

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST

‘Before the Norman Conquest’, wrote T. F. Tout, ‘England had no Continental relations, save those of the most casual and accidental character’.¹ Even so, England’s isolation was by no means complete. The Saxons, in establishing their regional kingdoms in England, kept up old relations and initiated new ones with the Germanic peoples of the Continent. The daughter of the Merovingian king, Charibert I, married King Ethelbert of Kent,² while an English slave, Balthild, married the Frankish king, Clovis II, and was actually regent of his kingdom for a time, until her son, Clothaire III, was old enough to rule. The finding of early English coins in Frankish territory is an indication of trade relations of some kind. But it was undoubtedly during the reign of Charlemagne that Anglo-Frankish relations reached their culmination, and it was an Englishman, Alcuin, who contributed as much as any one person to the Carolingian revival of learning.³ Partly, no doubt, through Alcuin, Charles was on friendly terms with Offa of Mercia, like himself an enlightened and powerful monarch, and in their correspondence there are further indications of trade between their respective countries. Charles took some interest in English politics⁴ and is known to have made donations to English monks and to English cathedrals.⁵ Although with the death of Charlemagne the organization of his empire began to break down, relations with England do not seem to have been seriously affected.

¹ *France and England: their Relations in the Middle Ages and now*, p. 38.

² See W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the eighth century*, p. 5.

³ H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, I, p. 272.

⁴ See Abel and Simson, *Jahrbücher des fränkischen Reiches*, II, pp. 379–98. Also Levison, *op. cit.* p. 114.

⁵ Levison, *op. cit.* pp. 112–13.

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The close connexion between England and Normandy, which was to culminate in the Norman Conquest, begins with the marriage in 1002 of Emma of Normandy and Ethelred of Wessex; for Edward the Confessor, one of the children of this marriage, was brought up in Normandy and returned to England only in 1041. His mother, after the death of Ethelred, had married Cnut, the new king of England, who no doubt realized that this marriage would tend to prevent the Normans from supporting the claims of Ethelred's sons to succeed their father. With Edward's accession in 1042, England and Normandy were drawn even closer together. Edward was so completely normanized that he felt ill at ease among the uncouth Anglo-Saxons and Danes and did his best to reproduce around him the conditions he had known in Normandy, by filling his household with French-speaking courtiers and officials, and by introducing French manners.¹ Ethelred, his father, had already granted special privileges to Norman merchants from Rouen, and Edward increased these, going so far as to give them a special port in London, Dunegate, for their use.² Already before the Norman Conquest we see the beginnings of the later expansion of French religious houses across the Channel to England. The abbey of Saint-Riquier was in the reign of Edward the Confessor granted lands, to the extent of eight villages in Norfolk, together with their revenues, and this grant was later confirmed after the Conquest by William himself.³

Ireland too was not without her influence on the Continent. By reason of her remote situation she had remained largely unaffected—except to her advantage—by the disintegration of the Roman Empire and the barbarian inroads into Western Europe. Scholarship flourished there in the fifth and sixth centuries when it had almost died out elsewhere, and for a time Ireland held the monopoly of learning. Not only did she therefore attract would-be scholars from Gaul, who followed the established trade route

¹ W. Cunningham, *Alien Immigrants to England* (London, 1897), pp. 19–20.

² E. de Fréville, *Mémoire sur le commerce maritime de Rouen*, I, p. 98.

³ See article by H. M. Cam, *EHR*, xxxi (1916), p. 444.

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to Cork or the mouth of the Shannon,¹ but she also sent scholars and priests to the Continent, and most of these passed through Gaul, even if they did not stay there. This movement was begun by Columban of Bangor, who in 590 sailed for the Continent and founded the monastery of Luxeuil in Gaul, before travelling on to Italy, where he founded Bobbio, equally famous. He was followed, in the seventh century and later, by a host of others. Jumièges, S. Bertin, Lagny, Lure, S. Riquier, Remiremont and many others were founded by Irishmen. What with their exclusive knowledge of Greek, their familiarity with the classical tradition—largely lost to the Franks—and their close contact with Rome, these men were able to bring about a veritable renaissance of letters and learning, which needed only the sponsorship and encouragement of a man like Charlemagne to make France the new centre of western civilization. Through his education, Alcuin already owed much indirectly to the Irish, and with the arrival, at Charles's court, of men like Clement and Dungal, Irish and Anglo-Saxon united to form a powerful combination of scholars. Unfortunately later generations of Irishmen, impelled less by the desire to impart knowledge than by the wish to get away from the Viking raiders, who had by the end of the eighth century extended the range of their depredations to Ireland, were by no means so devout, and many of them were in no way qualified to teach or preach. It was even found necessary to banish some of them from France.

The Scots were at first not clearly distinguished from the Irish, since they were felt to be of the same race, the Goidelic peoples who had early settled in Ireland having invaded Scotland in the third century A.D.² Latin mentions of the activities of 'Scotti' on the Continent must in nearly every case be taken as referring to the Irish.³ What little was known of Scotland in France was no

¹ C. O'Rahilly, *Ireland and Wales: Historical and Literary Relations* (London, 1924), pp. 22–7; O. G. S. Crawford, essay in *Custom is King* (ed. Dudley Buxton), pp. 185–6, 192.

² O'Rahilly, *op. cit.* p. 34.

³ Indeed, A. W. Haddan, in his essay 'Scots on the Continent' (in *Remains of A. W. Haddan* (ed. A. P. Forbes; Oxford and London, 1876)), still uses 'Scots' in this sense.

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doubt known through the Irish or the Anglo-Saxons. The other Celtic inhabitants of Britain, the Britons, now represented by their descendants the Welsh, do not for their part appear to have reached a very high level of culture, even when christianized. It is true that many British saints and proselytizers crossed the sea to France, but they are for the most part shadowy figures of church legend when compared with the solidly authenticated Irish scholars. Apart from one large-scale migration, that of the Britons of the south-west to Armorica in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries,¹ there was also later a steady flow of pilgrims and holy men. Many of the latter came from Wales, and some of them went via Cornwall to Brittany, like Saint Samson of Dol, for example, and Paulus Aurelianus, who gave his name to Saint-Pol-de-Léon. This was the western route.² To the east, pilgrims would cross the Channel from Sandwich or Dover to Boulogne, following the Roman lines of communication.³

POLITICAL RELATIONS, 1066–1500

As we have seen, Norman influence at the court of the last Anglo-Saxon king was considerable, and the process of ‘normanization’ had already begun on a small scale. The Conquest of 1066 had the effect of increasing immeasurably the tempo of this movement, by filling England with its victorious troops and their allies, and in their wake minstrels, clerics, adventurers and fortune-hunters of all kinds. It was an embarrassing moment for the King of France. He had given William, his vassal, permission to undertake the Conquest, but he had given him no active help, and after the event regretted even the permission given. Now William had won for himself an island kingdom which he owed largely to his own initiative and effort.⁴ He was still technically the vassal of the

¹ See J. Loth, *L'Émigration bretonne en Armorique, passim*.

² See Crawford, *op. cit.* pp. 192–6.

³ G. Hartwell Jones, ‘Celtic Britain and the Pilgrim Movement’, *Y Cymmrodor* xxiii (1912), p. 67.

⁴ It is true that he owed not a little to the official papal support given to his enterprise.

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French king for Normandy, but as King of England (for William's illegitimacy had not prevented Edward the Confessor from naming him as his successor) he felt that he owed allegiance to none, and it became increasingly unsatisfactory, for a man in his position and for his successors, to have to continue to pay even formal homage for Normandy. The attitude of the French king was understandable: the King of England was still, so far as he was concerned, Duke of Normandy and as such his vassal. Thus he expected homage, and viewed with growing alarm the increase of his already powerful vassal's resources in England where he could have no control over him. To the French king's relief, at the death of William I, England and Normandy seemed to be drifting apart again, for the Conqueror had bequeathed the one to William Rufus and the other to Robert, and there was little danger of a powerful amalgamation while those two were still alive. The powers were neatly balanced. On the death of Rufus, however, the situation took a turn for the worse. Although the claim of Henry to the English throne was weaker than that of his elder brother,¹ he nevertheless seized it while the latter was absent in the Holy Land, and Robert, when he returned, had to content himself with Normandy, which he already possessed. His attempts to regain what he with some justification regarded as his lost kingdom were unsuccessful. He was defeated and taken prisoner by his brother at Tinchebray in 1106, and ended his days in captivity in England. Normandy and England were once again controlled by a single ruler.²

The French king's uneasiness increased when Mathilda, daughter of Henry I and heiress to England and Normandy, married Geoffrey of Anjou in 1127: the issue of this marriage was to be feared, for it would have behind it the combined weight of England, Anjou, and Normandy. In 1137 the balance was for a while restored by the marriage of Louis, heir to the Capetian dynasty,

¹ G. O. Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, p. 294.

² H. W. C. Davis, *England under the Normans and Angevins, 1066–1272* (11th ed.), p. 129.

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and Eleanor of Aquitaine, but the hopes aroused by this match were shattered fifteen years later when Eleanor and Louis were divorced. This in itself was serious enough, but when, two years after the divorce, Eleanor married the young Henry, heir to the English throne, the situation was nothing less than disastrous. Henry, as heir, already represented England, Anjou and Normandy. His bride brought him the whole of Aquitaine and Poitou which were thus lost to the French king.

For the next generation, the French king could do little more than stir up what trouble he could between Henry II (who had become king shortly after his marriage with Eleanor) and his sons. Thus Louis VII urged Prince Henry to rebel against his father, and his successor Philippe Auguste encouraged Prince Richard to do likewise, at the same time secretly instigating feudal risings in Poitou. In Normandy, the bishops were loyal to the Plantagenets, but too many of the barons were inclined to serve the highest bidder.¹ Some of them had already revolted against Henry in 1173, only to be crushed by that monarch. Richard and Philippe Auguste, who had been in league with each other against Henry II, soon fell out after his death, and Richard on returning from captivity in Germany found that his French possessions had been overrun. He was in the process of winning these back by force of arms when he was struck down by a bolt from a cross-bow at the siege of Châlus in Limousin in 1199, and died after nominating John as his successor. On the other hand, Arthur of Brittany was considered, in France, to have a better claim, because he was the son of John's elder brother, Geoffrey Plantagenet. Already in April 1202, Philippe Auguste had formally declared John's French possessions to be confiscated to the French crown because John by repeatedly failing to answer his suzerain's summons to appear before him had violated the feudal contract. When in 1203 John either himself murdered his nephew Arthur, or had him murdered, this crime was an additional reason why the Norman barons,

¹ Ch. Petit-Dutaillis, *La Monarchie féodale en France et en Angleterre, Xe–XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1933), pp. 190–2.

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already perturbed by John's complete disregard for feudal obligations, should turn aside from him, and not one of them offered any resistance when Normandy, in 1204, was occupied by French troops and annexed.

England had now lost her former opportunities of a close alliance with Normandy: if she ever occupied that province again it would have to be by force of arms. She would not be able to count on the support of the Normans in spite of the relationship of race—a relationship which was already breaking down at the time of the loss of Normandy and which was to fade away and disappear altogether now that the Normans of England were to be isolated from their former kinsmen on the Continent. This does not mean, however, that England ever reverted to anything resembling the comparative isolation which had obtained before 1066. The Normans had made England a major power in European politics; they had bound her to France by a common culture and a common administration. Moreover, the appetite of the English kings had been whetted for Continental territories, and they did not feel that the confiscation of their legitimate possessions by Philippe Auguste was more than a temporary set-back. Their claim to them was as strong as ever, and was reasserted from time to time, as we shall see.

The loss of Normandy was followed shortly afterwards by that of Touraine, Anjou and the province of Poitou which formed the northern part of Aquitaine. Reverse followed upon reverse. In 1213 John was excommunicated by Pope Innocent III for his misdeeds against the Church, and Philippe Auguste was authorized to invade England and depose him. John repented in time, and managed to get his excommunication revoked by throwing himself upon the mercy of the Church. The Church now protected him, so that it was no longer possible for the French king to invade England without flying in the face of Rome. John's next move was to secure an alliance with the counts of Boulogne and Flanders, and with the Emperor Otto of Germany. He then invaded France while the emperor's army moved in from the north-east.

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But he was easily outmanœuvred and routed at La Roche-au-Moine near Angers, while the Germans were decisively beaten at Bouvines (1214). This campaign left John with only La Rochelle and Aquitaine. Another crisis arose in 1216 when John tried to repudiate the Magna Carta. His incensed barons, considering that they now owed no allegiance to John, invited Prince Louis, son of Philippe Auguste, to come to England and accept the crown, in spite of the papal interdict. The king and an army of his supporters held out against Louis and the barons; and, when John suddenly died, even those barons who had supported Louis now transferred their allegiance to the heir to the throne—the nine-year-old Henry, who became Henry III. The fact is an interesting comment on the growth of nationalism in England: the barons had been willing enough to accept Louis as a substitute for an intolerable king, but when an English heir was available they did not hesitate, and they got rid of Louis by compensating him for the trouble and expense of his enterprise.¹

Poitou, Aquitaine and Gascony, often collectively called Aquitaine or Guyenne, had passed by marriage into the hands of Henry II. Poitou had been annexed, in John's time, by Philippe Auguste's son. The tenure of Aquitaine and the question of the suzerainty of the French king offered special difficulties.² The inhabitants did not consider that they belonged to the kingdom of France, from which they were separated by race, language, and outlook. This made the task of the English king somewhat easier. Henry II handed over the province in his lifetime to Richard, and made him its duke. After Richard, John held it, though he lost all else, and successfully defended Gascony in 1206 against Alfonso VIII of Castile.³ For one thing, even John could retain the allegiance of the Gascons by appealing to their commercial interests; and the wine trade with England was too important a source of revenue to be neglected. The merchants of Bayonne and Bordeaux

¹ I.e. at the Treaty of Lambeth, 1217.

² See K. Norgate, *England under the Angevin Kings* (London, 1887), I, p. 442.

³ F. B. Marsh, *English Rule in Gascony*, pp. 5–9. Alfonso claimed that this fief had been promised him as a dowry by Henry II.

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could not hope to sell their wine to France or to Spain under such favourable conditions, for in those two countries they would encounter serious opposition and competition; and public opinion in Bayonne and Bordeaux was sufficiently strong to carry with it the rest of the province. Henry III realized how important Gascony was, not only commercially but also strategically, as a base for operations against France and a source of recruits and funds. He therefore continued John's policy of granting privileges to the Gascon towns and did his best to keep the representatives of the commercial interests of the province in a powerful position. From Gascony he made the second of his ill-advised attempts¹ to regain his Continental fiefs in 1242, acting in concert with a faction of rebellious barons, but Louis IX defeated English and barons alike at Taillebourg and Saintes. A five-year truce ensued, during which the Gascon nobles became increasingly unruly, for Henry had lost considerable prestige through his humiliating defeats. It was at this time that Henry sent Simon de Montfort, son of the leader of the Albigensian Crusade, to Gascony as seneschal, with extraordinary powers for seven years, but Simon resigned the task as hopeless after only five of them.

At the Treaty of Paris in 1259, Henry formally renounced his claim to all the lands which he and his predecessors had lost in France. This amounted to an undertaking not to attempt to recover them. In this manner he wrote off Normandy, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Poitou and a part of Saintonge, and was allowed to keep—on condition of homage—only a part of Aquitaine, including Gascony, of which he was still duke. This treaty marks an important turning-point in Anglo-French relations, because hitherto Henry III had claimed large tracts of French territory as his by right, considering himself and his predecessors to have been unjustly dispossessed of them by Philippe Auguste and Louis VIII. Now he formally renounced all claim to them. Louis IX, for his part, had good reason to be content with the treaty

¹ In 1230, during the minority of Louis IX, he had already tried unsuccessfully to recover Poitou with the help of a Breton alliance.

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and could afford to be generous, for he thus resumed no small measure of control over Guyenne, a province which had been without any official connexion with the French crown for the last fifty years.¹

In other respects the treaty was not so satisfactory, because the obligations imposed by it were distasteful to the English king's desire for a sovereignty free from feudal ties that made him the vassal of another king; and also because many of its clauses were so vague or so conditional that border disputes and questions of interpretation were bound to arise. In fact the treaty was largely provisional, much of it depending on the findings of further investigation. In reality the situation was in its broad outlines analogous to, and as unsatisfactory as, that obtaining at the time of the Norman Conquest. Just as William had been King of England and Duke of Normandy, so Henry III found himself King of England and Duke of Aquitaine—and with irritating memories of the far greater power of his grandfather Henry II.

Although from the commercial point of view the south-west corner of France was worth keeping, it was a source of considerable trouble to the English crown, because it, and the ambitions of its barons, lay too far away from the central authority—that is, the king, normally resident in England—to be easily controlled,² particularly as the French kings were ever ready to seize any advantage they saw, and to stir up trouble or make difficulties for the English administration. Nevertheless, an era of comparative tranquillity and prosperity set in with the reign of Edward I, during which the terms of the Treaty of Paris were, at least until 1291, largely fulfilled, and relations between England and Gascony were particularly close, with Gascons settling down in England, and Englishmen making their homes in Gascony. The French, for their part, felt more and more strongly, as they awoke to a feeling of national solidarity, that Gascony, as an integral part of France, should be merged with that kingdom. Around 1291 difficulties

¹ See M. Gavrilovitch, *Étude sur le traité de Paris*, pp. 112–13, 116–17.

² C. Bémont, *Simon de Montfort* (Paris, 1884), p. 20.