THESIS

THE NORMAN CONQUEST

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I.U. U.
The Norman Conquest.

The history of the Normans in England and the influence exerted on the civilization of the time, and upon the succeeding generations, is a study worthy of our earnest attention and consideration, as it is through the fusion of the saxon and Norman blood that we may trace many of the elements which help to make up the superiority and world-wide fame of the present English-speaking peoples.

The Normans resembled, in many points of character, their northern brethren, the Danes, especially in bravery, warlike disposition, and overpowering lust and desire for adventure and conquest, while the Danes were noted for the great love which they bore for their island home, and their bravery and undaunted courage in defending their firesides from the northern invaders who were ever ready to gain possession of this land or pillage the coasts.

The Normans had dwelt in Normandy, from which they received their name, for over a century and had learned many things from the Romanized Saxons and Franks whose civilization was higher than their own. They possessed a great faculty for adopting the language and customs of those whose country they had taken, and besides this they originated many new arts stamped with their own peculiarities which gave them a character truly their own. Owing to these civilizing influences which had surrounded the Normans before they came to England...
the results of the Conquest were not so immediate and radical nor the changes so apparent as when the wild Barbarian tribes overthrew the Roman Empire and established themselves in the once proud city, "that sat on her seven hills, and from her theme of beauty ruled the world."

There are great turning points in the annals of every nation, and times when a single event may change the character of the people and government, marking an epoch in their history. The occupation of England by the Normans was one of such importance, and such far-reaching influences were to grow out of it, that it may be truly said that no other event in her whole history was possessed of such magnitude, unless it be the introduction of Christianity, and even that, important as it was, was more a necessity than otherwise. If England were to keep abroad of 12 in advance of the nations surrounding her.

This Conquest, occurring as it did in a transitional period, holds a high place in the history of Europe; since the part which England took in continental affairs in succeeding years can be traced back to the direct influence of the Normans upon the English people. The immediate effect upon the inhabitants was that of humiliation without absolute slavery, modification of institutions and government without completely overthrowing and breaking down the existing forms and establishing entirely new principles.

They wisely left the names of cities and towns as they found them and also built up the English nation, as we find it today, on the foundation which
they found already in existence and operation, so that the conquerors did not become German but the conquered in time became true Englishmen.

The misrule of the sons of Canute engendered such hatred towards this line of kings that the establishment of a permanent Danish dynasty was no longer an event to be looked for with any hope of success.

With the accession of Edward the Confessor began the chain of circumstances which immediately preceded and rendered possible the German Conquest. He was educated in Normandy and consequently he brought his foreign customs, manners, and friends with him to England. All the high and honorable places in the kingdom were given to his followers, while the rightful incumbents were set aside. Thus the people were gradually accustomed to the presence of strangers before they were called upon to surrender all to the hand of a stranger.

William the Conqueror was a man of superior natural endowments both of mind and body. Whatever he undertook to do he carried out by some means or other and means were never lacking to his fertile brain.

His policy in dealing with the conquered nation may seem severe and arbitrary, yet had the people yielded a more willing obedience to his authority it would have proved milder and more effective than the preceding reigns. But the yoke of a foreign power was galling to the barons as it always is to a patriotic and liberty loving people, and their insurrections only called
down upon them the vengeance of an enraged king.

We can only form a just estimate of his character and reign by taking the testimony of his admirers as well as that of those whom he suspirosed; the former looked upon him as the noblest of men, while the latter, with sullen reserve, regarded him as one of earth's greatest kings.

He conquered England by force, rewarding those who were loyal to him and punishing those who sought to bring his kingdom into jeopardy; but when his authority was once firmly established and peace restored, his influence went on silently and unobserved, strengthening the government in many ways, and uniting elements which were at variance, thus hastening the time of national unity.

At this time England was tending towards feudalism which was making such rapid progress on the continent and proving itself so destructive to national unity and harmony, since it divided the country into many small states each with its own petty government. But William loved his own power and authority too well to permit this form of government which created a nobility of Barons equal to himself in power and glory, and only established a modified feudal system which differed from that in other countries in that he required an oath of fealty from all those who held land of him in fee, whether directly or indirectly, thus rendering his sovereignty complete.
and free from all encroachments.

In William the Conqueror we have the foundation of a new dynasty which in one sense has lasted until the present day as all the kings since that time are descended from this line; yet the period of his immediate descendants is more chthonian than the succeeding ages.

It has truly been said by no capable of judging that, England was a gainer by the Conquest. Not so much by what the Normans brought over with them in the way of new and more highly developed forms of government, religion and intellectual progress, as by what they preserved of the old English laws and customs. It was owing to this cause and the influence which emanated from it that England was not reduced to such a condition of turmoil and disorder as we find in Germany and France the sixteenth century.

Looking back over England's early history we find that when the Britons, in the fifth century, called the Saxons over to aid them against the Picts and Scots the Saxons gladly responded to the cry for help and drove the enemies from the land, but they were so much pleased with the country that they turned against the Britons and conquered the island for them selves. The Saxons then established seven kingdoms called the Saxon Heptarchy, but these kingdoms were constantly at war with each other until only three remained to contest for the mastery and in the ninth century they were all united under one king.
Those troubles among the separate powers on the stern necessity of protecting their homes from the depredations of their British and Scottish neighbors kept them from taking interest or part in continental affairs.

One of the things which William introduced, however, was a participation in affairs which happened beyond the seas, and from that time on not only a deep interest, but also an active part was taken by the English people in what was transpiring around them.

They, no longer, were content with their own little world, but were seized with a desire to act a part in the great historical drama of the period. Now for the first time England appears on the stage in the capacity of a nation capable of playing her part, commanding the respect of all, and making her influence felt in whatever direction she chose to exert her powers.

From that time forth her fame has spread abroad and continued to increase until the name of England has become the synonym of power and glory.

During the reign of Henry the second England extended her possessions in various parts of the world, and also her commercial relations so that Germany, the only nation with which she had formerly held such intercourse, was no longer the only patron of her trade and industries; but her merchant ships were
sun in the ports of Spain and along the Mediterranean. The mouths of the Mance and Loire were no longer barred to English trade, and her own ports were open in reciprocity of these favors. She also invited intercourse with the Flemish peoples and introduced many of their arts and industries among her own people.

The Crusades also added much to her power and prestige in this direction, in that it opened up new fields of treasure and luxuries before unknown to the English people. During the reign of Richard the first, England became renowned throughout the world for the part which was taken by her in the Third Crusade. She magnificence and power in this great undertaking was due to the indomitable will and undaunted courage and bravery of this lion-hearted Monarch.

The high place which she held after the Crusades, her ability to keep and further strengthen her position and extend her power was due to the infusion of the Norman element into her national life, since the Normans were an adventurous people full of sagacity for new undertakings and exploits, while the English without this bold fearless spirit, so hard and direct them, would not, perhaps, have attempted the great and marvelous enterprise which Henry the second and Richard the first planned and carried out. They would have protected their own shores against the attacks of invaders, and as one of their religious ceremonies made
Pilgrimages to the Holy Land, but the thought of taking up arms for the sake of their faith would not have originated in their minds.

The English language was affected in two ways by the Norman influence, first by the loss of inflection and the general breaking up of grammatical forms, and second by the great infusion of foreign words. New ideas brought with them the phraseology suitable for their expression, and also new terms, idioms, and various other forms and elements crept into it almost imperceptibly.

These changes were slow and two hundred years elapsed before the language was fully settled and established in the new forms. New nations are constantly borrowing words and expressions from neighboring peoples, which are salutary additions to the vocabulary and may in time become naturalized, but new native words.

Thus two languages, the French and the English, like two rivers flowed along side by side for some distance without mingling their waters. The Normans could speak English, and the English could speak French, both were considered necessary and important elements in education.

The proclamation of Oxford was written, and it is a noticeable fact, in both French and English thus demonstrating the point that these peoples representing each of these tongues were considered of sufficient
importance in public affairs to be instructed in matters pertaining to
the wellfare of the nation. The reign of Edward the third witnessed
the final though qualified victory of the English language over the
orman French. From that time on there was but one language and
that was the English, and in the fourteenth century an Englishman
no longer remembered his norman descent but naturally spoke English
and learned French as an ornament because it was fashionable.

The influence on the literature is closely allied with that
upon language, since these two are inseparably mingled so that whatever
affects one affects the other also. The age immediately preceding the
conquest was not rich in literary taste or productions in England or on
the continent. The men from foreign countries who held the honorable
places about the throne before this period were not men of high talents
and renown as in the days when Rome in her triumphal march
conquered cultured Greece and took her literary treasures to the imperial
city.

We need not be surprised to find the Chronicles and a few
ballads making up all the literature of the age. But when William and
his son came to the throne all was changed, for they at once surrounded
themselves with the most learned of the world and encouraged literature
in all its forms. Scholars were welcomed on English shores, kindly
received at court, and many honors bestowed on them.
All the beauties and wonders of the country were open to travelers and visitors from beyond the seas, and much attention and respect were shown to them.

History, prose and poetry appeared, a little later philosophie and scientific writings of various degrees of merit; and by the aid of printing which was introduced about this time, this knowledge was disseminated throughout the world. There was also a detrimental influence exerted upon literature by the introduction of the French rhyming ballads which lowered the standard of English heroic poems, and made the people lose faith in their own history. But the common people never ceased to speak their mother tongue although surround by those speaking a foreign language and it is through them that the English is preserved to this day. The old chronicles with a few hymns and religious writings are all that remain to us of the earliest literature.

Wycliffe's translation of the Bible and other writings, Chaucer's beautiful poems, and the travels of John Mandeville form a turning point in the history of the language and literature, and from that time it began to take a permanent form for as men thought they clothed their ideas in the language of the land. In the thirteenth century this spirit of nationality and desire for the old speech and customs revived and the distinction between the Norman and English passed away forever.
The Normans left their influence in architecture as well as on language and literature, and we can best form a correct estimate of the changes wrought by a comparison of the English styles before and after the Conquest.

The Normans displayed but little architectural skill or taste in building or decorating their homes as they were for the most part rude in form and void of decorative art, while they bestowed upon their churches and minsters much genius and labor especially for the higher and more fanciful styles of architecture. These buildings were principally constructed of stone which was cut and highly ornamented. The interiors were finished in the most approved style, following somewhat the Italian order in many leading features.

There are few of these buildings remaining, but enough are preserved to show what the character of this architecture was and the difference between them and that of other countries especially Normandy.

The Normans tore down most of the public edifices, particularly churches, as being too small and modest for their ideas of beauty and grandeur, and in their place raised their large and more massive structures. The form of these new buildings was a modification of the old Romanesque forms, some elements of which had been introduced into England during the reign of Edward
and completely established with the coming of William.

The changing ideas of beauty in this art were in the extensive and vast size combined with the massiveness of the ancient orders. Saint Peter's church of London is the most beautiful representation of the perfection to which they carried this art.

In time the daxon and chorman forms became mingled in such a way as to produce a new school differing from the component parts, and which like language and have become stamfed with a true English character.

England, by the Conquest, was united more closely with the Roman diet. It seemed but a little thing for Williams to receive the crown from the hands of the Pope, yet that one act unimportant as it appeared caused years of religious trouble.

In after times the prelates became so insolent and overbearing in character assuming the power, under direction of the Pope, to tax and pillage the people to such an extent, that the people felt themselves justified in taking up arms against the Papal power and declaring themselves free and independent of Roman authority.

Ministers and bishops were chosen from among the strangers who had no sympathy or acquaintance with their people, and therefore stood in a very different attitude from that which the
native ecclesiastics held. They instead of devoting their time and attention to the holy calling to which they were appointed, engaged in secular pursuits and employments until they became strangers to their people to whom they should have been friends and spiritual advisors.

William found a code of laws which he would have been content to follow if it had been possible, but these laws, however, useful to the Barons alone would have failed when applied to the two peoples without the additions and alterations which were introduced into it from time to time as occasion required.

He did not overthrow the old laws and establish new ones, but retained the existing institutions as a foundation upon which to build the constitution for the united peoples. It would have been in direct opposition to William's interest and plan to do away with the existing customs, for the laws of those early times were only customs handed down from father to son, because he desired to establish himself as king of England on a firmer basis than that of the sword.

It has been claimed by some writers that the English Constitution was replenished and remodelled from the chreman law, but no code of the laws of chremany existing before or during
the reign of William has been found from which he could have
ruined and replenished the English code.

The changes which were made were necessitated by the times and
needs which came from the union of two peoples unlike in all
respects, and were, therefore, in the form of additions and modifications.

From this time the administrative systems of the two countries
grew and developed side by side as necessity and advancing civilization
required. One of the modifications was the separation of the
ecclesiastical and temporal jurisdictions. From this time forward
the bypast was the court before which all religious disputes and
troubles were brought, discussed, and decided, while all secular matters
were carried before separate courts of justice.

The clergymen of highest rank appeared in both the Convocation
and Parliament, and the king exercised his authority in both
assemblies in such a manner as to secure the passage of such
bills, and only such as were pleasing to him; and the decisions
were generally rendered in accordance with his will and pleasure;
yet his despotism was that of despotism rather than that of Despotism.

It has truly been said that it is only a wise king who
knows how and when to use the assemblies which are at his
command. The first three kings of the new dynasty were
Thus strong and wise, they permitted the people to keep the same
privileges in the assemblies which they had enjoyed and exercised in
the Witenagemot before the Conquest.

The Kings Court, composed of the kings' advisors, was formed from
the Saxon Witenagemot and later the Barly Council and Cabinet
were instituted before which the more important matters of the
kingdom, and those having special reference to the royal prerogative
were considered. Thus the power of the crown was greatly increased
during the reign of the chosman. William was very jealous of
the kingly power and did everything to increase and secure the
royal prerogative and made the succession of kings hereditary rather
than elective as in former days.

As early as the twelfth century the fusion of the saxon
and chosman elements was completed, so that one portion of the
inhabitants was no longer looked upon as different from another.

It no longer was a man born an English told even though of chosman
parentage considered a chosman and a stranger, but an Englishman with all
the rights and privileges of an old English settler. This change was
brought about mainly through the middle class which was made up
by the union of these two peoples. The highest class was composed
of the chosman nobility which came over with the king, and all those
who shared in the government; while the lowest class was the old English element which had lost its power and now only made up the number of the people to be ruled.

This conquest, although it was attended by many evils and cruelties, yet was accompanied by many advantages and blessings. It not only brought in new manners and customs, but it also preserved many of the old Saxon laws, and the union of the two elements was the means of fixing the character of a nation which has become renowned for its patriotism, heroic courage, and political power; and upon whose possessions the sun never sets.

The love of liberty and freedom was the natural outgrowth of the fusion of the dissimilar characteristics of these two peoples. The Saxons, with their home loving disposition, were stimulated to greater attainments by the courageous and venturesome spirits of the strangers whose love for conquest was a strongly marked trait of character.

Liberty became their watchword, the great aim of their lives, and the love of this holy principle was the secret of their success and of the prosperity of their descendants even to the present day.