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John Horace Round (1854-1928) published *Feudal England* in 1895. The volume is a collection of Round's articles on feudalism, most of which had been previously published in the *English Historical Review*. The essays cover the period 1050-1200. They are linked by Round's overarching argument that it was the Norman Conquest that transplanted feudalism to England and that during the Anglo-Saxon period England had no real feudal institutions. The volume includes Round's groundbreaking article 'The Introduction of Knight Service into England', first published in the *English Historical Review* for 1891-92; a number of his important essays on the Domesday Book, a topic on which he was long regarded the leading expert; and several essays challenging the historical methods of Professor Freeman, the main opponent of Round's ideas. *Feudal England* was highly influential in medieval scholarship, and is still an important resource for researchers.

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*Historical Studies on the
XIth and XIIth Centuries*

JOHN HORACE ROUND



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FEUDAL ENGLAND

*HISTORICAL STUDIES ON THE XITH AND
XIIITH CENTURIES*

BY

J. H. ROUND, M.A.

Author of "Geoffrey de Mandeville: a Study of the Anarchy"

"Patres nostri et nos hanc insulam . . . in brevi edomuvimus, in brevi nostris subdidimus legibus, nostris obsequiis mancipavimus."—WALTER ESPEC (1138)



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P R E F A C E

THE present work is the outcome of a wish expressed to me from more than one quarter that I would reprint in a collected form, for the convenience of historical students, some more results of my researches in the history of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But to these I have added, especially on Domesday, so much which has not yet seen the light, that the greater portion of the work is new, while the rest has been in part re-written. The object I have set before myself throughout is either to add to or correct our existing knowledge of facts. And for this I have gone in the main to records, whether in manuscript or in print. It is my hope that the papers in this volume may further illustrate the value of such evidence as supplementing and checking the chroniclers for what is still, in many respects, an obscure period of our history.

As a foreign scholar has felicitously observed :—

Je lis avec plaisir le chroniqueur qui nous raconte les événements de son époque. Les détails anecdotiques, les traits piquants dont son œuvre est parsemée font mes délices. Mais comment saurai-je s'il dit la vérité si les pages qu'il me présente ne sont pas un roman de pure imagination? Dans les chartes, au contraire, tout est authentique, certain, précis, indubitable. Leur témoignage est contradictoirement établi, sous le contrôle de la partie adverse, avec l'approbation et la reconnaissance de l'autorité souveraine, en présence d'une imposante assemblée de notables qui apposent leur signature. C'est la plus pure de toutes les sources où il soit possible de puiser un renseignement historique.¹

¹ *Table chronologique des chartes et diplômes imprimés concernant l'histoire de la Belgique.* Par Alphonse Wauters, vol. i., p. xxxi.

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An instance in point will be found in the paper on "Richard the First's change of seal."

A collective title for a series of studies covering the period 1050–1200, is not by any means easy to find. But dealing as they do so largely with the origins of "Feudal England," I have ventured to give them this title, which may serve, I hope, to emphasize my point that the feudal element introduced at the Conquest had a greater influence on our national institutions than recent historians admit.² Even Domesday Book has its place in the study of feudalism, re-arranging, as it does, the Hundred and the Vill under Fiefs and "Manors."

To those in search of new light on our early mediæval history, I commend the first portion of this work, as setting forth, for their careful consideration, views as revolutionary on the Domesday hide and the whole system of land assessment as on the actual introduction of the feudal system into England. Although I have here brought into conjunction my discovery that the assessment of knight-service was based on a five-knights unit, irrespective of area or value, and my theory that the original assessment of land was based on a five-hides unit, not calculated on area or value, yet the two, one need hardly add, are, of course, unconnected. The one was an Anglo-Saxon system, and, as I maintain, of early date; the other was of Norman introduction, and of independent origin. My theories were formed at different times, as the result of wholly separate investigations. That of the five-hides unit was arrived at several years ago, but was kept back in the hope that I might light on some really satisfactory explanation of the phenomena presented. The solution I now propound can only be deemed tentative. I would hope, however, that the theories I advance may stimulate others to approach the subject, and, above all, that they may indicate to local students, in the future, the lines on which they should work and the absolute need of their assistance.

² See pp. 247, 262, 536–8.

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Perhaps the most important conclusion to which my researches point is that Domesday reveals the existence of two separate systems in England, co-extensive with two nationalities, the original *five hides* of the "Anglo-Saxon" in the south, and the later *six carucates* of the "Danish" invaders in the north.³

No one, I may add, is better qualified to carry further these enquiries than Prof. Maitland, whose brilliant pen has illumined for us the origins of English law. Himself engaged on the study of Domesday, he kindly offered to withhold his conclusions until my work should have appeared.⁴

Among the fresh points here discussed in connexion with Domesday Book will be found the composition of the juries by whom the returns were made, the origin and true character of the "Inquisitio Eliensis," and the marked difference of the two volumes compiled from the Domesday returns.

Of the six early surveys dealt with in conjunction with Domesday, I would call attention to that of Leicestershire as having, it would seem, till now remained absolutely unknown. It has long been a wish of mine to deal with these surveys,⁵ not only as belonging to a period for which we have no records, but also as illustrating Domesday Book. In "The Knights of Peterborough" will be found some facts relating to Hereward "the Wake," which seem to have eluded Mr. Freeman's investigations, and even those of Mr. Tout.

In case it should suggest itself that these papers, and some in the other portion of the work dwell at undue length on unimportant points, I would observe that apart from the fact that even small points acquire a relative importance

³ See p. 573.

⁴ Prof. Maitland informs me that since the appearance of his *Select Pleas in Manorial Courts*, he has discovered the earlier occurrence of the word "leet" (see p. 101).

⁵ See *Domesday Studies*.

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from our scanty knowledge of the time, there are cases in which their careful investigation may lead to unforeseen results. At the last anniversary of the Royal Society, Lord Kelvin quoted these words from his own presidential address in 1871:—

Accurate and minute measurement seems to the non-scientific imagination a less lofty and dignified work than looking for something new. But nearly all the grandest discoveries of science have been but the rewards of accurate measurement and patient, long-continued labour in the minute sifting of numerical results.

The same principle applies to the study of institutional history. Whether we are dealing with military service, with the land, with finance, or with the king's court, "the minute sifting" of facts and figures is the only sure method by which we can extend knowledge.

To those who know how few are the original authorities for the period, and how diligently these have been explored and their information exhausted, the wonder will be not so much that there is little, as that there was anything at all yet left to discover.

In a work dealing with the history of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a writer must inevitably find himself at times dealing with the same subjects as the late Professor Freeman. Without in any way disparaging the genius of that eminent man, one may deem it a duty to correct the errors into which he fell, and conscientiously to combat, as an obstinate and mischievous superstition, the conviction of his pre-eminent accuracy and authority on matters of fact. It would be far pleasanter to dwell only on his merits; but when one finds that, in spite of the proofs I have been producing for years, Mr. Herbert Fisher, representing the Oxford school of history, can still declare Mr. Freeman to have reached "the highest standard of scholarly exactitude,"⁶ it is evident that the works of the Regius

⁶ *Fortnightly Review*, December, 1894, pp. 804-5.

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Professor are still surrounded by a false glamour, and that one must further expose his grave liability to error. I cannot suppose that any competent scholar who may carefully peruse this work will in future venture to deny that, in spite of his many and his splendid gifts, Mr. Freeman was as liable as any of us to error, or that however laudable his intentions, he was capable of precisely the same inaccuracy and occasionally of the same confusion as he denounced so bitterly in others.

It is, indeed, my contention, as I have already explained,⁷ that to these denunciations of the errors of others is largely due the conviction of Mr. Freeman's supreme accuracy. The question raised may seem to affect the whole method of history, for if, as has been said, it is the argument of the scientific historian that we ought to prefer accuracy of fact to charm of presentment and to literary style, the proof that his method fails to save him from erring like any "literary" historian strikes at the root of his whole contention.

Yet it is not the scientific method, but its prophet himself that was at fault.

Although I am here only concerned with inaccuracy in matters of fact, I would guard myself against the retort that, at least, Mr. Freeman's errors are of little consequence as compared with that obliquity of vision which led Mr. Froude, at all hazards, to vindicate Henry the Eighth. Without insisting on an absolute parallel, I trace a resemblance even here. Just as his bias against the Roman church led Mr. Froude to vindicate Henry in order to justify the breach with Rome, so Mr. Freeman's passion for democracy made him an advocate on behalf of Harold, as "one whose claim was not drawn only from the winding-sheet of his fathers." I have elsewhere maintained, as to Harold's election "by the free choice of a free people," that Mr. Freeman's undoubted perversion of the case at this "the central point" of his history, gravely impairs his

⁷ *Quarterly Review*, July, 1892.

narrative of the Conquest, because its success, and even its undertaking, can actually be traced to that election.⁸ Unless we realise its disastrous effect on the situation both at home and abroad, we cannot rightly understand the triumph of the Duke's enterprise.

It had been my hope, in the present work, to have avoided acute controversy, but the attitude adopted, unfortunately, by the late Professor's champions has rendered that course impossible. One can but rejoice that his accuracy should find strenuous defenders, as it removes the reluctance one would otherwise feel in continuing to criticise it now. A case is doubly proved when proved in the teeth of opposition. But one expects that opposition to be fair, and the line my opponents have taken throughout cannot, by any stretch of courtesy, be so described. My difficulty, indeed, in dealing with their arguments on the Battle of Hastings, is that they do not affect or even touch my case. In spite of their persistent efforts to obscure a plain issue, there is not, and there cannot be, any "controversy" as to Mr. Freeman and the "palisade." For, while fully recognising that the *onus probandi* lay on those who assert its existence, he failed, on his own showing, to produce any proof of it whatever.⁹ Mr. Archer has ended,¹⁰ as he began,¹¹ by deliberately ignoring Mr. Freeman's words,¹² on which my case avowedly rests, and without suppressing which he could not even enter the field. This, indeed, I have explained so often, that I need not again have disposed of his arguments had not Mr. Gardiner, in the exercise of his editorial discretion, allowed him to make certain statements,¹³ and refused me the right of exposing them. A typical example will be found on p. 353.¹⁴

⁸ See *Quarterly Review* as above.

⁹ See pp. 340-347.

¹⁰ *English Historical Review*, July, 1894.

¹¹ *Contemporary Review*, March, 1893, pp. 335-355.

¹² *Norman Conquest* (2nd Ed.), iii. 763-4.

¹³ *English Historical Review*, as above.

¹⁴ I have, therefore, been obliged to refer in some detail to these

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It is not only demonstrable error that justifies critical treatment; no less dangerous, if not more so, is that subtle commixture of guess-work and fact, which leaves us in doubt as to what is proved and what is merely hypothesis. In his lecture on "The Nature of Historical Evidence," the late Professor himself well brought out the point:—

Many people seem to think that a proposition is proved if it cannot be disproved. . . . Very few see with Sir George Lewis—though Sir George Lewis perhaps carried his own doctrine a little too far—that in a great many cases we ought to be satisfied with a negative result, that we must often put up with knowing that a thing did not happen in a particular way, or did not happen at all, without being furnished with any counter-statement to put in the place of that which we reject.¹⁵

The question is whether a statement can be proved, not whether it can be disproved. Cases in point will be found on pp. 379, 389, 433-5.

It may, in view of certain comments, be desirable, perhaps, to explain that the study on the origin of knight-service appeared in Mr. Freeman's lifetime,¹⁶ and that my open criticism of his work began so far back as 1882. It will be seen, therefore, that I challenged its accuracy when he was himself able to reply.

To those who may hold that in these studies excessive attention is bestowed on Anglo-Norman genealogy, I commend the words, not of a genealogist, but of the historian Kemble:—

It is indispensable to a clear view of the constitutional law and governmental institutions of this country, that we should not lose sight of the distribution of landed estates among the great families, and that the rise and fall of these houses should be carefully traced and steadily borne in mind. . . .

Amidst all the tumult and confusions of civil and foreign wars; statements, while for those I have already disposed of I have given the references to the *Q.R.* and *E.H.R.*

¹⁵ *Methods of Historical Study*, p. 141.

¹⁶ *English Historical Review*, July, 1891-January, 1892.

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throughout religious and political revolutions; from the days of Arminius to those of Harald; from the days of Harald to our own; the successions of the landowners and the relations arising out of these successions, are the running comment upon the events in our national history: they are at once the causes and the criteria of facts, and upon them has depended the development and settlement of principles, in laws which still survive, in institutions which we cling to with reverence, in feelings which make up the complex of our national character.¹⁷

The paper on "Walter Tirel and his wife" may serve to show that in this department there is still needed much labour before we can hope for a perfect record of the great houses of the Conquest.

I have to thank Mr. Murray for his kind permission to make use of two of the articles I have contributed to the *Quarterly Review*. Some of the studies have previously appeared in the *English Historical Review*, and these are now republished with Messrs. Longmans' consent. Lastly, I would take the opportunity afforded by this preface of acknowledging the encouragement my researches have derived from the approval not only of our supreme authority—I mean the Bishop of Oxford—but also of that eminent scholar, Dr. Liebermann, whose name one is proud to associate with a work on mediæval history.

J. H. ROUND.

¹⁷ *The Names, Surnames, and Nicknames of the Anglo-Saxons*. Read at Winchester, September 11th, 1845.

[NOTE.—I have not thought it needful to include in the index names of persons or places only introduced incidentally in illustration of arguments. The prefix "Fitz," as in *Geoffrey de Mandeville*, has been retained as a useful convention, whatever the actual name may have been.]

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