayeux Tapestry", in which the story of the Norman Conquest of England is told in the form of a strip cartoon.

To men who hoped to rise in this profession, troubled times offered prospects of speedy advancement in the service of their liege lords or as free lances, selling their skill to the highest bidder or simply using it to amass booty by brigandage. Peace, on the other hand, meant unemployment, especially for younger sons debarred by the feudal law of succession from any share in their father's lands. No country had a bigger exportable surplus of such men than Normandy; and none offered them more glittering prizes than Italy, which was
already, as it remained for another eight centuries, the happy hunting ground of the soldier of fortune.

Visitors to Italy from north-west Europe were impressed by the visible remains of ancient culture still surviving, both in the churches and other sacred buildings and in the splendid residences of the wealthy and their luxurious mode of life and polished manners. But this wealth rested not only on the technical skill of the Italian craftsmen and on trade relations with the East but on the abject poverty of the down-trodden masses.

Coping with a mail shirt
The Italian aristocracy were proud of their descent from the Lombards, a Germanic tribe who had overrun most of Italy in the sixth century. The Lombards, like the Franks and the Normans, had adopted the language, religion, and customs of the conquered. But they had been less successful in forming a single nation with a strong central government, or even large feudal domains like the duchies and counties of France. The last Lombard ruler to call himself King of Italy died in A.D. 1015, and none of his predecessors for over two centuries had been king in much more than name.

Italy was a country with lords by the score but no effective overlord, though there were three rival claimants to this title. The Eastern (Greek) Emperor still occupied a number of strong points on the coast and exercised a somewhat precarious authority over Apulia and Calabria—the "heel" and "toe" of the Italian peninsula. The Western (German) Emperor, as heir to Charlemagne, claimed to rule at least the northern half of the country. His claim, when backed by an invading army, was irresistible; but between invasions it tended to evaporate. In the Papal estates, sandwiched between these rival spheres of influence, the Pope struggled to defend material interests that were not always easy to reconcile with his spiritual dignity.

The rivalry of the great powers fostered perpetual intrigue and disaffection among the smaller fry, easily passing into open rebellion and local or general warfare. The only place that offered any hope of security was within the walls of some city that had contrived to
win special trading rights and a measure of self-government. These cities nursed the seeds of the most brilliant and creative civilization that Europe had known since the heyday of the Greek city-states fifteen centuries before. But even here there was no escape from the feuds of rival families and factions and the oppressions and riots of the class war.

In this free-for-all there were ample opportunities for needy Norman adventurers to sell their services at a high price. But they were not the men to rest content with the career of mercenary, however well paid. As one of them declared, when refusing the ransom money offered by a besiegéd town, “they did not want cash down; they wanted power over those who held the money-bags”. They soon showed themselves as wily and as merciless as any Lombard nobleman, and a great deal more reckless, resolute, and ambitious.

In 1016 a fugitive murderer named Osmund led a small band of desperadoes like himself from Normandy to southern Italy to take part in a rebellion against the Greeks. By 1038 his brother Rainolf held high rank in the Italian aristocracy as Count of Aversa. But the pastmasters in this game were the twelve sons of Tancred de Hauteville, lord of a very modest estate in the Côtentin, that northern promontory of Normandy where the Viking settlers were most numerous and most unruly.

Among all the Dick Whittington stories of history or fiction it would be hard to find a stranger tale than that of Tancred’s sixth son Robert, nicknamed Guiscard
("the Crafty" or perhaps "the Weasel"). There may be a touch of fiction about its opening chapters, though they are likely enough. In 1047, we are told, Robert sets out alone, disguised as a pilgrim—it was not wise by this time to proclaim yourself a Norman in Italy unless you had an armed band behind you; he meets a very unbrotherly welcome from the older half-brothers who had preceded him, so he starts business on his own account as a highway robber. What follows is sober history. From this unpromising beginning he rises to be Duke of Apulia, paramount ruler of the southern half of Italy; he begins the conquest of Sicily from the Saracens; he drives the German Emperor out of Italy, sacks Rome and liberates (or captures!) the Pope; he invades Greece, defeats the Eastern Emperor Alexius in battle after battle and advances on Constantinople. Only the crowning achievement is missing. A fatal bout of malaria (in 1085) prevented him from ending his days on the throne of the Caesars.

This was highway robbery on the grand scale. It was also a remarkable illustration of the Norman genius for producing order out of chaos.

In forty years Robert Guiscard laid the foundations of a united Italy. But united Italy was not built for another eight hundred years. That task proved too difficult even for the Normans. Under Robert's younger son, who succeeded him as Duke of Apulia, the Norman empire in Italy began to break up. And then for a time it was reinvigorated by union with the Norman empire in Sicily.
Sicily had been conquered from the Greeks by the Saracens in the ninth century, and many of the inhabitants had been won over to Islam. In the eleventh century the government of the island was partitioned among three local emirs, as unruly, incompetent, and shortsighted as their Christian counterparts in Lombard Italy. In 1060 the emir of Syracuse, taking no warning from events on the mainland, called in the aid of the Normans against his rivals; and Robert Guiscard sent over a small force under the command of his youngest brother Roger.

It took Roger twenty years to conquer the whole island for himself—rather slow work for a Norman, but he did the job thoroughly. Under his rule and that of his son Roger II, Sicily was probably the best governed, most prosperous, and most highly civilized state in Europe. Roger I ranked merely as a count, nominally subject to his nephew the Duke of Apulia. But Roger II was strong enough to establish his rule over much of the Italian mainland and was eventually crowned by the Pope—who was in no position to refuse him anything—as King of Sicily and Duke of Calabria and Apulia. In Italy he could rule only as a feudal overlord. But in Sicily he developed a system of government, created by his father, that was quite foreign to Western Christendom.

Having been appointed by the Pope as his legate or personal representative, he exercised an authority over the Roman Church within his own realm that no other Christian sovereign possessed—the authority that
Henry II of England failed to acquire in his struggle with Becket. This enabled him, in defiance of contemporary opinion, to allow complete freedom of worship and civil rights to his Greek Christian and Moslem subjects and make full use of their services in peace and war. He governed through civil servants, chosen by himself and easily dismissable, not through hereditary nobles entrenched in their positions by privilege and custom.

Roger's lavish patronage of artists and craftsmen encouraged the growth of a local style, especially in architecture, whose masterpiece was the magnificent cathedral of Monreale (see Plates 2 and 3), built by his grandson William II (the Good). This style is a blend, sometimes surprisingly effective, of three different traditions: Moslem or Arabesque, Byzantine Greek, and the Western offshoot of Byzantine that is commonly called "Romanesque" but is better known in England as "Norman".

This mixture of traditions is typical. It was Roger who commissioned Geoffrey Malaterra to write the Latin History of the Normans quoted in the opening paragraph of this book, with a special instruction to include their faults as well as their virtues. He also commissioned the Book of Roger—a geographical treatise written in Arabic by El Edrisi which gave a more scientific and comprehensive description of the world than any yet produced. At Salerno, the chief centre of Norman rule on the Italian mainland, there grew up a medical school, founded according to legend by the co-operation of an Italian, a Greek, a Saracen,
Plate 1. A Viking “dragon-ship” (c. A.D. 900; found in a burial mound at Oseberg in Norway). (Courtesy, the Royal Norwegian Embassy)
Plate 2. William II of Sicily presents Montreale Cathedral to the Virgin Mary. (Reproduced from Les Normands En Méditerranée by Jean Beraud-Villars. Courtesy, Editions Albin Michel)
Plate 4. The Normans crossing the Channel. Scene from the Bayeux Tapestry. (Courtesy, Giraudon and The Mansell Collection)
and a Jew, which became the fountainhead of a great revival and spread of medical studies throughout Western Europe. Among its students was an Englishman, Adelard of Bath, who later (c. 1115) wrote works on such varied subjects as the care of hawks and the use of Arabic numerals—still regarded in the Christian West as a dark and mysterious art.

The Normans in Sicily were recruited by fresh immigrants from the homeland. A rather unusual one was a certain abbot of St. Evroult, who, having incurred the anger of Duke William, fled overseas with his niece Judith. They received a warm welcome from Roger I, who had fallen in love with Judith when she was a nun in Normandy; and her vows proved no obstacle to a romantic marriage. True to the best spirit of Norman romance, Judith shared the hardships of her husband’s campaigns and spurred on his troops by her example.

In the twelfth century there were frequent comings and goings between Sicily and Norman England. Among the Englishmen in the service of Roger II was one Thomas Brown (or le Brun), whose name appears in strange guises in Greek and Arabic records. After Roger’s death Thomas returned to England as financial adviser to Henry II and was allotted a special seat at the Exchequer. Under William the Good at least four Sicilian bishops were of English origin; and in 1176 this king himself married an English princess, Joan daughter of Henry II. A chronicler has described the royal welcome that awaited her when she was rowed
ashore at Palermo after nightfall: “the entire city
turned out to cheer, and so many lights were lit that the
whole place seemed to be on fire and the radiance of
the stars was dimmed.”

Sicily did not mark the limit of Norman expansion
towards the south. In 1135 Roger II took advantage of
quarrels among the Saracen *emirs* to gain a footing
on the coast of Africa. By 1148 his rule extended from
Tripoli to Tunis. And two centuries later he was still
remembered by an Arab historian as an efficient and
impartial ruler.

In the east the expansion of Norman rule is inter-
woven with the tangled story of the Crusades, which
cannot be told here even in the barest outline. It was
apparently the subtle Greek Emperor Alexius, when
he was relieved by the death of Robert Guiscard from
the immediate threat of Norman invasion, who first
conceived the idea of persuading his western enemies
to by-pass his dominions and attack his eastern enemies,
the Arabs and Turks. Palestine and Syria had once been
provinces of the Eastern Empire; as recently as 1065 his
predecessors had been rulers of Syrian Antioch. He
could show a convincing legal warrant for offering
these territories to be held as fiefs by any adventurers
doughty enough to win them by the sword.

For free-lances of the Guiscard type this was a
tempting bait. To the Italian trading cities the project
opened limitless vistas of commercial gain. And the
thought of redeeming Christ’s birth-place and sepulchre
from the infidel by a holy war appealed with tremendous
force to the new mood of Western Christendom, passionately devout and no less passionately eager for excitement and novelty.

The call for volunteers, launched by Pope Urban II in 1095, preached in countless pulpits, and backed by lavish promises of spiritual and worldly privileges, met with an embarrassingly enthusiastic response. But the effective striking force that eventually fought its way through Turkey was a small body of new-model cavalry in which Norman experts naturally played a leading role. Roger I of Sicily took no part in the enterprise; and Duke Robert himself, as we have seen, returned from it empty-handed. But some of Robert's followers stayed on after the capture of Jerusalem to serve under Godfrey de Bouillon, Duke of Lorraine, who on Christmas Day, A.D. 1100, was crowned at Bethlehem as "Defender of the Holy Sepulchre". And the strongest and most durable of the Crusader States was the Principality of Antioch, founded by Bohemond, eldest son of Robert Guiscard and perfect embodiment of the qualities of his race. This is how Bohemond is described from personal observation in the biography of Alexius written by his daughter the Princess Anna:

He was the living image of his father—tall, slender, broad-shouldered, with a well-developed chest and muscular arms. He appeared to have a slight stoop. His complexion was both fair and ruddy. His eyes were blue. His blond hair was cut short, and his beard was shaved. The charm of his manner was
marred by something rather terrifying that emanated from his whole person. . . . His mind was nimble, resourceful, inexhaustible in trickery. His words were carefully chosen, his answers always ambiguous. . . . In eloquence and the other gifts of nature he was inferior only to my father the Emperor.

So by the middle of the twelfth century it began to look as if the Normans were inheriting the earth. Norman-French was the language of the court in Antioch and Edinburgh, and a Norman lad with no inheritance but a strong right arm and boundless self-confidence might hope to hack out an empire for himself among the Wild Irish or the Bedouin of the Sahara. But in these outlying regions the Normans were too few to make a lasting impression. From Africa and Asia they were soon driven out. In Italy and Sicily they merged during the thirteenth century with the mingled residue of many earlier invasions. In Ireland many of their descendants became “more Irish than the Irish”. Only in England did the Norman invasion result in a stable and enduring form of society and government in which the Norman element remained clearly and permanently recognizable.
THE NORMANS IN THE BRITISH ISLES

THE NORMAN Conquest is so familiar to British readers as an episode, fortunate or unfortunate, in the history of England that it is difficult to look at it for a moment through Norman eyes. To Duke William the project must have presented itself, quite literally, as a heaven-sent opportunity. Here at his very doors was a richer prize than any that his fellow Normans had won in distant lands to the south. As a kinsman of the late king Edward the Confessor through Edward's mother, a daughter of Duke Richard I, he could claim as good a title to the English throne as two of the rival claimants, the kings of Norway and Denmark. His claim had been acknowledged at one time by King Edward himself. It was strongly supported by the Pope, who was indignant at the expulsion of a lawfully elected Norman archbishop of Canterbury to make way for an Englishman and hoped to see the Church reformed and reinvigorated in England as it had been in Normandy. He was thus embarking with the papal blessing on a holy war.
To enforce his claim he could draw on the full armed strength of the Duchy, which he had built up with all the resources of a well organized state and welded by arduous campaigns into the finest military machine in Europe. He could also be confident of attracting to his banner a host of adventurous volunteers from outside Normandy—Bretons, Flemings (from Flanders), and Frenchmen of all sorts.

Of course the enterprise was difficult and dangerous. The problem of transport was very formidable for an army with no such seafaring experience as the Danes or Norsemen and dependent on heavily built horses and cumbrous armour (see Plate 4). The English could be expected to offer a much tougher resistance than the long-suffering Italians. But they were not united by that overruling sense of patriotism that we take for granted in a present-day nation. Earl Harold, who had been chosen as Edward’s successor by the dominant faction at the English court, had no hereditary claim to their allegiance. Many were opposed to him through personal or family enmity, inflamed by Norman intrigue and strengthened by the backing of Rome. A Norman duke was no more a foreigner than the Danish king Canute, whose reign had been (at least in its later years) the most peaceful that England had known for a century. And no one could foresee those drastic changes in the English way of life that would follow a Norman conquest. In 1066 William can have had few long-term plans. He was a gambler, taking an enormous risk for a proportionate prize.
If he had failed, historians would have had no difficulty in explaining why failure was inevitable.

William's victory at Hastings was spectacular, and the death of Harold made it for the moment decisive. But it was merely the beginning of the conquest. Success was ensured only by a long process of diplomacy alternating with ruthlessness, in the true Norman tradition. The new king saw clearly enough that he could not hope to establish his rule on a permanent footing unless he could make it at least tolerable to the great mass of his English subjects. But in the first instance he depended on the loyalty of his Norman and other Continental followers, who expected their services to be well repaid in land and honours. So, while he promised in his coronation oath to preserve the ancient laws and customs of England and the liberties of the Church, he was quick to distribute the lands forfeited by Harold's supporters as fiefs among French nobles and to allot such bishoprics and abbeys as fell vacant to French clerics.

For the first few years he seems to have made a genuine effort to enlist the aid of any English magnates willing to co-operate, especially those of the faction that had opposed Harold. But this policy failed to satisfy either the Normans, who resented it as a check to their ambitions, or the English, who were tempted to transfer their allegiance to other claimants—King Sweyn of Denmark or the young prince Edgar, great-nephew of the Confessor, who had taken refuge in Scotland. So the Conqueror, meeting each crisis as it
came along, found himself forced into a different course. For the rest of his reign William acted primarily as commander in chief of an army of occupation, disposed at fortified strong-points throughout the country. His prime task was to ensure obedience by the conquered and by his own followers. Naturally he organized the kingdom in a feudal framework—the only kind he knew, and one towards which English society had already been tending. But, like his contemporary Roger of Sicily, he aimed at a more centralized government than any feudal state on the Continent. He exacted an oath of homage to himself not only from the great nobles or barons, who held their fiefs directly from the Crown, but also from the more important of the under tenants, who might otherwise have felt that they owed allegiance to their own lords rather than to the king.

In the normal English “shire” (or county, as it was called in Norman-French) the dominant figure was usually the “earl” (called count in French). The earl held large hereditary estates and could lead into battle a large force of his own tenants fully equipped as knights. He was a great man in his own right, whose wishes carried corresponding weight in the counsels of the king. But every shire, whether or not it had an earl, had its shire-reeve or “sheriff”. The sheriff was not, as might be supposed from his French title of viscount, a deputy of the earl or count. He was one of the minor gentry of the county, personally appointed by the king for a term of a year or two to collect the crown revenues and enforce “the king’s peace”. He was thus a vital link
in a chain of authority through which the king could govern the country to some extent independently of his nobles.

To simplify the task of administration, William instituted in 1086 that great survey of the realm, showing the allotment of the land and its taxable resources, which soon became known as *Domesday Book*—the authority from which, as from the Last Judgement, there could be no appeal (see Plate 8).

The organization thus constructed by William and his advisers, out of elements partly English and partly Norman, formed a basis on which his successors were able to build up a system of government that proved exceptionally efficient (by medieval standards) in enforcing the king's will throughout the kingdom. They could not foresee that this governmental machine would eventually develop into a means of checking and guiding the exercise of the king's power, not by violent rebellion but by the steady pressure of a body of men who had learnt in his service the art of working together for a common purpose.

In the same spirit William set about reorganizing the English Church. After the chaos that followed the Danish invasions, when the buildings and other possessions of the Church had been destroyed over wide areas and much of the country had relapsed into paganism, there had been a great revival of religious life in England, inspired by the same zeal for reform that was active on the Continent. But the English clergy still stood in particular need of reform, in the sense in which
the word was generally understood at the time. They were mostly subservient to lay patrons. They were almost all married, which meant that a parish priest was often tempted to treat his parish as an hereditary possession. And they were poorly educated for their profession.

As his right-hand man in this work, William chose his old friend Lanfranc, who came over rather reluctantly from Normandy to assume the archbishopric of Canterbury. Lanfranc presided over a series of councils of church dignitaries, whose regulations infused into the life of the Church the same sort of Norman discipline that William had introduced into the State. He prudently refrained from trying to dissolve existing clerical marriages; but they were strictly forbidden for the future, though in fact it was over a century before this part of the reformers’ work seriously took effect. Parish priests were given greater security of tenure. And the steps taken to improve their education doubtless contributed to the striking rise in cultural standards in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Bishops were given greater authority to regulate and to protect the lower clergy. And in some cases their headquarters were moved from what had become an outlying village into the principal town of the bishopric, where they would be more closely in touch with national affairs.

Since the king retained the decisive voice in the appointment of the higher clergy, the reformed Church could generally be counted on to support the throne
against rebellious elements in the baronage or the common people. But not always. The resistance of Becket to Henry II, or of Stephen Langton to John, showed that a well organized Church, like a well organized State, was not necessarily an instrument of despotism.

By the end of William's reign, English "earls" and "thanes" were almost entirely replaced by French *counts* and *barons*; there were no English bishops left except the saintly Wulfstan of Worcester, and only two English abbots of any importance. It might seem that the division between conquerors and conquered was complete. But even at this date there were a great many Englishmen, including royal clerks and local officials, in the service of the Norman ruler, not to speak of the English tenantry who followed Norman barons and knights into battle. And the mingling of the two nations, through intermarriage and social contact, was well under way. Henry I himself set an example by his marriage with Edith, daughter of Malcolm king of Scotland and of Margaret, a sister of prince Edgar, through whom later sovereigns of England have been able to claim descent from the royal house of Wessex.

As late as the 1150's a Norman magnate could still speak of "the plots of the English", whether or not he really believed in them. But after this there is little to suggest that the two nations were separated by any sense of mutual hostility or even of significant difference.

William I, taking a tip from the Danes, had ruled that, when a man was found murdered, the whole
township in which the body was found should pay a fine, unless it could be proved that the dead man was English. By 1180, we are told, this “proof of Englishshry” was no longer applied, since no clear line could now be drawn between English and French. The need for this rule shows that the Norman bosses at the outset were not exactly popular in England. But, if they had been the object of universal hatred, they could scarcely have survived as they did. For they were a small and scattered minority, a few thousands dispersed amongst a population of over a million.

There were castles in England garrisoned mainly by Normans. But there were no Norman villages, as there were Danish villages in the northern and eastern counties or villages of “Northmen” in Normandy. The evidence of place-names is quite clear. French names were sometimes bestowed on castles (Belvoir, Malpas, Mountsorrel) or on abbeys (Beaulieu, Fountains, or Battle, on the site of the battle of Hastings). The names of Norman landlords were added to English village names (Stoke Mandeville, Kingston Bagpuize, or Tooting Bec, which commemorates the grant of an estate in Surrey to the Norman abbey of Bec). Here and there an English name was replaced for some special reason by a Norman one, as “Foulpit” in Essex was transmogrified to Beaumont. But with very few exceptions the map of twentieth-century England preserves the English or Danish village names recorded by the Conqueror’s clerks in Domesday Book.

The picture is very different when we turn to personal
names. Very soon after the Conquest, perhaps even in the period of Norman influence under Edward the Confessor, the snobbish fashion came into vogue of christening English children by Norman names. In the course of the twelfth century English Christian names became rapidly scarcer, and in the thirteenth, with few exceptions, they almost dropped out of use. Among the exceptions were those of the royal saints, Edward and Edmund, which were actually bestowed by Henry III on his own sons, and the no less royal name of Edith. A few other English saints’ names (Cuthbert, Kenelm, Hilda) survived locally. But their bearers were far outnumbered by the Saxon peasants who went through life in the aristocratic guise of William or Henry, Robert, Richard or Roger, Mabel, Maud, or Alice. Two centuries after the Conquest, most of the names formerly current in England must already have sounded as uncouth and outlandish in English ears as they have done ever since.

If the English were quick to adopt French names, they were in no such hurry to learn the French language. There existed at the time of the Conquest a great body of English literature—poetry and history, sermons, laws and official documents—extending back over three or four centuries. French, by contrast, had scarcely begun to develop a written literature and lacked the precise technical terms needed for the business of law and administration. William I, in line with his general policy of working through English institutions, sometimes expressed his will by means of writs drawn up in
the traditional language of the West Saxon court. One of them (with modernized spelling) runs thus:

William king greets William bishop and Gosfrith port-reeve and all the burh-weres [burgesses] in London, French and English, friendly. And I quethe [assure] you that I will that ye be worthy of all the laws that ye were in Edward king's days. And I will that every child be his father's erf-nome [heir] after his father's day. And I nill thole [will not tolerate] that any man bid [offer] you any wrong. God hold you!

But in Normandy, as in most of Western Christendom, the language of government was Latin. Since this was familiar to English as well as to Norman clerks, it was soon adopted for official documents by the Anglo-Norman court and remained in use, to the exclusion of English, for over three centuries.

Meanwhile French, as the language of the ruling class, enjoyed much greater social prestige than English. In the twelfth century it acquired international currency as the language of “romance” and chivalry and the *lingua franca* (i.e. “Frankish language”) of commerce. It is hard to say how widely it was used in Norman England. The Latin chroniclers often profess to report long conversations in various walks of English life. But it is only in stray glimpses that they reveal what language was being spoken.

We are told, for instance, that the lady Heloise de Morville, mother of one of Thomas Becket’s murderers, having fallen for a handsome young Englishman but
found him proof against temptation, revenged herself by framing him on a charge of trying to kill her husband. To draw her husband's attention to the pretended attempt on his life, she cried out to him in English: "Hugh de Morville, ware, ware, ware! Lithulf hath his sword y-drawe."

With this we may match the story of the gentleman who turned to his steward, while the guests were assembling in the hall, and asked in French if the dinner was cooked yet. The steward, mistaking the word *cuite* ("cooked") for *quitte* ("paid for") and very conscious of his master's financial position, replied that it most certainly was not.

We know that French was widely used in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries for correspondence and informal documents and as the spoken language of the law courts and of Parliament. It is likely that courtiers and nobles down to the time of Edward II usually preferred to talk French among themselves. But, unless they had been brought up abroad, they must have been familiar from childhood with the English of the village and the market place. Abbot Samson of Bury, elected in 1182, was eloquent in both Latin and French and preached powerful sermons in English—with a broad Norfolk accent. An envoy of King John is said to have assured the ruler of Morocco with patriotic pride that his countrymen were skilled in every liberal and mechanical art and learned in three languages, Latin, French, and English.
Friar Roger Bacon (c. 1260) referred to these as the Englishman’s three mother tongues.

When English emerges once more as the main literary language of the country in the writings of the court poet Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1345–1400), it is very different from the Anglo-Saxon of three centuries earlier. But the process of change had been going on continuously throughout these centuries. English grammar had been greatly simplified, and many words that belonged only to the language of poetry or literary prose had disappeared. In their place the new English had incorporated a vast number of French words—nouns, adjectives and verbs.

Among them are words that deal with everything that could be talked about in court or castle, by tailor, butcher or carpenter, in the mason’s lodge, the merchant’s counting-house or the monk’s parlour, or in my lady’s chamber. The words italicized in the foregoing sentence are all French words that were naturalized in English by the year 1300 at latest. Among such words are many that preserve peculiarities of early Norman or Northern French pronunciation as distinct from what Chaucer called “French of Paris”—for example, castle, war and faith, as compared with the French forms château (earlier chastel), guerre and foi.

What is demonstrably true of language probably holds good over the whole range of cultural contact between the two peoples. The native tradition tended to be swamped, not necessarily by Norman culture, which in many fields scarcely existed, but by a Continental
culture imported via Normandy. But English craftsmen, even when they set out to imitate foreign fashions, ended by producing something distinctively English. This is true of cookery and costumery, penmanship and pottery, metal-work and sculpture. It is most conspicuously true of architecture, where the greatly increased material resources made available by imported techniques and by Norman drive and efficiency made it possible to plan and build on a far more grandiose scale than had ever been attempted in Saxon England.

Norman penetration in the British Isles did not end with the conquest of England. Even before 1066 Norman adventurers had been granted lands by Edward the Confessor on the borders of Wales as a frontier-guard against the turbulent tribesmen of the West. William the Conqueror, who usually kept a tight rein on his earls, allowed a relatively free hand to those of Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford, who guarded the western boundary (or “march”) of England, so long as they confined their aggressions to their Welsh neighbours.

Wales was a land of many independent princes, usually at feud with one another, who afforded many openings for the Norman tactics of intrigue and infiltration. In many places the heirs or retainers of these “Marcher Earls” established themselves as successors to the native princes, exercising similar rights over their Welsh subjects and almost as independent of any overlord. They met with periodic setbacks, due to
bursts of Welsh nationalism, to the alarm inspired in the
king of England by their growing power, and to their
own mutual jealousies. But within a few generations
they had made themselves masters of most of the flatter
and more fertile lands of south and central Wales. Only
the natural fortress of Snowdonia defied them, till
Edward I intervened and after a hard-fought war
brought the whole country under the direct authority
of the English crown.

The tactics of peacemeal conquest that succeeded in
Wales were not applicable to Scotland—a strong and
indeed aggressive, though somewhat disunited, king-
dom. Malcolm, son of Duncan, who succeeded Macbeth
as King of Scots in 1057, found himself ruler of a very
mixed bag of subjects, Gaels in the north-west, Picts
or their descendants in the north-east, Welsh in the
south-west and Northumbrian English in the south-east,
besides Norse settlers in the neighbouring islands and
at many points round the coast. The royal family were
Gaelic in origin; but Malcolm’s marriage with the
Saxon princess Margaret strengthened his ties with the
English-speaking population in the Eastern Lowlands,
the most settled and prosperous part of the kingdom.
It also brought him into conflict with William I.

But after the marriage between Henry I and Mal-
colm’s daughter Edith relations between the English
and Scottish courts grew closer. David I, before he
came to the throne of Scotland in 1124, succeeded by
marriage to the earldom of Huntingdon and spent much
of his life at the English court, where he made many
friends among the Anglo-Norman nobility. Some of these accompanied him to Scotland and were granted earldoms there. The descendants of these men and others like them, including Balliols, Bruces, and Stewarts, exercised an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. It was largely thanks to them that Scotland south and east of the Highland line was reorganized as a feudal state on the Anglo-Norman model and that it proved strong enough to withstand the strenuous efforts of Edward I to conquer it as he had conquered Wales.

In Ireland, Norman intervention followed a pattern more like that in Wales. The Celtic civilization of the "Isle of Saints", with its scholarly monks and fervid missionaries, had been disrupted by Norse invasions. Politically the country was a chaos of rival princes competing fiercely for the status of High King. In 1170 the Norman Earl of Pembroke, responding to an appeal from an exiled Irish prince, landed in Ireland with a force of knights and men-at-arms and established himself in Dublin. Other Norman adventurers took a hand in the game.

Henry II, who had his own plans for the country, was not too well pleased at this unofficial invasion. Next year he came over to Dublin himself and tried to regularize the situation. He received the homage of the leading Irish princes, except those in the far north, and with the blessing of the Pope summoned a council of the leading Irish churchmen, with a view to attempting the sort of reform that the Normans had brought about in
the English Church. This was the beginning of a gradual Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland, which never fully achieved its object.

In this the Norman nobles played a double part. Within what the English called "the land of peace"—the settled area of varying extent based on Dublin—they were the mainstay of a feudal society not notably different from that of England. But others, such as the Fitzgeralds, Butlers and Burkes, through intermarriage with Irish princely families, became leading figures in the turbulent and picturesque society of the "land of war", the country beyond the Pale, whose way of life the English never understood.

After this brief outline of the Norman achievement we shall turn in the following chapters to look more closely at some aspects of life under Norman rule. We shall be concerned mainly with Norman England, i.e. England in the four or five generations between 1066 and 1204, when the political tie with Normandy was severed. We shall be on the look out for features in the life of the time that seem to be distinctively Norman. But we must bear in mind that England and Normandy were both bound up with Western Christendom as a whole, which in its turn was involved in the broader sweep of world history.

If William instead of Harold had met his death at Hastings, the influences that transformed England in the following centuries might well have acted through different channels and in different forms. Probably they
would have acted less powerfully, since the English have always been less willing to learn from foreigners than to ape their own aristocracy. But England could not have escaped them altogether; and it would be unjust to assign to the Norman Conquest all the praise or all the blame even for those imports that we most confidently label "made in Normandy".
A NORMAN VILLAGE

The villages of Norman England have left few material remains above ground, except here and there a solidly built Norman church. Little has been done to enlarge our knowledge of them by excavation. There are no landscape paintings to show us what they looked like, and no contemporary descriptions of their outward appearance or of what it felt like to live in them.

We can, however, draw on a wealth of documentary evidence unequalled elsewhere. The invaluable Domesday Book can be supplemented by local surveys, especially of monastic estates, at various dates in the twelfth century and by some thousands of deeds recording sales or grants of land. These documents were written for strictly practical purposes: to record the rights that particular people, from the king downwards, enjoyed or claimed and wished to pass on to their heirs, and the obligations that other people owed them. They do not go out of their way to tell us things that everyone at the time knew quite well. By fitting together the things they do tell us and setting
them against the abiding background of the English countryside and the recurring round of the farmer's year, it is possible to build up an over-all picture that grows more precise and more convincing as each new piece is fitted into the jig-saw. But there are many important pieces missing, and probably many others misplaced.

In the wilder and more newly settled districts, as in the heroic age of the American frontier, some of the land was cultivated by individual families living in isolated farmsteads. But it was more usual for a group of farming families to live together in a village. The size of this group was limited by the distance a man could comfortably walk from his dwelling to the field of his labour in the morning and back at night. This gives a unit area of a few square miles, its size, shape, and population depending on the nature of the land and the method of cultivation. In a highly organized society, with effective means of transport and industrial populations demanding food and able to pay for it with other products, cultivators can specialize in particular crops with an eye to the market. But in a simpler society the unit area must be mainly self-supporting.

In the more developed parts of Roman Britain, as in other provinces of the Empire, the unit area had often been a single estate (Latin, villa). The villa belonged to one landowner or to the state and was worked by the labour of household slaves and serfs, i.e. tenant farmers forbidden by law to leave the estate or to alter their condition of life. It was designed to produce a
considerable surplus, usually of wheat, to feed the townsfolk and the big standing armies. But with the collapse of Roman rule and the barbarian invasions this system had broken down throughout Western Europe. In its place there had grown up a new pattern of country life, not standardized by law but regulated by local custom. Within this pattern there was room for endless variation, which depended quite as much on differences in soil and climate and the almost unnoticed spread of new farming methods as it did on the mass migration of tribes or the frontiers imposed by conquest or treaty.

The unit area was now cultivated by a small group of peasant households forming a single community. Though it was still called villa or ville in Romance languages, it differed in many ways from the old Roman villa. For one thing, it was highly self-contained. It supplied its inhabitants not only with the grain that formed their staple diet, but with pasturage and hay to feed the cattle that pulled their ploughs and carts and provided them with milk and cheese and the sheep in whose wool they clothed themselves, and with wood to make their houses and furniture and tools, keep them warm in winter and cook their meals. A slight surplus of farm produce would suffice to pay for the few necessities, such as salt and iron, that they could not normally provide for themselves.

There had been some technical improvements. The solidly built northern plough, drawn by a team of eight oxen, was a more efficient instrument than the
light Roman one, at any rate in the heavy and often sodden soils of Britain. Improved harness enabled fuller use to be made of horse-power. Water-mills, a novelty in Roman times, were now almost as widespread as running water. Domesday Book mentions more than 5,000 mills in England, including a tide-mill in Dover harbour which proved a nuisance to shipping. Windmills (origin unknown) appeared first about the year 1180 and soon became abundant.

All this did something to lighten the burden that had lain on the shoulders of the Roman serf. But work remained very hard. Ploughing, sowing, harrowing, weeding and harvest made up an almost continuous round of labour from dawn to dusk throughout the year. Add to this the care of the cattle and other livestock. Add also such tasks as hedging and ditching,
vital to the welfare of the community as a whole, and the building and repairing, gathering of firewood or peat, spinning and weaving, baking and brewing, and all the other household chores incidental to a largely "do it yourself" economy. And it will be seen that the peasant family had very little spare time.

Moreover, it was not enough for the peasantry to produce the small surplus required to meet their own needs. If they were to form the basis for even a modest superstructure of civilization—a small class of specialized
craftsmen, traders and soldiers, an educated clergy and a privileged class with the means and leisure to cultivate more refined tastes and wider interests—then the land must be made to yield a bigger surplus, which could be taken from the producers under the name of rent, tithes or taxes. In fact the peasantry, in Saxon or in Norman England as elsewhere, got a good deal less out of the soil than they might have done with more efficient farming: what was considered by agricultural experts in the thirteenth century to be the maximum yield of a given amount of land and seed was less than a quarter of what would now be considered a bare minimum. And a high proportion of this meagre yield was extorted from them by their rulers and used with at least equal inefficiency.

There is no doubt about the wastefulness of medieval society (i.e. society in what came to be called the "Middle Ages", the period between the collapse of Western Civilization about A.D. 500 and its supposed rebirth or "Renaissance" about 1500). But it did not squander the natural resources of the earth as we have done since. Medieval farming methods were in every sense conservative: they were based on long experience, changed very slowly, and could be continued indefinitely without impoverishing the soil.

Over most of England, especially the main midland zone, the arable land of the village had been divided ever since the Saxon settlement into either two or three large unfenced fields. Part of this was left fallow (i.e. under grass) each year so as to regain fertility and
provide extra pasturage. The rest was planted either with an autumn-sown crop (wheat or rye) or with a spring-sown crop (oats, barley, or "pulse", i.e. peas, beans, or vetch).

The lay-out of the land was a complex patchwork of rectangular "furlongs" ("furrow-longs") with short "headlands" set at right-angles and irregular "butts" or "gores" filling up the odd spaces. This was dictated in general by the problem of manoeuvring the cumbersome plough-team, and in detail by the lie of the land.

Clearly a unit of this sort could be run only as a communal enterprise. There could be no question of each householder owning his own separate plot of land and running it in his own way. But it was not run as a collective farm on Communist lines. It was more like a joint-stock company, with the members of the village community as hereditary share-holders. Each man's holding consisted of so many narrow strips or "acres", each corresponding roughly to a day's ploughing, scattered here and there over the whole field. A full share-holder was reckoned to possess on an average about one "yardland" of twenty to thirty acres. There were also many smallholders who had far less than this and who, if they had families to support, must have eked out their living as village craftsmen (smiths or wheelwrights, for instance) or as hired labourers for richer men.

The rest of the land consisted of meadows to provide hay for winter feeding, usually fenced round to
keep out the cattle, and rough pasture including waste land—heath, marsh, scrub or wood. This was usually the common property of the village; but the number of cattle or sheep that each household could keep on it was fixed by custom and in most villages was proportionate to the holder’s share of ploughland. The waste land also served other purposes as a source of fuel and timber and the acorns and beech mast used for fattening pigs in autumn, and also of wild game that could be hunted or snared. Incidentally, there were no rabbits in Norman England; they were introduced about the end of the twelfth century on the estates of the bishop of Winchester.

During the Norman period the lion’s share of the land in most villages belonged to one man, the lord of the manor, though there might be several manors in one village, or several villages attached to one manor. Manor is a French word, originally meaning “mansion” or “dwelling”. And in Norman England the lord of the manor was often a descendant of a Norman knight who had received it from one of the Conqueror’s barons in return for feudal service.

But there must have been manors, or something very like them, in England before the Norman Conquest. The compilers of Domesday Book, while they record the name of the Norman or Saxon lord who held every manor in England as far north as Yorkshire in 1086, can usually name with equal confidence the man who had held it twenty years before “on the day when King Edward was alive and dead”, and who had •
presumably inherited it from his forebears. In their earlier days English villages may have been more democratic. But there is no evidence that all the share-holders in the village community had ever been free and equal.

The lord’s share of the village land was called his *demesne*. Its produce belonged to him for the support of his household, leaving a surplus that he could sell for his own profit. It was cultivated partly by his household servants, partly by the combined labours of the other villagers, who were each obliged by custom to devote a certain amount of their time to their lord’s service. The villagers are elaborately classified in Domesday Book according to their legal status in relation to the lord and also according to the size of their share. Those described as “free men” or as “sokemen”, tenants bound to “seek” (i.e. attend) the manor court, held their land as of right, rendering only a moderate rent in the form of labour, produce, or money. But the great bulk of the tenants, including the full share-holders whom Domesday Book calls simply “villagers” (*villani*) and also the smallholders and cottagers, were burdened with heavier services and bound without appeal by the authority of the manor court.

Distinct from all these classes were the “slaves”, who are scarcely mentioned in later records. It would seem that household slavery, which had certainly existed in Saxon England, died out during the Norman period. On the other hand, the liberties of the “unfree” peasantry were probably diminished. In the language of Norman lawyers, *villanus* or *villein* came to mean some-
thing very like "serf". But in practice the lord's powers were usually as strictly limited by the custom of the manor as the king's were by the custom of the realm. At the meeting of the manor court (or "hall moot"), at which the customary rules were enforced and offenders punished, the lord or his steward presided; but the decisions were taken collectively by the tenantry. As the central government grew stronger, matters involving the rights of free tenants or breaches of "the king's peace" came to be reserved for trial before the sheriff or the king's justices. More and more, the self-contained village or manor became integrated into the life of the country as a whole.

Let us now look more closely at the description of a sample village as it appears in Domesday Book. First we are told whether it forms part of the king's demesne, kept "in his hand" and paying its rent directly into the crown revenues, or whether it is held by the lord of the manor as part of a particular feudal barony or fief. Then comes the taxable value of the land, rated as so many *hides*—units of indeterminate size but usually more or less equivalent to four yardlands, i.e. 80 to 120 acres. Next the amounts of ploughland held by the lord as his demesne and by various classes of tenants; the plough-teams available to cultivate it; the amounts of meadow, pasture, and so forth; and sometimes other assets such as fisheries, salt-pan, or iron foundries. Occasionally the account is enlivened by scraps of local history, such as the settlement of disputed claims. But on the whole it is dull reading, except for the interest of picking up
odd pieces of the jig-saw to fit into our oldest comprehensive picture of England.

For our sample let us choose a village in Essex, a county for which the descriptions are more detailed than for most. The village of Witham, on a low hill rising from the marshes and crossed by the old Roman road from London to Colchester, had been founded in A.D. 913 as a burh, i.e. a fortified outpost against the Danes; but it was not a place of any size or importance. This is how it figures in Domesday Book:

Witham was held by Earl Harold in the time of King Edward as 1 manor and as 5 hides. Now the manor is in the King’s hand and in the keeping of Peter the sheriff. Then there were 2 ploughs in demesne, now there are 3: then 21 villagers, now 15; then 9 smallholders, now 10; then 6 slaves, now 9; then 23 sokemen, now the same. Then the men had 18 plough-teams, now they have 7; and this loss was in the time of sheriffs Swayn and Baynard, by the death of the beasts. There is woodland for 150 pigs; 30 acres of meadow; pasture which then paid a rent of 6d., now 14d. There has always been 1 mill. The said sokemen hold 2 hides and 1 yardland, having 2 ploughs. Then the whole yearly value was 10l.; now 20l.

The entry then deals with the lands of thirty-four free men “adjacent” to the manor, including one hide claimed by the monks of Ely, whose claim was supported in respect of half a hide by the local jurors.

The manor of Witham was afterwards granted to Eustace, count of Boulogne, who married a sister of
Plate 5. Building of motte-and-bailey castle by the Normans at Hastings. From the Bayeux Tapestry. (Courtesy, Giraudon and The Mansell Collection)

Plate 7. The nave of Durham Cathedral (built A.D. 1099-1133). (Courtesy, Mrs. F. H. Crossley)
Plate 8. Domesday Book: this entry shows the top of the first page dealing with Shropshire (Sciroptesberie) and contains part of the description of Shrewsbury (Sciroptesberie). (Crown copyright. Reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office)
Plate 9. The building of St. Guthlac's Chapel, Crowland, from a 12th century manuscript. (Courtesy, The Mansell Collection)
Edith, wife of Henry I. His daughter Maud, wife of King Stephen, gave it to the Templars or Knights of the Temple, a religious order dedicated to the defence of the Holy Land against the Saracens. It was thus included in a survey of the Templars’ English estates made in 1185, just a century after Domesday Book.

At this date the Templars’ lands in Witham and in the neighbouring village of Cressing (still distinguished as Temple Cressing) were run as a single estate with an area of arable land reckoned at five hides. Half of this was held in demesne, producing crops that could be sold to swell the revenues of the order. The other half was parcelled out among over one hundred tenant households, which contributed in various ways to the running of the demesne.

Some of the tenants paid a fairly heavy rent for their holdings, coupled with light labour services. Among these were a group of “yardlanders”, whose private holdings of about thirty acres each must obviously have occupied most of their time, and lesser tenants whose main occupation is indicated by the titles or surnames appended to their misleadingly Norman Christian names: Richard the Door-keeper, Reyner the Forester, Peter the Skinner, Gilbert the Smith, Osbert the Clerk, Richard the Mason, Roger the Thatcher, Alice daughter of Ives the Shepherd, Fulk and Withard “of the Market”, who presumably ran the Sunday market granted to Witham by a charter of King Stephen, Golding the Merchant, Baldwin the Reeve (i.e. the Foreman) and
Wulfward the Baker, whose half-acre cannot have included much beyond the site of his bake-house.

Quite distinct from both these classes were those who held plots of ten acres or less by performing "week-work" on the demesne (a form of labour commonly regarded as a mark of the servile villein) in addition to some small customary rents, such as "pannage" for the right to fatten pigs in the woodland (as mentioned in the Domesday entry) and a Christmas gift of four hens and three farthings.

A ten-acre household was called upon to provide two full days' work a week (three days in August and September), besides transport for the demesne produce into the port of Maldon by cart or pack animal on any Saturday when required and two trips a year as far as London. This does not include the nominally voluntary services to be performed "at bidding"—boon-reaping on Tuesday and Thursday at harvest and boon-ploughing with all available plough-beasts. Clearly, if there was only one able-bodied man in the household,
this programme would leave him very little time to till his own plot. Other services performed by some tenants on this estate included carting hay, cutting brushwood and hedging with it and gathering hazel nuts.

Surveys such as this afford glimpses into the life of a heavily but not intolerably burdened peasantry with so many gradations of rank and wealth and so many local variations that no general picture can do it justice.

The standard of living, by comparison with modern Europe, was miserably low. Diet was simple and rough. At boon-ploughing the Templars provided their tenants at Witham with a free meal of ale, bread, and herrings. The ale would have seemed tasteless stuff to modern palates, accustomed to the bitter flavour of hops that did not enter into English brewing till the fifteenth century. The coarse-ground bread with its intermixture of rye flour and pea or bean meal may have been nutritious but would certainly have taxed modern powers of digestion. The herring, perhaps highly salted Yarmouth bloaters, may well have been a delicacy to the poorer labourers, who probably often had to make do with bread and cheese. Bacon and salt beef, varied by eggs and rather tasteless freshwater fish on Fridays, may not have been unduly scarce; but the problem of feeding animals in winter made fresh meat a luxury for festive occasions. Since all Essex was royal forest, subject to ferocious game-laws, hunting at Witham would have been a perilous way of filling the pot. Other items of diet can scarcely have extended beyond a narrow range of vegetables (kale, onions, garlic, etc.)
some pot-herbs, wild berries and orchard fruits, especially apples (many of which went into cider), and a little honey.

Clothing consisted mainly of tunics, smocks, and cloaks of home-spun wool, with a little linen or hemp in some districts. The wool was spun by the women with distaff and spindle (the spinning wheel did not come in till the fourteenth century) and woven on hand-looms. Knitting was unknown in England, perhaps till the sixteenth century. Cloth of finer quality and bleached or dyed in bright colours was manufactured locally (e.g. at Worstead in Norfolk) and sold at fairs or by travelling pedlars to those who could afford such finery.

The houses, even of the wealthier classes of the peasantry, were rude wooden shacks or hovels of
wattle-and-daub (i.e. basketwork coated with clay), with a hole in the thatch to let out the smoke. Furniture was of the simplest—perhaps no more than a bench and a stool or two. A heap of straw would serve as a bed. Spoons, bowls, platters, milk-pails, and the like were normally of wood, though a little earthenware was in use. A few essential tools of husbandry and cookery might well complete the list of the peasant's goods and chattels.

In the score or two of houses that made up the village, straggling along the roadside or huddled like a continuous wall round the village green and facing inward for safety, two buildings stood out among the rest. The Norman manorhouse, usually divided into a large hall and a few small chambers, was distinguished by size rather than by materials or structure. But the church was another matter.

A typical village was at the same time a parish with a parish church. In Saxon times this too had often been a wooden building, though even then there were a few stone churches, of which one or two survive. Soon after the Norman Conquest the new Romanesque style reached England, with its much more solid masonry of bigger stones more carefully shaped and set, its massive pillars supporting round "Norman" arches and sometimes its square central tower. During the twelfth century many hundreds of these were built in all parts of England; but most of them have since been replaced by newer buildings or else repaired and enlarged out of recognition.
The Normans, as we have seen, also did something to improve the status and education of the parish priest. But in many parishes he remained little better off and scarcely less ignorant than most of his flock. Very often the tithes or tenths of their corn and other produce, originally set aside for his use, had been appropriated by a lay rector or a religious house (in the case of Witham by the church of St. Martin le Grand in London), who appointed a vicar at a modest stipend. There was also a share of the village land (the glebe) reserved for the priest, who usually cultivated it with his own hands.

The Norman priests, who were appointed to some parishes, may have been better educated than most English ones; but they would have found it hard to preach a sermon that their parishioners could understand. At the end of the twelfth century the low standard of preaching was recognized as a crying evil throughout Western Christendom; and it was partly the hope of remedying this that inspired St. Francis and St. Dominic to found their orders of travelling friars.

Nevertheless, in the life of the poorest villein, however ignorant of Christian doctrine, the Church was a very present reality, whether as visibly embodied in a dignified and impressive building, adorned perhaps with wall-paintings of scenes from the Scriptures or from lives of the saints, or as a spiritual brotherhood that linked him with his fellow men and women of all ranks in the mystic bonds of the holy sacraments.

Blended with the official religion there still lingered
throughout the countryside active relics of older beliefs and rites, dating from the beginnings of agriculture. The pronouncements of Church councils against witchcraft and other heathen practices are proof of their persistence; and this is supported by abundant evidence of their survival long after Norman times. Some of the more harmless of these practices were tolerated by the Church in a Christianized form, in accordance with the advice given by Pope Gregory to the missionaries he sent to the Anglo-Saxons; and we can be sure, though there is very little direct evidence, that merry-making at May Day, Hallow E’en, Christmas and other age-old seasonal festivities enlivened the yearly round in the villages of Norman England.

However harsh and unrewarding this way of life may seem to us, it passes quite creditably the only tests we can apply to it. The figures given in Domesday Book have been variously interpreted; but they do indicate that the population of England in 1086 cannot have been much more than one to one and a half million. During the ensuing century, in spite of frequent wars and the anarchy of Stephen’s reign, all the indications are that the population at least doubled and that the standard of living was also rising. Whatever grievances the peasantry may have had, they were not driven to large-scale revolt.

For the enterprising few there were possibilities, even in that class-divided society, of bettering their lot. Though the communal methods of farming gave little scope for originality and experiment, it was possible by
hard work and thrift to save a little money. With this the villein could buy his liberty. Labour services could be commuted for rent. In many districts there was extra land available that could be reclaimed from the waste. A bright lad might be put to school and become a clerk, though a villein’s son was not eligible for holy orders without special dispensation. A daring one might make good as a military retainer or a mercenary soldier. But the most promising outlet was provided by the growing towns: a villein who contrived, with or without permission, to reside for a year and a day in a borough became a free man; and here, as we shall see in a later chapter, the door was open for at least a gradual rise in the social scale.
A NORMAN MONASTERY

The word monastery originally meant a place for living alone. The first monks were followers of St. Anthony of Egypt about A.D. 300, who abandoned their homes and possessions and went out into the desert to live a solitary life of prayer and meditation. It was generally agreed at the time that such a life was the fullest expression of the Christian ideal. But experience soon showed that a hermit was easily tempted either to lapse into mere idleness or to wear himself out by excessive austerity. So the monks took to living in communities, and rules were laid down for their guidance. In Western Christendom most monasteries followed the rules drawn up in the sixth century by St. Benedict for the community established by him at Monte Cassino in Italy and the nunnery founded by his sister, St. Scholastica.

Benedictine monks lived in a little world of their own with its communal dormitory and dining-room, its chapter-house where the brethren met for official business and its less official parlour or "talking-room", its infirmary and guest-houses, and of course its church.
These with the surrounding gardens and farm-lands were designed as a self-supporting unit, so that the inmates might sever all contact with the outside world.

The monks bound themselves for life by a three-fold vow of chastity, poverty, and obedience to the "father" (abbot) of their house. Their lives were devoted mainly to worship and prayer in accordance with a strict routine. In winter the day ran from about 2 a.m. to 7 p.m. In summer it was rather longer, but broken by an early morning sleep and a siesta. The winter time-table provided for one daily meal, taken in Norman times about 2 p.m. During Lent the meal was postponed to

Monks chanting
about 5.30; and in summer there was an evening meal as well as a midday one. About ten hours were spent in worship, mainly the chanting of psalms and the ceremonial celebration of mass, leaving some five or six hours for work and private study. Conversation was restricted to a small part of the day. Though the eating of meat (other than fowls) was confined to certain special feast-days, the diet was not intended to be unduly rigorous.

It was a recognized duty of the monasteries, as models of the Christian way of life, to be hospitable to the stranger and to minister so far as their means allowed to the poor and the sick. At certain periods of history and in certain places these social services became important; but they were never regarded as the primary function of religious communities.

The earliest monks had been seeking refuge in a life of hardship from the temptations of a civilized and affluent society, which they denounced for its love of worldly pomp and pleasure. But during the war-torn centuries that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West this civilized society ceased to exist. Since the sanctity of the monastery was generally respected, except by outright pagans like the Norsemen, life and property were safer within its walls than anywhere else. Monasteries were enriched by gifts of land from the pious and death-bed bequests from those who hoped to atone for a life of impiety. These monastic estates, being managed by men much better educated than most lay landlords and trained to
co-operate in a permanent organization, were run with more than average efficiency. Hence, though the monks as individuals were supposed to have no possessions, collectively they often amassed great wealth and lived more luxuriously than they could have hoped to do in the world outside. Sometimes this led to a neglect of the rule and a scandalous decline in moral standards, which provoked violent criticism and recurring demands for reform.

Benedict had made provision in his rule for regular

A monk yields to the sin of gluttony
hours of work, partly so that his monks could be self-supporting, partly on the ground that work can be a form of prayer with a spiritual value of its own. The Benedictine monks of Norman times, with their large estates run by villein labour and their staffs of household servants, had no need to work with their hands. But the management of these estates and households called for a great deal of administrative work, which was apportioned among such of the monks as were specially appointed to the office of treasurer, cellarer, sacristan or the like. At the head of this organization stood the abbot, with his second-in-command the prior. The special duties of the senior officials inevitably exempted them from many of the restraints of monastic discipline. The abbots of the wealthier monasteries, ranking among the greatest land-holders in the country, were not only despotic rulers of their own domains but occupied a prominent place in feudal society, sometimes even in the government of the country as royal councillors and officials. To a man of ambition and practical ability, the monastic career offered great scope.

To those, on the other hand, of a studious or artistic bent, the comparative affluence, leisure and security of the cloister afforded opportunities unobtainable elsewhere, which were sometimes turned to good account. The monasteries were patrons of the arts and pioneers in their development. The classical tradition of Western music goes back in its main stream to the choral singing of the Benedictine monks. Modern European drama has grown out of the “passion play”, which began
as a dramatization by the monks of the Easter story. Almost as striking has been their contribution to architecture and sculpture, metal-work and painting, both on the grand scale and in miniature. And no one who takes any interest in history can forget how inescapably we depend on their guidance in our exploring of the past.

The monks used their necessary knowledge of Latin not only to learn their service books and the Scriptures and to recopy them, often lavishing great care and devotion on a shapely script with initial capitals gaily illuminated, but also to study and recopy such other Latin manuscripts as came their way. Thus they preserved many relics of pre-Christian Latin literature that would otherwise never have survived the illiteracy and neglect of the early Middle Ages. Some of them went on to try their hands at original literary composition, suitable for reading aloud at meal-times in the refectory. They were especially fond of lives of the saints, with a natural preference for those associated in some way with their own monasteries. The more business-like compiled "cartularies"—entry books of the charters that served as their title deeds for lands and privileges. It was a natural step to combine these two themes in the form of chronicles, recording the main events in the history of their houses, with biographical notes on the founders and other benefactors and the successive abbots. Some chroniclers recorded much else besides, and a few of them wrote general histories of wide scope and interest.
These charters and chronicles are the main source for modern knowledge of many centuries of European history. The modern historian, while acknowledging his immense debt to the monks both as informants and as predecessors, must constantly bear in mind that a picture of the world from inside the cloister cannot truly portray what it looked like from outside.

The *Constitutions* drawn up by Lanfranc for the cathedral priory of Canterbury show what pains were taken to regulate every detail of monastic life and to check every irregularity by confession or denunciation in chapter, followed by fasting, scourging or other penance. But the rigours of the rule are tempered by a spirit of forgiveness and practical good sense. An interesting section of the *Constitutions* deals with the admission to the monastery of young boys, a practice still quite common at that time.

When his hair has been clipped in the tonsure, let the boy, holding in his hands the sacred bread and the chalice of wine according to custom, be offered by his parents to the priest who is celebrating mass. When the priest has accepted this offering, let the parents wrap the boy’s hands in the pall with which the altar is covered and which hangs down in front; and then let the abbot accept him. Thereupon let the parents in the presence of God and his saints promise that the boy will never through their agency or prompting leave the order, nor will they ever give him anything that might lead to his undoing. This promise, written in advance in the presence of witnesses, they shall there utter in words and afterwards lay upon the altar.
This done, the abbot shall bless a cowl and, divesting the child of his cloak or other such garment, shall say: "May the Lord divest thee of the old man!" Then, clothing him with the cowl, he shall proceed: "May the Lord clothe thee with the new man!" Thereupon the boy shall be led away to be shaven and robed in the fashion of our order. When, having come of age, he is ready to make his profession, he shall undergo all else that is done to a new entrant.

The significance of this ceremony is brought home to us by the life-story of an individual monk. In the train of Roger de Montgomery, who came over to England with the Conqueror and received the earldom of Shrewsbury, was a clerk named Odeler of Orleans. Odeler became a parish priest in Shrewsbury, married an English wife, and had three sons. He replaced his wooden church by a stone one and eventually, with the patronage of the earl, converted it into a monastic establishment, the abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul, which he himself joined as a monk together with his youngest son. What happened to the second son may be told in his own words:

I was born on the 16th of February, 1075, and baptized on the following Easter Saturday at Atcham, a village in England on the great river Severn. There, O Almighty God, thou didst cause me to be born again of water and the Spirit by the ministry of Orderic the priest and didst bestow on me the name of that same priest, my godfather.

When I was five years old I was sent to school in Shrewsbury and offered to thee the first services of clerkhood in the church of St. Peter and St. Paul the
Apostles. There for five years the renowned priest Siward taught me my letters and imparted a knowledge of psalms and hymns and other needful instruction. Meanwhile thou didst exalt the said church upon the river Meole, which was my father’s, and by the pious devotion of earl Roger didst erect a venerable monastery.

It did not please thee that I should further prolong there the battle of life, lest in the midst of kinsfolk, who are often a burden and a hindrance to thy servants, I should suffer distress of mind or some default in the observance of thy law through their carnal affection. Therefore, most glorious God who didst bid Abraham depart out of his country and leave his father’s house and kin, thou didst put it into the heart of Odelar my father to resign all claim upon me and dedicate me wholly to thy service.

Weeping, he handed me, weeping no less, to Rainald the monk and for the love of thee consigned me to exile, so that he never looked upon me again. As a tender child, I did not presume to go against my father’s wishes, but freely obeyed him in all things, because he for his part promised me that, if I became a monk, then after my death I should inherit paradise with the Innocents.

When through my father’s words this covenant had been made between thee and me, I left my country and my parents and all my kindred and friends and familiars, who weeping and bidding farewell commended me with kind prayers to thee, O God Most High. So at the age of ten I crossed the British Sea and came an exile into Normandy, known to none and knowing none. Like Joseph in Egypt, I heard a tongue that I knew not.

But by thy favour I met there among strangers a
gracious and friendly welcome. By the venerable abbot Mainier I was admitted to a monk's estate in the monastery of St. Evroult and on the 21st of September received the tonsure. In place of my English name, which the Normans found uncouth, I was given the name of Vitalis, borrowed from one of the companions of St. Maurice the martyr, whose martyrdom was then being celebrated. In that monastery, by thy favour, I have lived for 56 years, receiving from all my brethren and comrades love and respect far beyond my deserts.

For the later twelfth century our most revealing picture of monastic life is the chronicle of Bury St. Edmunds (see Plate 6) written by Jocelin the almoner. Jocelin tells us how in the year 1180 abbot Hugh, a kindly well-meaning man whose muddle-headed finance had brought the abbey to the verge of bankruptcy, fell from his horse at Rochester while on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the newly canonized martyr, St. Thomas of Canterbury. “Doctors rushed up and began to torture him in various ways, but did not cure him.” He was carried back in a horse-litter to Bury, where he died of a fever. His household servants went off with all his furniture and chattels, and the abbey could scarcely raise a penny to distribute to the poor for the welfare of his soul.

Until a successor was elected, the revenues of the abbey were payable to the king, like those of a feudal barony between the death of a baron and the succession of his heir. But the problem of choosing him set the tongues of all the brethren wagging. One of them
urged the claims of brother So-and So, “a man of scholarship, eloquence and prudence, a strict observer of the rule and one devoted to the interests of the community.” “From good scholars,” muttered another, “good Lord deliver us.”

One candidate, recommended as “a capable administrator and something of a scholar, though not one whom much learning had made mad”, was denounced as “an ignoramus who could neither read nor chant, but a grinder of the faces of the poor.” Another was praised for his liberality, but as roundly condemned for his luxurious tastes, which would make his appointment “more onerous than honourable”. Yet another was devout in his prayers but surly and arrogant to subordinates.

Eventually the choice fell on Samson the undersacristan, whom one speaker had stigmatized as a “Norfolk pettifogger”; and the rest of the chronicle is largely filled with the achievements of this immensely competent and vigorous champion of the abbey’s rights. No reader of brother Jocelin can forget that, however strange the institutions and ideas of Norman England may appear to us, the clash of personalities was much the same then as it is today.

Much less is known of Scholastica’s nuns than of Benedict’s monks, because they have left no such revealing picture of their own lives. Since their religious services were conducted by priests or chaplains, they did not need to learn much Latin. In general, though more carefully educated than their sisters in manorhouse
or castle, they were less literate than the monks. Their daily routine was similar, though less strenuous, and their seclusion from the world was even more complete.

Since an entrant to a nunnery was expected to provide a substantial “dowry” to meet the cost of her maintenance, nuns tended to be drawn more exclusively from the wealthier classes. The assignment of a girl to a nunnery was often less a matter of vocation than of family convenience, for instance to prevent the splitting up of an estate among sisters who were joint heiresses.

But the picture, common in medieval poetry, of the young nun bewailing her exclusion from the joys of life and love is a romantic overstatement. In an age of violence, when women’s life at the best was a harsh one and they had little or no say in the choice of a husband, the nunnery offered them a haven of gentleness and tranquillity. It also allowed considerable scope for the gift of management and organization. An irreverent proverb declared that, if the abbot of Glastonbury married the abbess of Shaftesbury, their son would be richer than the king. And with wealth went power, though in her dealings with the outside world an abbess had to exercise it mainly by proxy.

Down to the middle of the twelfth century the great Benedictine monasteries—Glastonbury and Malmesbury, Bury St. Edmunds, Peterborough, and St. Albans—were the main centres in England both of piety and of learning. After that they tended to be left behind by newer competitors. This was an age of
new monastic orders, bound by stricter rules than that of Benedict. Most famous among these were the Cistercians, known as White Monks in contrast to the black-robed Benedictines.

This order originated at the abbey of Cîteaux near Dijon in central France, largely under the inspiration of an English abbot, Stephen Harding (1109–1134). Cîteaux founded many daughter-houses throughout Western Europe, all subordinate to a representative governing body (chapter general) that met periodically to regulate the affairs of the whole Order and was subject to no authority but that of the Pope himself. They were thus under much stricter supervision than Benedictine abbeys, which were largely independent of external control, though most of them were answerable in certain matters of doctrine and discipline to the local bishop. The Cistercians would accept only voluntary entrants of full age. They objected to the easy-going ways and splendid ceremonial of the older monasteries and aimed at a more austere and strenuous life, including many hours a day of hard manual labour in the fields.

At this time most Benedictine monasteries stood in towns, many of which indeed had grown up under their patronage; but the Cistercians deliberately built their abbeys in the wilderness—in England most notably in lonely valleys among the Yorkshire moors (Fountains, Byland, Jervaulx, etc.), where they specialized in sheep-farming and thus incidentally laid the foundation of the Yorkshire woollen industry. Their
success was overwhelming, and before long disastrous. They laboured so diligently and so efficiently that they accumulated great riches. Eventually they took to employing “lay brothers” to do the manual work under their supervision and thus largely defeated the intention of their founders.

So it came about that genuine seekers after a life of simplicity and self-denial were attracted elsewhere. Some were drawn into more drastically reformed monastic orders, such as the Carthusians. Others joined the ranks of the wandering friars, who were dedicated to absolute poverty, collective as well as individual.

Meanwhile the Benedictines were losing their cultural as well as their spiritual pre-eminence. With a few exceptions, such as Lanfranc’s abbey of Bec, the monasteries had never attempted to provide schools for the instruction of outsiders. They gave a grounding in Latin grammar to their own members and, as they possessed almost the only libraries in existence, they had at one time a near monopoly of book-learning. But the twelfth century witnessed the rapid growth of “grammar schools” as well as “choir schools” run by the churches, especially by the cathedrals and the big “collegiate” churches—i.e. churches served by a number of priests or canons acting as colleagues.

The most influential of these educational colleges were the group that formed themselves during this century into the “university” of Paris, which provided the model for Oxford and Cambridge and most of the
other universities of Western Europe. These were intended for students who already had a thorough knowledge of Latin and wished to pursue a course of higher study—mainly theology and philosophy, but also other liberal arts such as mathematics and astronomy.

The universities, like the friars, belong to the later Middle Ages. But the great age of the monasteries coincided with the great age of the Normans. And the Normans, wherever they went, were among the most generous founders and patrons of monasteries. Many of them embraced the monastic life with whole-hearted zeal and infused into it something of their own distinctive qualities of energy, organization, and discipline.
A NORMAN CASTLE

The medieval castle was primarily the residence of the medieval baron, the feudal magnate. Here he was safe against surprise attack from marauding bands, from rival barons living a day’s ride away, or from his own hard-pressed tenantry. Here, if provoked, he might even feel strong enough to defy his liege lord. The castle was thus, like the feudal system of land-holding and government, a bulwark against complete anarchy and at the same time an obstacle to the enforcement of law and order on a national scale.

In medieval warfare, so long as the decisive striking force consisted of a band of heavily armed knights, the only way in which a ruler could occupy or defend territory was by posting garrisons at certain key-points from which a cavalry charge could not dislodge them. The castle provided the base from which knights could operate and to which, in the face of superior force, they could retire; a safe lodging for men and beasts; a storehouse for food, munitions, and money; a prison for captives, hostages, or law-breakers; a court-house where judgement could be given (ideally) without fear or
favour; a seat of government from which the ruler or his representative could enforce the royal will upon the surrounding district; a visible symbol of security and power, to reassure the law-abiding and overawe the rebellious.

The simplest type of castle, as it developed in the Frankish territories after the death of Charlemagne, was a plain wooden structure, a solidly built manor-house, perched on a natural eminence or an artificial

Scene from the Bayeux Tapestry: Normans attack a motte-and-bailey castle (Dinan in Brittany) with firebrands

7—FOATIN
mound ("motte"), surrounded at the top by a rampart of earth crowned by a stockade. The motte usually stood at one end of a "bailey", an enclosure containing outbuildings and stables and big enough to accommodate an influx of refugees with their farm stock. This was ringed round by a similar earthwork (often an inner and an outer rampart) and usually joined to the motte by a wasp waist in a rough figure-of-eight pattern. Where possible, the encircling trench from which the earth had been dug was filled with water, naturally or deliberately; and this became such an important feature that the term "motte" or "moat" was eventually transferred to it (see Plate 11).

In the eleventh century most castles were still of this motte-and-bailey type, like the one at Dinan in Brittany as portrayed by a contemporary artist in the Bayeux tapestry, or one in Flanders which is thus described by a slightly later writer:

On the motte of Ardres count Arnold built a wooden mansion, a masterpiece of carpentry that surpassed every other building in Flanders at that time. It was the work of a craftsman from Bourbourg named Louis, scarcely inferior in this art to Daedalus. He made of it an almost inextricable labyrinth, joining storeroom to storeroom, chamber to chamber, adding granaries to cellars and erecting a chapel on the top in the most convenient place at the eastern end of the building.

In the first storey, at ground level, were the cellars and granaries, filled with bins, casks, vats and other household utensils. In the second storey were the common living-room of the residents, the stillrooms
of the pantlers and butlers and the great chamber of
the lord and his wife, in which they slept, and
adjoining this a closet which served as the chamber
or bedroom of the serving maids and children. On
the more secluded side of the great chamber was a
private apartment where, in the early morning or
evening or in case of illness or for blood-letting or
to warm the maids or weaned children, they used to
make up a fire.

Up to this level a kitchen was attached to the
house. In its lower storey were kept pigs and geese
for fattening and capons and other poultry always
ready to be dressed for eating. In its upper storey
lived only cooks and scullions. Here delicacies for
the master’s table were concocted with great trouble
and a battery of appliances. Here too the meals of the
household staff and domestics were prepared by
daily provision and toil.

In the third or top storey of the main building were
bedrooms in which the master’s children used to
sleep, on one side the sons, when they so desired, on
the other the daughters, because such was the rule.
Here, too, the garrison and servants who looked
after the house would retire to rest.

Stairways and passages led from storey to storey,
from the house to the kitchen, from chamber to
chamber and from the house to the outhouse where
they used to sit in their leisure hours and chat, and
thence to the chapel, which in its carving and painting
was modelled on Solomon’s tabernacle. It is no
wonder if guests and visitors lose count of all the
rooms in this mansion, when many who have been
reared in it from infancy to manhood have not been
able to reckon up the number of the gates, doors,
posterns and windows.
Evidently such timber structures could be very substantial. But for men who were replacing their wooden churches by stone ones it was an obvious step to do likewise with their castles, especially as many of them had fought in Mediterranean lands where Roman methods of siege warfare and military architecture were still remembered.

In England before the Norman Conquest, though Alfred and his successors had established fortified villages (burhs) as a defence against the Danes, there were few if any castles in the strict sense. To our friend the Anglo-Norman monk, Orderic Vitalis, it seemed that this was one of the main reasons why the country fell such an easy prey to the Conqueror. Certainly William himself was quick to draw the lesson. As shown on the Bayeux tapestry, one of his first acts after setting foot in England was to build a motte-and-bailey castle at Hastings (see Plate 5); and one of the charges brought against him by an English chronicler was that he caused "castles to be made and poor men to be oppressed."

Those of his followers who received baronies did not fail to follow the royal example. As a safety measure in newly conquered country this was inevitable. But the king, as we have seen, was wide awake to the danger of giving too much power to his great feudatories. And it remained the policy of English kings to keep the strongest castles in the kingdom under their direct control, except at frontier posts like Durham and Shrewsbury, where the risk of invasion seemed to outweigh the risk of rebellion. Wherever there was a sheriff to represent
the royal authority, usually in the leading town of the shire, we may expect to find a royal castle that served as his headquarters.

During the turmoil of Stephen’s reign the barons, as a chronicler tells us, “filled the land full of castles and burdened the folk with castle-work”—mainly, no doubt, the spadework of motte and dyke. The reassertion of royal power by Henry II was marked by the destruction of these unauthorized castles, coupled with a costly programme of royal castle-building in the new fashion. Except in newly conquered lands such as Ireland, earthworks and timber were giving place to masonry.

The building of a stone castle was a major operation, requiring a greater command of skilled labour and, in some districts, of scarce materials than was available to any but the king and the greatest of his vassals. At some sites the change from timber to stone was a gradual process. The stockade round the rampart was replaced by a stone wall, usually with a strongly built gate-house. Then a higher stone wall was erected round the top of the motte and the space within this shell gradually filled in with stone buildings. Castles of this type can still be seen at Arundel in Sussex and Restormel in Cornwall (see Plate 12).

Elsewhere the main building was planned from the outset in the form of a rectangular stone tower (or “keep”), a copy in masonry of the timber manorhouse. Such was William the Conqueror’s “White Tower”, the nucleus of the Tower of London. Such too was the massive pile reared at the king’s command by Gundulf
bishop of Rochester, a monk of Bec who came over with Lanfranc, and rebuilt about 1130 (see Plate 13). These are exceptionally early examples. But by the end of the twelfth century the stone keep, often built on an old motte-and-bailey site, had become the standard type.

The windowless basement floor of the castle was generally given up, as at Ardres, to storage and was a convenient place for the confinement of prisoners. It regularly included a stone-lined well dug down to water level to provide the most vital of all necessities to a besieged garrison. Most of the first floor was taken up by the great hall—the common dining room and living room of the residents and the sleeping room for most of the menfolk. The lord and lady had a private chamber at the back.

The larger castles allowed space for other separate apartments in an upper floor or in wall turrets. Some had an inside kitchen, but in others cooking must have been done in the bailey. Other elaborations were evolved for military reasons, such as overhanging ("machicolated") parapets and flanking towers from which archers could command the space at the foot of the wall. But most of these belong to the post-Norman period.

Few incidents of medieval life are more familiar than the siege of a castle: the crash of battering rams and the thud of catapulted stones; the defenders raining arrows from the battlements or through the slit windows or pouring down boiling water; the assailants struggling up scaling ladders or pushing forward wooden towers on rollers; sappers mining and countermining; the long
agony of starvation. These incidents fired the imagination of romance-writers, then as later, because they were dramatic and, on the whole, unusual. An assault on a properly garrisoned castle in good repair was a hazardous enterprise, to be avoided if possible. And a prolonged siege did not suit the tactics of feudal armies, who expected to move about the country and support themselves by plunder. It was not easy to hold an adequate force together long enough to starve out a garrison who might be better provisioned than the besiegers and had no such inducements or facilities for desertion. The military value of some of our historic castles may have been no less because throughout their long history it was never worth an enemy’s while to besiege them.

Even in the most peaceful times castles did not stand empty or idle. They had to be kept habitable and defensible, with stocks of provisions constantly inspected and renewed. There can seldom have been any lack of business to be transacted in the great hall, whether it was the centre of a baronial estate, where manorial bailiffs and reeves rendered account of their stewardship and received their orders, or a seat of local government, where king’s messengers were constantly coming and going and sheriffs’ clerks dealt with their extensive correspondence. But besides all this, castles continued to serve their primary purpose as permanent places of residence, where the wealthy Norman aristocracy could indulge their love of splendour, their appreciation of eloquence and minstrelsy .
and their taste for banqueting, hunting, falconry and the mimic warfare of the tournament.

A lengthy poem by one Daniel of Beccles, said to have been a clerk of Henry II, seeks to lay down a code of polite behaviour for gentlemen. This sets a remarkably high standard of tidiness and refinement. The castle should have its orchard, kale-yard and herb garden, and the moat should be well stocked with fish. The bedchambers and privies should be kept neat and clean. The hall should not be used as a cowshed, sty, or stable or a poultry run, or provide kennels for hounds or mews for falcons; and it is no place for the women while they are spinning or combing wool or for the children’s cradles. The courtyard should have a year’s stock of fuel, besides hay and straw for litter. There should be an ample store of warlike munitions, including fetters and chains for unwilling visitors, and also of cooking utensils and foodstuffs for voluntary ones—butter, milk and cheese, salt, pepper and garlic, herring and stockfish, and fitches of bacon hanging from the rafters.

On arriving at a castle you should not knock, as is done at a monastery, but hail the porter. If you are a person of any consequence and the lord follows the precepts of this poem, you can count on an almost overwhelming welcome:

Should clerk or knight come to thy gate as guest,
Make haste to greet him, proffering thy best.
Embrace and kiss, if he be dear to thee.
Let all thy household at his service be.
Plate 11. Air view of the site of a motte-and-bailey castle (Berkhamsted, Herts.). (Courtes... Aerofilms and Aero Pictorial Ltd)

Plate 12. Air view of the ruins of a “shell keep” (Restormel, Cornwall) (Courtes... Aerofilms and Aero Pictorial Ltd.)
Let hay and straw his horses' need supply,  
And smoky fires offend not nose or eye.  
If the hall swelter, let the hearth stand chill.  
Cheer with good cheer the hungry. Let good will  
Ennoble meat and drink. Let sprightly jests  
And tuneful music gladden well-filled guests.

The lavish variety of the dishes Daniel proceeds to describe suggest that the guests, if they survive the ordeal, can scarcely fail to be well filled. And it is not only the ingredients and preparation of the meal that require care, but the methods of serving. The table should be spread with a spotless cloth. Soup-spoons and knives should be clean—dinner forks were not yet in use. The handle of the knife, like the breast of a fowl, the head of a fish or the snout of a swine, should point towards the guest. Hands are washed by pouring water over them into a basin, and dried on napkins. When wine is served after dusk, the waiters carry the wine-jug in one hand and a lighted candle in the other. If your waiter is a girl, it is courteous to offer her the first draught (presumably so that she may "leave a kiss within the cup"). When you lift your goblet, you should say to your neighbour, in English: "Waes hail!" (that is, "Be well", the origin of the word "wassail"), to which he will reply: "Drink hail!" On these occasions children should not be present till they have learnt to behave themselves.

The lady of the house should be taught to stand up for her guests, and also for her lord and master. She should not be allowed to indulge too freely her taste for finery—though Daniel, who believes that most men
are ruled by their wives, clearly has little hope that this
part of his advice will be followed.

Woman delights in pride of gay attire.
Silk scarves and hair-bands are her head’s desire.
Her hand cries out for gems, her feet for shoes,
New-made, close-fitting, bright with various hues,
Her ears for ear-rings and her neck for chains,
Her arms for bracelets. She will spare no pains
In flowing gowns and robes of purple sheen,
Ofttimes renewed, to flaunt it like a queen.
On these she sets her heart at every hour:
These feed her pride and fortify her power.

Such standards of luxury as this implies must have
been beyond the means of all but a very few of the
wealthiest magnates. But the poem gives us some idea
of what it meant in the twelfth century to “keep up with
the Jones’s”.

We have seen that even a simple wooden castle like
Ardres had its amenities. Some castles made far amplier
provide for comfort and elegance, masking their stone
walls with wainscot and tapestries and finding room
in the bailey for orchards and rose gardens. Such
places were focal points of a more gracious way of
living, born in the royal court, whose standards slowly
filtered down to the lesser gentry in their manorhouses
and the merchants above their shops and at length even
impinged on the squalor of peasant life.

The culture of the castle was less literate than that of
the cloister, but it, too, had its chroniclers, who expressed
themselves not in “monkish Latin” but in the almost
equally international language of "romance". Like the "legends of the saints" read aloud in monastic refectories, the rambling romances recited by wandering minstrels in the great hall of castle or manorhouse were mixtures of fact and fancy. In their world King Arthur's knights conquer the Roman Empire and Alexander the Great goes crusading against the Infidel. They may not tell us much that is authentic about Arthur or Alexander; but they tell us quite a lot about the audiences to whom they were addressed and about the romance-writers themselves. The world they describe, with its high ideals of "chivalry" and "courtesy", was largely imaginary, as indeed they often reveal by cynical or humorous glimpses of a much more sordid reality. But they themselves, by their praise of the "parfit, gentil knight" and their condemnation of disloyalty and ignoble "villainy", did something to turn the ideal into fact.

The code of chivalry prescribed that a defeated foe, if he was of knightly rank and not merely one of the rabble, should not be put to death but taken captive. This made warfare less bloodthirsty and also more mercenary, since a captured knight (or his tenancy) might be expected to pay a substantial ransom. A learned churchman, Peter of Blois, archdeacon of Bath, a clerk in the service of Henry II, rebukes the knights of his day, not because they are too fond of fighting but because they prefer to dodge it.

In ancient times knights used to bind themselves by an oath that they would never flee from the battlefield, but would hold their own lives cheaper
than the public weal. Even today entrants into the order receive their swords from the altar, so that they may profess that they are sons of the church and have taken the sword for the honour of the priesthood, the protection of the poor, the punishment of evil-doers and the deliverance of their country.

But the reality has grown to be quite the reverse. Today, when they are adorned with the belt of knighthood, they despoil the poor subjects of Christ and pitiably and pitilessly afflict the piteous so that by the suffering of others they may satisfy their own lawless appetites.

When our knights set out on a campaign, their pack-horses are laden not with steel but with wine, not with lances but with cheeses, not with spears but with spits. You would think they were going to a banqueting hall, not a battlefield. They carry finely gilded shields, in quest of booty rather than battle, and bring them back virgin and undefiled. They have combats and the clash of arms depicted on their saddles and shields so that they may delight in this pictorial semblance of conflicts they dare not look upon in fact. . . . When by God's grace they return from a campaign unscathed and unscarred with their arms undamaged and undinted, they hurl themselves into the festive fray.

Peter's ironic reference to pictures painted on shields is a reminder that knights were beginning to wear distinctive badges or emblems, which made them recognizable to friends and foes, though the elaborate rules of heraldry had not yet been evolved.

At first glance the life of the castle with its alternations of butchery and revelry, seems the very opposite of the
placid routine of the monastery. But in fact the two had much in common: the same blend of austerity, magnificence and monotony; the same conflict of lawless impulses and iron discipline. To a monk his life was a ceaseless "warfare" (*militia*, the technical term for "knighthood"). He liked to picture his monastery as a castle besieged by the Devil and his retainers, whose garrison must "be sober and keep vigil".

On the other hand, every castle as a matter of course had its chapel. The knight's oath of fealty was a "sacrament". He was bound, like the monk, by the rules of an "order". And some orders such as those of the Templars and Hospitallers—the Knights of the Temple of Solomon and of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem—were dedicated to a form of "service" both military and monastic. Abbots mingled freely with their fellow magnates in the banquet hall, the council chamber and the hunt. And many a hardened warrior, after long years in the castle guard-room, ended his days in the cloister. It is no accident that the Normans, who excelled as founders of monasteries, were no less remarkable as builders of castles.
A TOWN differs from a village, broadly speaking, in that it is not self-supporting. Its inhabitants do not all derive their living from the resources of the immediate neighbourhood. They include craftsmen and traders, selling their goods and services to visitors at the local market or to landlords and their retainers and officials whose revenues come from further afield, or exporting them perhaps over a wide area. Thus the growth of a village into a town depends partly on local factors: a convenient and (in troubled times) defensible site; ready access by road or water; and, if possible, some special asset, such as a deposit of iron ore or potters’ clay. But it is no less dependent on external factors, especially the general level of security and prosperity.

In Roman Britain the towns were largely created by government policy. They grew up around legionary camps or “colonies” of retired veterans and pensioners with the Roman preference for the amenities of town life, and as part of the network of trading centres along the great high roads of the Empire. On the breakdown of the Roman imperial government, those that were not
sacked by the invading English died a natural death. Under Ango-Saxon rule new towns developed slowly. The Danish invasions, after their first phase of devastation, speeded up the process: on the English side some of the burhs built as defensive outposts grew into ports (i.e. centres of trade, not necessarily by water), while the Danish settlers kept up active trade relations with the Continent.

Even so, it is doubtful whether at the time of the Norman Conquest any town in England, except London and possibly the old West Saxon capital of Winchester, had a population of more than ten thousand. The figures for householders given in Domesday Book suggest that York had over eight thousand residents, Norwich and Lincoln perhaps seven thousand each, and no other town as many as five thousand. Nevertheless there were many settlements big enough to be reckoned in some sense as “boroughs” (burgi). Some of these may have been little more than burhs in the Anglo-Saxon sense of fortified villages; but many of them had ceased to be wholly agricultural. At Maldon in Essex, for instance, which, as we have seen, served as an outlet for surplus production from Witham, Domesday Book shows us a compact township with some two hundred households (representing a population of perhaps one thousand), most of which had only very small plots of land. Perhaps most of the householders were fishermen, like the people of Yarmouth further up the coast, where the herring fishery was already a thriving industry.
At the other side of the country Domesday Book gives us a glimpse of life in that wild frontier town where the boy monk, Orderic, only a year before, had taken leave of his parents (see Plate 8).

In the city of Shrewsbury there were in the time of King Edward 252 houses and as many burgesses in them, paying a yearly rent of 7l. 16s. 8d. There the king was entitled to the following customs. Anyone who wittingly broke the king’s peace became an outlaw, if it was given by his own hand; if it was given by the sheriff, he paid a fine of 100s., and the same for waylaying someone in the open or Assaulting him in a house.

When the king stayed here, he was guarded by twelve of the best men of the city. When he went out hunting, the best burgesses who had horses formed an armed escort and the sheriff sent out 36 men on foot as beaters. When the sheriff made an expedition into Wales, any man who did not join him when ordered paid 40s.

A widow paid the king 20s. on marriage, a maid 10s. A burgess whose house was burnt by accident or negligence paid 40s. to the king and 2s. each to his next-door neighbours. . . . The king had there three minters of his coin, who 15 days after they had bought their dies, like the other minters of the country, gave the king 40s. each, and the same on every change of coinage. In all, the city paid 30l. a year, two-thirds to the king and one to the sheriff.

The year before this survey it paid 30l. to earl Roger. The English-born burgesses say it is very hard on them that they pay the whole amount now as they did in King Edward’s time, although the earl’s castle has occupied 52 house sites while 50 other sites lie
waste, 43 more are now held by French burgesses, and 29 burgesses who used to contribute have been given by the earl to the abbey which he is making there.

Shrewsbury was not the only town in England where there were hard feelings between English and French burgesses, or where the erection of a Norman castle or a Norman abbey was felt as a grievance. But, take it all round, the towns, especially the sea ports, profited by the strong government and wider foreign relations that followed the Conquest. They not only expanded more rapidly but developed a way of life that marked them off more sharply from the surrounding villages. Within a borough the distinction between free man and villein was wiped out. All burgesses ranked as free tenants, paying a rent for their tenements but exempt from the burdens of manorial service. A castle or an abbey, whatever its drawbacks, assured the tradesmen both of protection and of customers. If the local magnate, whether baron or abbot, was also the landlord, it was to his interest to foster the growth of the borough. But this did not prevent its history from consisting in many cases of a long struggle to escape from his direct domination. Brother Jocelin of Bury shows how easily friction might arise between borough and abbey.

Ever since St. Edmund's town received the name and liberty of a borough, each household has been accustomed to pay the cellarer of the abbey one penny, called "reap-silver", for the reaping of our
corn; before the town was free, they used all to reap it as serfs. Only the houses of knights, chaplains, and court servants were quit of this payment.

In course of time the cellarer began to spare the richer townsfolk, exacting nothing from them. When the other burgesses saw this, they started to maintain openly that no one who had a house of his own ought to pay, but only those who rented houses from others. Eventually they all alike laid claim to this liberty. They interviewed the abbot and offered an annual rent in lieu.

The abbot reflected that it was undignified for the cellarer to go round the town collecting reap-silver, seizing cooking-tripods or doors or other fitments in the poorer houses as pledges for payment, while old women would come out with their distaffs, shouting threats and insults. So he ruled that 20 shillings a year should be paid to the cellarer by the hand of the reeve at the "portmanmoot" [borough court] next before August by the burgesses, who set aside a rent for the purpose. So it was enacted and confirmed by our charter.

On another occasion the monks complained to abbot Samson that, at a time when "all good towns and boroughs in England were increasing, to the profit of their lords," the burgesses of Bury continued to pay no more than £40 rent a year, although their shops and stalls were taking up more and more space in the market by no authority but that of the reeves, who after all were mere servants and nominees of the abbey sacristan. The abbot, however, pointed out that, if he tried to turn these traders out of their holdings, they were entitled as free men to take their plea into the
king's court. He therefore counselled compromise. But this and other disputes lingered on; and as not all abbots were as prudent and diplomatic as Samson, they led more than once to serious rioting and bloodshed.

Most English towns, however, were royal boroughs, standing on crown land and paying rent to the king. Here the burgesses struggled throughout the Norman period for freedom from interference by the sheriff and other royal officials: judicial freedom, by increasing the powers of their borough courts; financial freedom, by substituting a fixed annual payment ("farm") for rents and levies imposed at the king's pleasure; administrative freedom, by getting rid of the king's agent (the "borough-reeve" or "port-reeve") and replacing him by an elective "mayor".

Early in the twelfth century they made some headway. Henry II, who had had trouble in his French domains with demands for municipal self-government, clamped down firmly on his English boroughs. But his sons Richard and John, to meet their pressing needs for cash, sold a great many borough charters conferring various degrees of civic liberty.

This struggle did not mean that English boroughs were anti-royalist: indeed, they usually backed the king in his disputes with the barons. Nor did they aim at the complete political independence achieved by some city-states in countries such as Italy, Germany, and Flanders, where there was no strong central government. The English town that came nearest to true self-government was London; and it was too closely linked with
the fortunes of the country as a whole for any question to arise of political independence.

In many towns the trading community organized itself into a "merchant guild". In origin this may have been a quite informal affair—a social club whose members bound themselves to promote their mutual welfare, relieve special hardship and look after widows and orphans. But it commonly developed during the twelfth century into a legalized corporation, with an elective council and chairman (the "elder" or "alderman"), having the right to hold and dispose of collective property acquired by entrance-fees and donations, besides extensive powers to regulate trade within the borough. As towns acquired rights of self-government, the merchant guild provided the nucleus or model of a body capable of exercising these rights.

In the larger towns particular groups of craftsmen—bakers, weavers, tanners, etc.—formed their own craft guilds. Their main object was to safeguard themselves against price-cutting and other practices deemed to be "unfair competition", especially the sale of shoddy goods by unskilled or dishonest workmen. Eventually this led to a very strict regulation of town life, in which it was hard for anyone to make a living except by entering a guild through the laborious channel of apprenticeship to a master and by conforming to innumerable rules.

In Norman times this process was only beginning. Industry and trade were on a very small scale and few fortunes were made in either. The townsmen, having
acquired equality in legal status, had not yet been split into conflicting classes by the great inequalities in wealth and power that developed later. But there was scope here for private enterprise such as scarcely existed in the rigid social framework of the countryside.

Living conditions in towns were unhealthy, owing to overcrowding and bad sanitation, and the death-rate was high. Their growing population was recruited mainly from enterprising peasants, including fugitive villeins, but also from foreign traders and craftsmen. These had to face a good deal of prejudice; but they were welcomed by the more far-sighted as introducing new commercial connections and new handicrafts.

In the chronicle of Richard of Devizes (about 1190) there is a story of a French lad, a poor cobbler’s apprentice, who is urged by a Jew (with the most sinister motives) to seek his fortune in England. Here is the Jew’s parting advice, which we may imagine as uttered in the accents of Fagin:

When you get to England, if you arrive in London, pass through it quickly. It is a sink of immigrants of every nation, each bringing his own vices, where the worst delinquent is reckoned the best man. There you must beware of bawdy houses and gaming houses, playhouses and taverns. The whole city teems with showmen, mountebanks, quacks, fortune-tellers, night prowlers, degenerates, beggars and vagabonds of every description. If you don’t like the company of rogues, don’t live in London. Of course I don’t include men of letters or religion or Jews—though I daresay that in such surroundings even they are less
virtuous than elsewhere. I don’t suggest that you should not live in a city. But you must make your choice carefully.

It is time ill spent even to go through Canterbury: it is so crowded with rabble attracted by that high priest of theirs—that fellow they have made into a saint—that people are dying in the streets by daylight of starvation and unemployment. Rochester and Chichester are mere hamlets, with no claim except their cathedrals to rank as cities. Oxford can scarcely keep its own population alive. Exeter feeds men and horses on the same groats. Bath lies in a deep hollow, immersed in fog and sulphurous fumes, at the very gates of Hell. I don’t advise you to settle in Worcester, Chester, or Hereford: the Welshmen hold life too cheap.

York is full of Scots—filthy and treacherous creatures. Ely in the midst of its fens is always stinking. In Durham, Norwich, or Lincoln you will find few of the better sort like yourself and never hear French spoken. At Bristol there is no one who is not a soap-boiler—as offensive to a French nose as a scavenger. Setting aside the cities, every market town, village and hamlet is inhabited by brutish peasants. You may look upon the Cornish as being what you know the Flemings to be in France, though their country itself is favoured in soil and climate.

Take it all round, there is nowhere to equal Winchester. For Jews it is a veritable Jerusalem—the one place where they can live in peace. Here indeed they become men. Here there is bread and wine going free. The monks are so merciful, the clergy so enlightened, the citizens so well mannered and so honest, the women so beautiful and so chaste, that I can scarcely restrain myself from going there
to become a Christian among such Christians. Their only weakness is a taste, unequalled under the sun, for inventing and retailing false gossip.

The story continues as a piece of sensational horror fiction, in which the unlucky boy is ceremonially murdered by the Jews of Winchester. Apart from the interest of this passage as a tourist's guide to England, it may serve as a reminder that since the Conquest a Jewish community had become a feature of a score or so of the larger English towns, in the teeth of a prejudice far more deep-seated than any that confronted other immigrants.

The Jews were well fitted for town life by long experience and strict observance of hygienic rules. But they were debarred not only from the religious life of the country and the social life that went with it but even from most departments of its economic life. They could neither hold land, join a guild, nor occupy an official position. A few of them practised medicine. Their links with Continental countries gave them certain advantages as traders. They excelled as goldsmiths, and through their dealings in the precious metals they could command ready cash in an age when this was a scarce commodity. The law of Moses forbade them to lend this at interest to their fellow Jews. The Church similarly forbade the practice of usury by Christians. But there was nothing to stop Jews from lending to Christians on the best terms they could get. And in this capacity they proved very useful to the king, who took them under his protection, taxed them exorbitantly and
enforced repayment of their loans. So till the year 1290, when they were expelled by Edward I, they maintained a precarious existence in England, surviving repeated persecutions but with little chance of making any positive contribution to the life of the community.

The Jews needed strongly built houses as a protection against mob violence and burglary; and they were probably pioneers in the building of stone houses in towns, like the "Jew's house" still standing in Lincoln (see Plate 14). Throughout the twelfth century most houses in English towns, like those in the country, were built of timber or wattle-and-daub with thatched roofs. Since most towns were confined within defensive walls, the growing urban population led to overcrowding; and this in turn increased the ever-present risk of fire. So Daniel of Beccles admonishes his readers:

Build your town house of stone to make it sure;  
For fire in towns makes many a rich man poor.

The danger was greatest in London. "In the old days," as an early London chronicler tells us, "most of the city was built of wood and the houses roofed with straw. Hence, when one house caught fire, a great part of the city was consumed in the blaze. This happened in the first year of King Stephen, when a conflagration starting near London Bridge destroyed St. Paul's cathedral and spread as far as St. Clement Danes. Afterwards many citizens, to ensure as far as they could against such a danger, built stone houses on their sites, roofed with thick tiles and protected against the
ferocity of fire. It often happened that a fire, after burning many houses, stopped short at such a house and died out, so that many neighbouring houses were saved.” Accordingly, in the reign of Richard I, when London won self-government under its first mayor, one of the earliest acts of the civic authorities was to draw up an elaborate set of regulations designed to encourage the erection of stone houses with walls sixteen feet high and tiled roofs. Provision was made for drawing off rainwater and for sanitation, and the builders were forbidden to block a neighbour’s view or to encroach on his land by building out on overhanging corbels.

Fire was one of the “two plagues of London”, the other being “heavy drinking by fools”. So we are told in the introduction to the life of Thomas Becket (St. Thomas of Canterbury) written about the year 1180 by his chaplain William Fitz Stephen. Apart from these,
William, who proudly calls himself “citizen of London”, will admit no fault in his native city, which “among the world’s noble cities extends its fame most widely, exports its wares furthest, holds its head highest”. He goes on to unroll a vivid panorama of London as he knew it: its thirteen monastic foundations and 126 parish churches; the turreted, seven-gated wall running westward from the Conqueror’s massive keep along its northern rim (for the southern wall had been washed away by the Thames); the two miles of suburb, set with “spacious and gracious” orchards, extending upstream to the peerless palace of Westminster, with its bastions and outworks. On the north lie fertile fields, traversed by frequent streams loud with the cheery rumble of mill-wheels, and not far beyond them a vast forest harbouring stags and boars. Its citizens are recognizable everywhere by their polished manners and fine clothes. Its women are models of virtue. “Truly, a goodly city, if it have but a good lord!”

But what chiefly rouses William’s enthusiasm is the gayer side of London life, at which the carping Jew in the story professed such horror. He praises the delicacies—flesh, fish, and fowl—on sale in the public cookshop near the vintry; the displays of verbal dexterity by the scholars, especially of the three great church schools, including disrespectful verses at the expense of their fellows or of higher authority; the equestrian contests at Smithfield horsemarket; the convivial celebration of marriages and church festivals; the miracle and passion plays; the cock-fighting and
ball games on Shrove Tuesday; the perilously realistic mock battles outside the gates and in boats on the river, with spectators lining the bridge; the archery, slinging, racing, wrestling and dancing in summer; the bull, boar, and bear baiting, sliding and skating in winter; the hawking and hunting, in which Londoners were licensed to indulge over a wide area; and the crowds of young folk pouring out into the fields on summer evenings to enjoy the fresh air.

This civic pride was not a monopoly of Londoners, and it was something in which even a monk, in his own fashion, could share. Here are the thoughts that filled the mind of Brother Lucian of St. Werburgh’s abbey, about the year 1190, when he went shopping in the thriving new town that had sprung to life within the square ramparts of the ancient legionary camp on the river Dee:

By the gift of God our city of Chester has flowing by its walls a fair river teeming with fish that both enriches and adorns it, and on its southern bank a harbour for ships coming from Aquitaine and Spain, from Ireland and Germany, which by the toil and prudence of merchants, with Christ at the oar, refresh the city’s bosom with good things in plenty, so that by God’s grace we even drink wine more copiously than those regions that enjoy the produce of their own vineyards.

The tidal water in its daily flow, covering and uncovering wide stretches of sand, never ceases to visit it, importing something at every flood and exporting at every ebb, so that lately it brought a glut of fish to the inhabitants and robbed the fishermen of a livelihood. Our eyes are regaled by the
beauty of the scene, and our minds filled with wonder that on one day in one place God makes a safe path for wayfarers and a basin in which the creatures of the deep may swim.

The city also has two straight and noble high streets that meet and pass each other in the form of the blessed cross, being thereby transformed from two into four. Thus they mystically declare the indwelling grace of the Great King, who reveals the fulfilment of the twofold law of the Testaments by the mystery of the Holy Cross in the four Evangelists.

How aptly, too, is the market situated in the middle of the city, offering food to all comers, as the Eternal Bread of Heaven offers himself to all nations equally! And let the thoughtful observer rejoice to perceive how visibly the Almighty has provided for the salvation of the citizens! For if a man stand in the centre facing the East in the manner of a church, he will find in that quarter the church of John the Lord's Precursor, on the West the Apostle Peter, on the north the Virgin Werburgh, and on the south the Archangel Michael.

Lucian deplors the spiritual blindness of his fellow-citizens, who would turn their backs on these uplifting sights to watch ferocious hounds mangling a bull or a bear. But he is convinced all the same that they are the finest people in England.

In Norman England the townsfolk were still a small minority, with no recognized status in the framework of feudal society. But already they were vigorously building a new form of society and a new way of life that would one day spread far beyond the confines of the city wall.
A NORMAN COURT

THE FRENCH word court originally meant no more than a courtyard; but it soon came to include not only the buildings round it but also the people living in them. The "king's court" meant the place where he happened to be at the moment and also the men and women then (or usually) in attendance on him. Since the king was a busy man, with many duties to perform both in war and in peace, the court seldom stayed for long in one place.

The king of England in the twelfth century was still, like his Norman ancestors, the captain of a band of warriors, with the right and the duty to lead them in battle for the defence or aggrandisement of his realm. But he was also, by virtue of the coronation ceremony, "the Lord's anointed"—God's chosen agent for the fulfilment of His will in all that concerned men's bodily fortunes.

If he overrode too harshly the claims and counsels of his military subordinates, he might provoke them to "defiance". If he disregarded too blatantly the law of God or the authority of Holy Church, he ran the risk
of excommunication, which would absolve his subjects from their allegiance. He was bound by his coronation oath to respect the Church and uphold justice. He could limit his own powers, as both William I and Henry I did soon after accession, by the issue of a charter promising to respect ancient laws and customs. But his powers were not limited by any constitution. They depended on the skill with which he contrived to exercise them, on his personality and prestige, his choice of advisers, the loyalty and efficiency of his servants, and the fortunes of war and peace.

Even in the most peaceful times, when he had no foreign campaign to conduct and no rebels to subdue or overawe, he was faced with the problem of feeding his numerous household. And the cheapest and most practical way of doing this was to take his household round with him from one royal manor to another and consume the produce of each on the spot, dropping in now and then to enjoy the hospitality of a wealthy baron, bishop or abbot without (in common prudence) unduly outstaying his welcome. During the winter months, when rain and snow turned the bare earth of the highways to deep mud and flooded the fords, the court might remain stationary for weeks on end at some favourite royal residence not too far from the national centre of gravity. But for most of the year mobility was a normal feature of court life, as it continued to be down to the time of James I. It had its obvious drawbacks. But it did mean that the ruler kept a personal eye on the running of the royal demesnes
and remained in touch with the problems of government and the grievances of his subjects in their local as well as their nation-wide aspects.

The household of Henry I is described in a document drawn up just after his death, presumably for the guidance of his successor Stephen. This enumerates the established servants with their salaries and their allowances of food, candles, pack-horses and so on. The establishment comprised five main departments, each headed by a senior official earning 5s. a day with a staff whose salaries ranged down to 1d. a day.

First came the Chancery, staffed by chaplains and clerks, who ministered to the king’s spiritual needs and dealt with his correspondence. His material needs were served by the steward’s department, with a large staff of bakers, butchers, cooks, scullions, serving-men and the like, and by the chief butler with his cellarmen, cooperers, and cup-bearers. Since the king’s chamber or bedroom was also the place where he kept his treasure-chests, the treasurer is grouped with the chamberlain and his staff, including tailor and laundress. The armed escort of knights and men-at-arms was supervised by the constable and marshals, who had to find lodgings for this unwieldy multitude in its perpetual wanderings. Attached to this department were the huntsmen with their packs of hounds, who were responsible for the king’s favourite recreation, besides helping to stock his larder.

The higher officials must, of course, have been accompanied by considerable household staffs of their
own; and so must many of the courtiers of high and low degree who were attached to the court for one reason or another on a less permanent basis. If we add to these a motley swarm of camp-followers and hangers-on and a long baggage-train of pack-horses and wagons, we may form some notion of the procession that jogged and jolted over the deep-rutted trackways of England or France when the court was on the move.

Henry II with his far-flung empire had more ground to cover than his predecessors. He also had a much bigger household staff. During his reign the departments concerned with the administration of the realm became more and more detached from the royal household and settled down in a fixed abode at Westminster. But the number of those in personal attendance on the king remained very large. Their tribulations under this tireless and unpredictable ruler are described from first-hand experience by Peter of Blois:

I wonder how those who are used to the orderly life of a clerk can endure the hardships of court life, in which meal-times, journeys and the hour of waking are without order or method. The bread set before a clerk or a knight of the court is coarse-grained stuff, leavened only with the dregs of ale and heavy as lead. The wine is sour or mouldy, greasy, tarry and flat. I have seen noblemen confronted with wine so muddy that it has to be drunk, or rather filtered, through clenched teeth, with a wry face and closed eyes. Court ale tastes as nasty as it looks.

In court, owing to the great concourse of people,
cattle are sold with no distinction between the sound and the diseased, and fish as much as four days old and no cheaper because it stinks. Servants don’t care a rap for the death or illness of the unfortunate diners, so long as their masters’ tables are served with full dishes. The exhausting exercise puts such an edge on appetite that even this filthy food becomes eatable. But when the court indulges in a longer stay at some town or other, there are always some who fall sick.

Among the worst plagues are the marshals. I have seen many men—and men who had not been stingy in greasing the marshals’ palms—arrive at their lodging after the strain of a long journey and sit down to dinner or even retire to bed, only to have the marshals descend upon them in a storm of abuse, cut the halters of their horses, throw out their baggage without discrimination but not without loss, and turn them out of doors, so that the poor men, though they might in fact be rich men, had nowhere to lay their heads.

Another affliction is this. If the king has promised to stay somewhere for the day and the herald’s voice has proclaimed that such is the royal will, you may be sure that he will start on his travels at the crack of dawn and upset everybody’s plans by unexpected haste. Often those who have just undergone blood-letting or taken medicine neglect the care of their bodies to follow their sovereign. So they stake their lives on a single throw, risking their all for what they have not got and never will have. Then you will see men rushing round in a frenzy, pack-horses jostling pack-horses, wagons colliding with wagons and such a chaos of confusion that it might serve as a picture of Hell.

If, on the other hand, the king has declared his intention of setting out for a particular destination first thing in the morning, he is certain to change his
mind and sleep till noon. Then you will find pack-horses standing about fully loaded, wagons silent, outriders dozing, dealers on tenterhooks and everybody grumbling. Advice is sought from the camp wenches and tent-shifters about the sovereign's plans; for the secrets of the palace are often known to that class of courtier. And there are no more constant followers of the court than the laundry-women, gamesters, cheapjacks, barbers, minstrels, buffoons and such gentry.

I have often known it happen, when the king was asleep and a solemn hush lay over all, that word would come forth from the royal abode, not almighty but certainly all-inspiring, and put a name to the city or town of our destination. What a relief, after the long tedium of uncertainty, to have some prospect of staying where we might find food and lodging in plenty! That was the signal for a stampede of riders and marchers like Hell let loose.

Then, when our harbingers had well nigh completed a day's journey, the king would switch his route to some place where there was perhaps a single building and no food to spare for anyone else. I verily believe, if I may dare to say it, that his pleasure was enhanced by our tribulations. I have thought myself lucky, after wandering for miles through unknown forests and often in the dark, to light on some miserable shack. It was no rare thing for courtiers to dispute with drawn sword for a hovel not fit for pigs to fight over.

O God Almighty, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, put it into the heart of our king to remember that he is a man and to have compassion on those who are drawn in his train not by ambition but by necessity.
This description is certainly overdrawn; Peter himself admitted afterwards that he was ill and depressed when he wrote it and that court life had its compensations. One of Peter's contemporaries believed that things had been better ordered in the days of Henry I:

His is said to have been, so far as the world allows, a court without care and a palace without tumult or confusion, which is a rare thing. If we are to believe our fathers, we may say that his was indeed the Golden Age... His movements were so strictly prearranged and his halts so publicly proclaimed that wherever he stayed was like a fair, with merchants and merchandise in plenty. Before lunch his court was attended by men ripe in years or in wisdom, the herald's voice having summoned those who wished to be heard on business. After lunch and the midday sleep it was open to those who sought amusement. So it was a school of virtue and wisdom in the morning, thereafter of courtesy and seemly gaiety.

An earlier writer, actually living in the time of Henry I, had taken a gloomier view of it. "Our country," he declared, "is so favoured by the blessings of nature, so secure behind the barrier of the sea, that it would recall the ancient happiness of the Golden Age, if only it were ruled according to true reason."

But, whatever king might reign, it was vital to his authority that his court should maintain certain standards of dignity, based on rules of ceremony (or "courtesy") as strict and elaborate on formal occasions as the ritual of a religious service. William I made a point of celebrating the chief festivals of the Christian year in
regal style—Christmas at Gloucester, Easter at Winchester and Whitsuntide at Westminster. On these occasions he appeared publicly in his crown and regalia, and held a magnificent banquet attended by all the magnates of the realm, at which he made an unwonted display of geniality and generosity. This was done, as a
chronicler tells us, "so that foreign envoys might be impressed by the splendour of the gathering and the costliness of the entertainment, and guests might report that the king's liberality was equal to his wealth". It was regarded as a sign of the times, during Stephen's troubled reign, that "the solemn court-days and the panoply of kingly pomp handed down by long tradition had utterly vanished".

We can form some idea of what these state occasions were like from the contemporary description of the coronation of Richard I, which followed what was no doubt already a set pattern and one that has remained fairly constant ever since. We see the long procession of richly robed dignitaries filing into the abbey church at Westminster. Richard, flanked by the bishops of Durham and Bath, walks under a canopy held aloft by the lances of four barons. After taking the coronation oath he is stripped to his shirt and breeches, then shod with gold-threaded sandals, anointed by the archbishop of Canterbury, robed in his royal tunic, dalmatic and mantle, girt with a sword in a gold-plated scabbard, fitted with gilded spurs, and at length solemnly crowned with "the massy golden crown, encrusted with precious stones". After the ceremonial mass, the day concludes with a magnificent banquet.

This glittering, fairy-tale aspect of court life is a favourite theme of the romances, with their emphasis on wedding feasts and the pageantry of the tournament. Now and then these give us a glimpse of its more human and informal moments. In a French ballad
commemorating the exploits of the warrior statesman and star of tournament, William the Marshal, we are told how, when a very small boy, he was held as a hostage by King Stephen and his life would have been forfeit if his boyish trustfulness had not touched the king's heart. Here is an incident that is said to have happened when the king was besieging Newbury.

The king sat in his tent one day,
Whose floor was strewn with flowers gay.
Young William, searching here and there,
A bunch of soldiers picked with care—
Those soldiers that the plantain rears,
Whose tapering leaves are sharp as spears.
His fist well filled, "Good sir," said he,
"Will you play soldiers, please, with me?"
"Gladly, my good friend." quoth the king.
The boy made due apportioning,
Then asked: "Do you strike first, or I?"
"You, my dear friend, be first to try."
Will's champion charged to start the fight.
The king held out a rival knight,
Whose head at the first shock was sheared.
And you may guess how William cheered.

But the court had no lack of more serious employment. The king's main task—we might almost say his only task—was to "keep the peace". The peace of the realm was perpetually threatened: from time to time by foreign foes; continuously by the underlying tension between different classes of the population with competing interest—landlord and tenant, free man and serf, countryfolk and townsfolk, laity and clergy; and
Enforcement of the king’s peace: malefactors in prison and in the stocks

recurrently by personal and family squabbles within every class, from the drunken brawls of villeins in the ale-house to the intrigues, feuds and private wars of ambitious magnates manoeuvring for power. It was these last who provided the king with what was probably his biggest headache—how to reward faithful service without drawing too heavily on his own resources or concentrating too much power in the hands of any individual or faction. This often meant sitting personally in judgement to decide between rival claimants.

William I once spent a whole Sunday from dawn to
dusk holding a court with his sons and barons in the hall of Lacock manor to consider the claim of the Norman abbey of Fécamp to some lands near Steyning, in Sussex, then in the king’s possession. The decision was a compromise. A disputed wood was divided between the king and the abbey, and fenced along the boundary. The king abandoned his claim to levy a toll on a certain bridge, when witnesses testified that it had not been levied before the Conquest; and he agreed that a ditch recently dug to lead water to the moat of a royal castle should be filled in. Problems of this sort continued to occupy much of the time of his successors. But more and more it became necessary to delegate the royal authority to officials—either trained clerks or experienced laymen.

From the reign of Henry I onwards we hear of such men either sitting at Westminster or being sent on circuit as king’s justices with higher authority than the old local courts and the sheriffs, to pronounce judgement on matters affecting the interests of the crown. Since it could be argued that any act of violence was a breach of the king’s peace, and that the king’s interest (not to speak of his coronation oath) required that no free tenant should be despoiled of his inheritance without due cause, their field of operation was a wide one. And they had every inducement to widen it, since legal proceedings were expected to show a handsome profit in the form of fees and fines.

There is plenty of evidence that the justices were often corrupt and rapacious. But the best of them
devoted much labour and thought to their work. By their decisions, based on a blend of Anglo-Saxon and Norman-French customs and systematized to some extent in the light of their knowledge of Roman law or the canon law of the Church, they laid the foundations of English common law as it is practised today in many parts of the world.

It is under Henry I, again, that we first hear of a special court that sat at Westminster to audit the accounts of the sheriffs and other royal officials who collected the revenue derived from the rent of the crown lands, from the fines imposed on law-breakers, and from various other sources. Before the introduction of Arabic numerals there was no easy way of adding and subtracting large sums of money except by means of counters. Hence the most conspicuous feature of this court was a table covered with a squared cloth, which was used as a ready-reckoner. This was nicknamed the "exchequer" or chess-board and gave its name to the whole court and to the magnates, the "Barons of the Exchequer", who sat there as judges. Chief among these were the Treasurer and the Chancellor or his deputy, later known as the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The functioning of this court is described by a Treasurer of Henry II in the *Dialogue of the Exchequer*—a detailed exposition in the form of a dialogue between expert and learner. This was clearly intended for the training of young civil servants and is infused with the pride of the professional in the efficiency of his department and the niceties of its official procedure.
These institutions, as well as the men who ran them, were put to a severe test by Richard I, who was absent from his kingdom for almost the whole of his reign, first as a crusader and then as a prisoner of the German Emperor. But the machinery of government continued to function without its head, and the Exchequer contrived to levy the huge sum needed for fitting out the crusade and the colossal ransom of £100,000 demanded by the Emperor (who used it, incidentally, to finance an invasion of the Norman kingdom of Sicily).

They also stood up, as few institutions have ever done, to the test of time. The annual account rolls of the Exchequer (called "Pipe Rolls" from their appearance when rolled up), extending in unbroken sequence from
the middle of the twelfth century to the year 1832, and the Plea Rolls of the Courts of Common Law, extending from the reign of Richard I to 1911, are a testimony as eloquent as the keep of Rochester castle or the massive columns of Durham cathedral to the quality of the Normans. What the Normans built was built to last.

It will be clear to readers of this book, unless the writer has fallen down badly on his job, that it offers no more than a few preliminary clues, which some of them may be tempted to follow up for themselves, to the understanding of a very remarkable people. It may be less obvious that, for experts no less than for beginners, “finding out about the Normans” is a continuous process.

Even from chroniclers whose work has long been familiar, something new can be gathered by more intensive study in the light of fuller knowledge of the age they lived in and of their personal prejudices and their sources of information. Less well known writers of the period, ranging from the most earnest preacher to the most light-hearted romancer, have still much to teach the historian. Domesday Book has not yet yielded all its secrets. And the countless other documents that still await discovery or detailed investigation hold out a promise of buried treasure. To the student with some specialized branch of knowledge, even the dullest-seeming record may provide the answer to a question that has been bothering him for years.

Far less explored are the archaeological sources.
Though the more conspicuous Norman buildings, especially churches with their monumental sculptures and brasses, have been objects of antiquarian interest for centuries, a closer scrutiny based on the technical knowledge now available will certainly lead to new discoveries. It is only in recent years that the importance of wooden “motte-and-bailey” castles has been fully appreciated. When these and other Norman sites have been scientifically excavated by the methods evolved for the study of prehistory, our picture of Norman England should become far more precise.

That picture has already been transformed since the days when Scott wrote *Ivanhoe* or Kingsley wrote *Hereward the Wake*, though there has been no such advance in our power of bringing the picture to life. And years to come may witness further transformations. But complete understanding of any bygone age must always remain an unattainable ideal. And in dealing with the Normans we must not forget that even to their own contemporaries they were a puzzling people, whose outstanding qualities seemed often to clash with one another.

This book began with a balanced judgement on the Norman character by an Italian monk. It is fitting that it should end with an equally balanced judgement by an English monk, William of Malmesbury, who wrote about the year 1125.

The Normans in their dress are ostentatious to the point of exciting envy; in their food, luxurious but not gluttonous. They are so used to warfare that
they can scarcely live without fighting. They attack their enemies with vigour, and where force does not prevail they resort to trickery and bribery.

In their houses they like great size but avoid needless expense. In dealing with equals, they are envious; with superiors, bent on outstripping them; with inferiors, as apt at protecting them from others as they are at fleecing them for their own benefit. To their lords they are faithful, and then on slight provocation faithless. They impose the death penalty for treason; but in return for payment they revoke the sentence.

Beyond all other nations they are prepared to treat foreigners as honourably as their own people. They intermarry freely with their subjects. To religious discipline, which had died out everywhere in England, they have given fresh life. In every village in the country you will see churches, and in the towns and cities monasteries, springing up newly built in a new style.

The monasteries have gone, and most of the surviving churches have been refashioned several times. But the impress of Norman imperialism has not yet been erased from the face of the land or the life of its people.
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