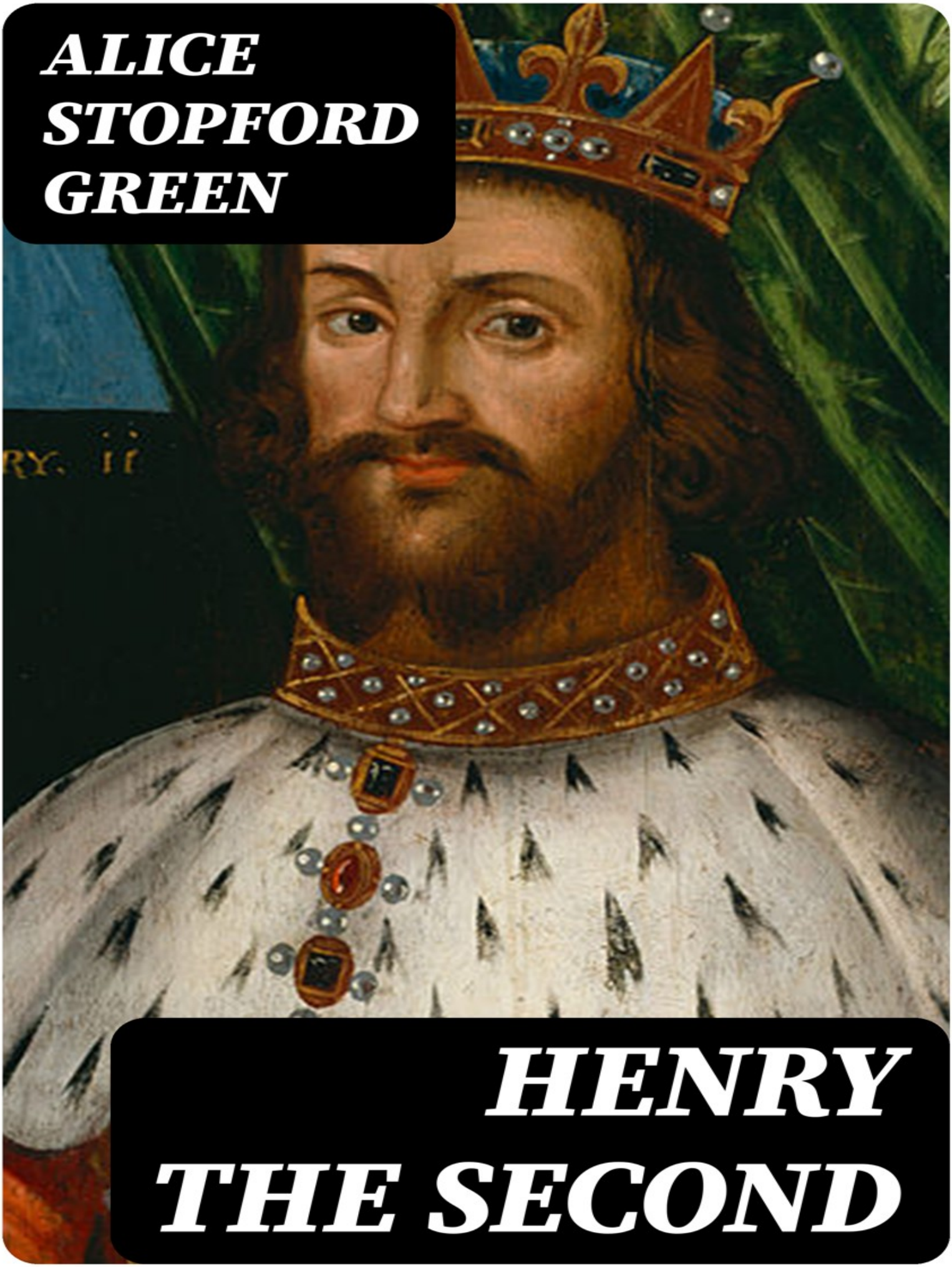
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THE SECOND

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Henry the Second

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HENRY PLANTAGENET

The history of the English people would have been a great and a noble history whatever king had ruled over the land seven hundred years ago. But the history as we know it, and the mode of government which has actually grown up among us is in fact due to the genius of the great king by whose will England was guided from 1154 to 1189. He was a foreign king who never spoke the English tongue, who lived and moved for the most part in a foreign camp, surrounded with a motley host of Brabançons and hirelings; and who in intervals snatched from foreign wars hurried for a few months to his island-kingdom to carry out a policy which took little heed of the great moral forces that were at work among the people. It was under the rule of a foreigner such as this, however, that the races of conquerors and conquered in England first learnt to feel that they were one. It was by his power that England, Scotland, and Ireland were brought to some vague acknowledgment of a common suzerain lord, and the foundations laid of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It was he who abolished feudalism as a system of government, and left it little more than a system of land-tenure. It was he who

defined the relations established between Church and State, and decreed that in England churchman as well as baron was to be held under the Common law. It was he who preserved the traditions of self-government which had been handed down in borough and shire-moot from the earliest times of English history. His reforms established the judicial system whose main outlines have been preserved to our own day. It was through his "Constitutions" and his "Assizes" that it came to pass that over all the world the English-speaking races are governed by English and not by Roman law. It was by his genius for government that the servants of the royal household became transformed into Ministers of State. It was he who gave England a foreign policy which decided our continental relations for seven hundred years. The impress which the personality of Henry II. left upon his time meets us wherever we turn. The more clearly we understand his work, the more enduring does his influence display itself even upon the political conflicts and political action of our own days.

For seventy years three Norman kings had held England in subjection William the Conqueror, using his double position as conqueror and king, had established a royal authority unknown in any other feudal country William Rufus, poorer than his father when the hoard captured at Winchester and the plunder of the Conquest were spent, and urged alike by his necessities and his greed, laid the foundation of an organized system of finance. Henry I., after his overthrow of the baronage, found his absolute power only limited by the fact that there was no machinery sufficient to put in exercise his boundless personal power;

and for its support he built up his wonderful administrative system. There no longer existed any constitutional check on the royal authority. The Great Council still survived as the relic and heir both of the English Witenagemot and the Norman Feudal Court. But in matters of State its "counsel" was scarcely asked or given; its "consent" was yielded as a mere matter of form; no discussion or hesitation interrupted the formal and pompous display of final submission to the royal will. The Church under its Norman bishops, foreign officials trained in the King's chapel, was no longer a united national force, as it had been in the time of the Saxon kings. The mass of the people was of no account in politics. The trading class scarcely as yet existed. The villeins tied to the soil of the manor on which they had been born, and shut out from all courts save those of their lord; inhabitants of the little hamlets that lay along the river-courses in clearings among dense woods, suspicious of strangers, isolated by an intense jealousy of all that lay beyond their own boundaries or by traditional feuds, had no part in the political life of the nation.

But the central government had proved in the long run too weak to check the growth of feudal tendencies. The land was studded with fortresses—the homes of lords who exercised criminal jurisdiction without appeal, and who had their private prisons and private gallows. Their manor courts, whether they were feudal courts established by the new nobility of the Conquest, or whether they represented ancient franchises in which Norman lords succeeded to the jurisdiction of earlier English rulers, were more and more turned into mere feudal courts. In the Shire courts

themselves the English sheriff who used to preside over the court was replaced by a Norman "*vicecomes*," who practically did as he chose, or as he was used to do in Normandy, in questions of procedure, proof, and judgment. The old English hundred courts, where the peasants' petty crimes had once been judged by the freemen of the district, had now in most cases become part of the fief of the lord, whose newly-built castle towered over the wretched hovels of his tenants, and the peasants came for justice to the baron's court, and paid their fees to the baron's treasury. The right of private coinage added to his wealth, as the multitude of retainers bound to follow them in war added to his power. The barons were naturally roused to a passion of revolt when the new administrative system threatened to cut them off from all share in the rights of government, which in other feudal countries were held to go along with the possession of land. They hated the "new men" who were taking their places at the council-board; and they revolted against the new order which cut them off from useful sources of revenue, from unchecked plunder, from fines at will in their courts of hundred and manor, from the possibility of returning fancy accounts, and of profitable "farming" of the shires; they were jealous of the clergy, who played so great a part in the administration, and who threatened to surpass them in the greatness of their wealth, their towns and their castles; and they only waited for a favourable moment to declare open war on the government of the court.

In this uncertain balance of forces in the State order rested ultimately on the personal character of the king; no

sooner did a ruler appear who was without the sense of government than the whole administration was at once shattered to pieces. The only son of Henry I. had perished in the wreck of the *White Ship*; and his daughter Matilda had been sent to Germany as a child of eight years old, to become the wife of the Emperor Henry V. On his death in 1125 her father summoned her back to receive the homage of the English people as heiress of the kingdom. The homage was given with as little warmth as it was received. Matilda was a mere stranger and a foreigner in England, and the rule of a woman was resented by the baronage. Two years later, in 1128, Henry sought by means of a marriage between the Empress Matilda and Geoffrey, the son of Count Fulk of Anjou, to secure the peace of Normandy, and provide an heir for the English throne; and Matilda unwillingly bent once more to her father's will. A year after the marriage Count Fulk left his European dominions for the throne of Jerusalem; and Geoffrey entered on the great inheritance which had been slowly built up in three hundred years, since the days of the legendary Tortulf the Forester. Anjou, Maine, and Touraine already formed a state whose power equaled that of the French kingdom; to north and south successive counts had made advances towards winning fragments of Britanny and Poitou; the Norman marriage was the triumphant close of a long struggle with Normandy; but to Fulk was reserved the greatest triumph of all, when he saw his son heir, not only of the Norman duchy, but of the great realm which Normandy had won.

But, for all this glory, the match was an ill-assorted one, and from first to last circumstances dealt hardly with the

poor young Count. Matilda was twenty-six, a proud ambitious woman "with the nature of a man in the frame of a woman." Her husband was a boy of fifteen. Geoffrey the Handsome, called Plantagenet from his love of hunting over heath and broom, inherited few of the great qualities which had made his race powerful. Like his son Henry II. he was always on horseback; he had his son's wonderful memory, his son's love of disputations and law-suits; we catch a glimpse of him studying beneath the walls of a beleaguered town the art of siege in Vegetius. But the darker sides of Henry's character might also be discerned in his father; genial and seductive as he was, he won neither confidence nor love; wife and barons alike feared the silence with which he listened unmoved to the bitterest taunts, but kept them treasured and unforgotten for some sure hour of revenge; the fierce Angevin temper turned in him to restlessness and petulance in the long series of revolts which filled his reign with wearisome monotony from the moment when he first rode out to claim his duchy of Normandy, and along its southern frontier peasant and churl turned out at the sound of the tocsin, and with fork and flail drove the hated "Guirribecs" back over the border. Five years after his marriage, in 1133, his first child was born at Le Mans. Englishmen saw in the grandson of "good Queen Maud" the direct descendant of the old English line of kings of Alfred and of Cerdic. The name Henry which the boy bore after his grandfather marked him as lawful inheritor of the broad dominions of Henry I., "the greatest of all kings in the memory of ourselves and our fathers." From his father he received, with the surname of Plantagenet by which he was

known in later times, the inheritance of the Counts of Anjou. Through his mother Matilda he claimed all rights and honours that pertained to the Norman dukes.

Heir of three ruling houses, Henry was brought up wherever the chances of war or rebellion gave opportunity. He was to know neither home nor country. His infancy was spent at Rouen "in the home," as Henry I. said, "of his forefather Rollo." In 1135 his grandfather died, and left him, before he was yet three years old, the succession to the English throne. But Geoffrey and Matilda were at the moment hard pressed by one of their ceaseless wars. The Church was openly opposed to the rule of the House of Anjou; the Norman baronage on either side of the water inherited a long tradition of hatred to the Angevin. Stephen of Blois, a son of the Conqueror's daughter Adela, seized the English throne, and claimed the dukedom of Normandy. Henry was driven from Rouen to take refuge in Angers, in the great palace of the counts, overlooking the river and the vine-covered hills beyond. There he lived in one of the most ecclesiastical cities of the day, already famous for its shrines, its colleges, the saints whose tombs lay within its walls, and the ring of priories and churches and abbeys that circled it about.

The policy of the Norman kings was rudely interrupted by the reign of Stephen of Blois. Trembling for the safety of his throne, he at first rested on the support of the Church and the ministers who represented Henry's system. But sides were quickly changed. The great churchmen and the ministers were soon cast off by the new ruler. "By my Lady St. Mary," said Roger of Salisbury, when he was summoned

to one of Stephen's councils, "my heart is unwilling for this journey; for I shall be of as much use in court as is a foal in battle." The revolution was completed in 1139, when the king in a mad panic seized and imprisoned Roger, the representative alike of Church and ministers. With the ruin of Roger who for thirty years had been head of the government, of his son Roger the chancellor, and his nephew Nigel the treasurer, the ministerial system was utterly destroyed, and the whole Church was alienated. Stephen sank into the mere puppet of the nobles. The work of the Exchequer and the Curia Regis almost came to an end. A little money was still gathered into the royal treasury; some judicial business seems to have been still carried on, but it was only amid overwhelming difficulties, and over limited districts. Sheriffs were no longer appointed over the shires, and the local administration broke down as the central government had done. Civil war was added to the confusion of anarchy, as Matilda again and again sought to recover her right. In 1139 she crossed to England, wherein siege, in battle, in council, in hair-breadth escapes from pursuing hosts, from famine, from perils of the sea, she showed the masterful authority, the impetuous daring, the pertinacity which she had inherited from her Norman ancestors. Stephen fell back on his last source—a body of mercenary troops from Flanders,—but the Brabançon troops were hated in England as foreigners and as riotous robbers, and there was no payment for them in the royal treasury. The barons were all alike ready to change sides as often as the shifting of parties gave opportunity to make a gain of dishonour; an oath to Stephen was as easy to break as an

oath to Matilda or to her son. Great districts, especially in the south and middle of England, and on the Welsh marches, suffered terribly from war and pillage; all trade was stopped; great tracts of land went out of cultivation; there was universal famine.

In 1142 Henry, then nine years old, was brought to England with a chosen band of Norman and Angevin knights; and while Matilda held her rough court at Gloucester as acknowledged sovereign of the West, he lived at Bristol in the house of his uncle, Robert of Gloucester, the illegitimate son of Henry I., who was still in these troubled days loyal to the cultured traditions of his father's court, and a zealous patron of learning. Amid all the confusion of a war of pillage and slaughter, surrounded by half-wild Welsh mercenaries, by the lawless Norman-Welsh knights, by savage Brabançons, he learned his lessons for four years with his cousin, the son of Robert, from Master Matthew, afterwards his chancellor and bishop of Angers. As Matilda's prospects grew darker in England, Geoffrey recalled Henry in 1147 to Anjou; and the next year he joined his mother in Normandy, where she had retired after the death of Earl Robert. There was a pause of five years in the civil war; but Stephen's efforts to assert his authority and restore the reign of law were almost unavailing. All the country north of the Tyne had fallen into the hands of the Scot king; the Earl of Chester ruled at his own will in the northwest; the Earl of Aumale was king beyond the Humber.

With the failure of Matilda's effort the whole burden of securing his future prospects fell upon Henry himself, then a boy of fifteen. Nor was he slow to accept the charge. A year

later, in 1149, he placed himself in open opposition to Stephen as claimant to the English throne, by visiting the court of his great-uncle, David of Scotland, at Carlisle; he was knighted by the Scot king, and made a compact to yield up to David the land beyond the Tyne when he should himself have won the English throne. But he found England cold, indifferent, without courage; his most powerful friends were dead, and he returned to Normandy to wait for better days. Geoffrey was still carrying on the defence of the duchy against Stephen's son Eustace, and his ally, the King of France; and Henry joined his father's army till peace was made in 1151. In that year he was invested with his mother's heritage and became at eighteen Duke of Normandy; at nineteen his father's death made him Count of Anjou, Lorraine, and Maine.

The young Count had visited the court of Paris to do homage for Normandy and Anjou, and there he first saw the French queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Her marriage with Louis VII. had been the crowning success of the astute and far-sighted policy of Louis VI.; for the dowry Eleanor had brought to the French crown, the great province of the South, had doubled the territories and the wealth of the struggling little kingdom of France. In the Crusade of 1147 she had accompanied king and nobles to the Holy Land as feudal head of the forces of Aquitaine; and had there baffled the temper and sagacity of Louis by her political intrigues. Sprung of a house which represented to the full the licentious temper of the South, she scornfully rejected a husband indifferent to love, and ineffective in war as in politics. She had "married a monk and not a king," she said,

wearied with a superstition that showed itself in long fasts of more than monkish austerity, and in the humiliating reverence with which the king would wait for the meanest clerk to pass before him. In the square-shouldered ruddy youth who came to receive his fiefs, with his "countenance of fire," his vivacious talk and overwhelming energy and scant ceremoniousness at mass, she saw a man destined by fate and character to be in truth a "king." Her decision was as swift and practical as that of the keen Angevin, who was doubtless looking to the southern lands so long coveted by his race. A divorce from her husband was procured in March 1152; and two months after she was hastily, for fear of any hindrance, married to the young Count of Anjou, "without the pomp or ceremony which befitted their rank." At nineteen, therefore, Henry found himself the husband of a wife about twenty-seven years of age, and the lord, besides his own hereditary lands and his Norman duchy, of Poitou, Saintonge, Perigord, Limousin, Angoumois, and Gascony, with claims of suzerainty over Auvergne and Toulouse. In a moment the whole balance of forces in France had changed; the French dominions were shorn to half their size; the most brilliant prospects that had ever opened before the monarchy were ruined; and the Count of Anjou at one bound became ruler of lands which in extent and wealth were more than double those of his suzerain lord.

The rise of this great power to the west was necessarily the absorbing political question of the day. It menaced every potentate in France; and before a month was out a ring of foes had gathered round the upstart Angevin ruler. The outraged King of France; Stephen, King of England, and

Henry's rival in the Norman duchy; Stephen's nephew, the Count of Champagne, brother of the Count of Blois; the Count of Perche; and Henry's own brother, Geoffrey, were at once united by a common alarm; and their joint attack on Normandy a month after the marriage was but the first step in a comprehensive design of depriving the common enemy of the whole of his possessions. Henry met the danger with all the qualities which mark a great general and a great statesman. Cool, untroubled, impetuous, dashing from point to point of danger, so that horses sank and died on the road in his desperate marches, he was ready wherever a foe threatened, or a friend prayed help. Foreign armies were driven back, rebel nobles crushed, robber castles broken down; Normandy was secured and Anjou mastered before the year was out. The strife, however, had forced him for the first time into open war with Stephen, and at twenty Henry turned to add the English crown to his dominions.

Already the glory of success hung about him; his footsteps were guided by prophecies of Merlin; portents and wonders marked his way. When he landed on the English shores in January 1153, he turned into a church "to pray for a space, after the manner of soldiers," at the moment when the priest opened the office of the mass for that day with the words, "Behold there cometh the Lord, the Ruler, and the kingdom is in his hand." In his first battle at Malmesbury the wintry storm and driving rain which beat in the face of Stephen's troops showed on which side Heaven fought. As the king rode out to the next great fight at Wallingford, men noted fearfully that he fell three times from his horse. Terror spread among the barons, whose interests lay altogether in

anarchy, as they saw the rapid increase of Henry's strength; and they sought by a mock compromise to paralyse the power of both Stephen and his rival. "Then arose the barons, or rather the betrayers of England, treating of concord, although they loved nothing better than discord; but they would not join battle, for they desired to exalt neither of the two, lest if the one were overcome the other should be free to govern them; they knew that so long as one was in awe of the other he could exercise no royal authority over them." Henry subdued his wrath to his political sagacity. He agreed to meet Stephen face to face at Wallingford; and there, with a branch of the Thames between them, they fixed upon terms of peace. Stephen's son Eustace, however, refused to lay down arms, and the war lingered on, Stephen being driven back to the eastern counties, while Henry held mid-England. In August, however, Eustace died suddenly, "by the favour of God," said lovers of peace; and Stephen, utterly broken in spirit, soon after yielded.

The strife died out, in fact, through sheer exhaustion, for years of anarchy and war had broken the strength of both sides; and at last "that happened which would least be believed, that the division of the kingdom was not settled by the sword." The only body of men who still possessed any public feeling, any political sagacity, or unity of purpose, found its opportunity in the general confusion. The English Church, "to whose right it principally belongs to elect the king," as Theobald had once said in words which Gregory VII. would have approved, beat down all opposition of the angry nobles; and in November 1153 Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester and

brother of Stephen, brought about a final compromise. The treaty which had been drawn up at Wallingford was confirmed at Westminster. Henry was made the adopted son of Stephen, a sharer of his kingdom while he lived, its heir when he should die. "In the business of the kingdom," the king promised, "I will work by the counsel of the duke; but in the whole realm of England, as well in the duke's part as my own, I will exercise royal justice." Henry did homage and swore fealty to Stephen, while, as they embraced, "the bystanders burst into tears of joy," and the nobles, who had stood sullenly aloof from counsel and consent, took oaths of allegiance to both princes. For a few months Henry remained in England, months marked by suspicions and treacheries on all sides. Stephen was helpless, the nobles defiant, their strongholds were untouched, and the treaty remained practically a dead letter. After the discovery of a conspiracy against his life supported by Stephen's second son and the Flemish troops, Henry gave up for the moment the hopeless task, and left England. But before long Stephen's death gave the full lordship into his hands. On the 19th of December 1154 he was crowned at Winchester King of England, amid the acclamations of crowds who had already learned "to bear him great love and fear."

King of England, Duke of Normandy, Count of Anjou, Maine, and Touraine, Count of Poitou, Duke of Aquitaine, suzerain lord of Britanny, Henry found himself at twenty-one ruler of dominions such as no king before him had ever dreamed of uniting. He was master of both sides of the English Channel, and by his alliance with his uncle, the Count of Flanders, he had command of the French coast

from the Scheldt to the Pyrenees, while his claims on Toulouse would carry him to the shores of the Mediterranean. His subjects told with pride how "his empire reached from the Arctic Ocean to the Pyrenees;" there was no monarch save the Emperor himself who ruled over such vast domains. But even the Emperor did not gather under his sway a grouping of peoples so strangely divided in race, in tongue, in aims, in history. No common tie of custom or of sympathy united the unwieldy bundle of states bound together in a common subjection; the men of Aquitaine hated Anjou with as intense a bitterness as they hated France; Angevin and Norman had been parted for generations by traditional feuds; the Breton was at war with both; to all England was "another world"—strange in speech, in law, and in custom. And to all the subjects of his heterogeneous empire Henry himself was a mere foreigner. To Gascon or to Breton he was a man of hated race and alien speech, just as much as he was to Scot or Welshman; he seemed a stranger alike to Angevin and Norman, and to Englishmen he came as a ruler with foreign tastes and foreign aims as well as a foreign tongue.

We see in descriptions of the time the strange rough figure of the new king, "Henry Curtmantel," as he was nicknamed from the short Angevin cape which hung on his shoulders, and marked him out oddly as a foreigner amid the English and Norman knights, with their long fur-lined cloaks hanging to the ground. The square stout form, the bull-neck and broad shoulders, the powerful arms and coarse rough hands, the legs bowed from incessant riding, showed a frame fashioned to an extraordinary strength. His

head was large and round; his hair red, close-cut for fear of baldness; his fiery face much freckled; his voice harsh and cracked. Those about him saw something "lion-like" in his face; his gray eyes, clear and soft in his peaceful moments, shone like fire when he was moved, and few men were brave enough to confront him when his face was lighted up by rising wrath, and when his eyes rolled and became bloodshot in a paroxysm of passion. His overpowering energy found an outlet in violent physical exertion. "With an immoderate love of hunting he led unquiet days," following the chase over waste and wood and mountain; and when he came home at night he was never seen to sit down save for supper, but wore out his court with walking or standing till after nightfall, even when his own feet and legs were covered with sores from incessant exertion. Bitter were the complaints of his courtiers that there was never any moment of rest for himself or his servants; in war time indeed, they grumbled, excessive toil was natural, but time of peace was ill-consumed in continual vigils and labours and in incessant travel—one day following another in merciless and intolerable journeyings. Henry had inherited the qualities of the Angevin race—its tenacity, its courage, its endurance, the sagacity that was without impatience, and the craft that was never at fault. With the ruddy face and unwieldy frame of the Normans other gifts had come to him; he had their sense of strong government and their wisdom; he was laborious, patient, industrious, politic. He never forgot a face he had once seen, nor anything that he heard which he deemed worthy of remembering; where he once loved he never turned to hate, and where he once

hated he was never brought to love. Sparing in diet, wasting little care on his dress—perhaps the plainest in his court,—frugal, "so much as was lawful to a prince," he was lavish in matters of State or in public affairs. A great soldier and general, he was yet an earnest striver after peace, hating to refer to the doubtful decision of battle that which might be settled by any other means, and stirred always by a great pity, strange in such an age and in such a man, for lives poured out in war. "He was more tender to dead soldiers than to the living," says a chronicler querulously; "and found far more sorrow in the loss of those who were slain than comfort in the love of those who remained." His pitiful temper was early shown in his determination to put down the barbarous treatment of shipwrecked sailors. He abolished the traditions of the civil war by forbidding plunder, and by a resolute fidelity to his plighted word. In political craft he was matchless; in great perils none was gentler than he, but when the danger was past none was harsher; and common talk hinted that he was a willing breaker of his word, deeming that in the pressure of difficulty it was easier to repent of word than deed, and to render vain a saying than a fact. "His mother's teaching, as we have heard, was this: That he should delay all the business of all men; that whatever fell into his hands he should retain along while and enjoy the fruit of it, and keep suspended in hope those who aspired to it; confirming her sentences with this cruel parable, 'Glut a hawk with his quarry and he will hunt no more; show it him and then draw it back and you will ever keep him tractable and obedient.' She taught him also that he should be frequently in his