

**EFFECTS OF THE CONQUEST OF  
ENGLAND BY THE NORMANS: AN  
ESSAY READ IN THE THEATRE,  
OXFORD, JUNE 24, 1846. PP. 1-60**

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**CHICHESTER S. FORTESCUE**

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EFFECTS OF THE CONQUEST OF ENGLAND  
BY THE NORMANS.

AN ESSAY,

(1)

READ

IN THE THEATRE, OXFORD,

JUNE 24, 1846.

BY

CHICHESTER S. FORTESCUE, B.A.,

STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH.



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"IT IS SUFFICIENT FOR OUR PRESENT PURPOSE TO REMARK THE FACT, THAT THE APPARENT DESIGN OF PROVIDENCE IS, THE ADVANCEMENT OF MANKIND, NOT ONLY AS INDIVIDUALS, BUT AS COMMUNITIES. . . . IN EVERY PART OF THE UNIVERSE WE SEE MARKS OF WISE AND BENEVOLENT DESIGN; AND YET WE SEE IN MANY INSTANCES APPARENT FRUSTRATIONS OF THIS DESIGN. . . . IN THE MORAL AND POLITICAL WORLD, WARS, AND CIVIL DISSENSION—TYRANNICAL GOVERNMENTS, UNWISE LAWS, AND ALL EVILS OF THIS CLASS, CORRESPOND TO THE INFUNDATIONS—THE DROUGHTS—THE TORNADOS, AND THE EARTHQUAKES, OF THE NATURAL WORLD. . . . A POINT WHICH IS ATTAINABLE IS, TO PERCEIVE, AMIDST ALL THE ADMIXTURE OF EVIL, AND ALL THE SEEMING DISORDER OF CONFLICTING AGENCIES, A GENERAL TENDENCY NEVER-  
THELESS TOWARDS THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF WISE AND BENEFICENT DESIGNS."

WHEATLY'S LECTURES ON POLITICAL ECONOMY, LECT. IV.

## THE EFFECTS OF THE CONQUEST OF ENGLAND BY THE NORMANS.

"Voilà ce qui about l'invasion."

MICHELET.

AN Historical Essay has little to do with the more immediate and sensible effects, and the picturesque aspect, of an event like the Norman Conquest. The historian indeed has a double task to perform. He must at one time throw himself into the period which he describes, at another stand aloof from it: he must look upon its scenes, sometimes with the eye of an actor in them, sometimes with that of a distant observer, now giving the lively but narrow picture which presents itself to the one, and now the larger view which belongs only to the other. But the task of the Essayist is more limited; he has not to paint but to philosophize; he is not required to follow the footsteps of a Scott or a Thierry, in order to reproduce to his contemporaries the very life and aspect of a distant century; he must keep his place upon the vantage-ground of his own times, from thence survey the events of which he treats, and examine them altogether by the light of modern experience. "It



is not the history of *events* properly so called that we are to consider ; what is to occupy us, is the history of civilization,—*that* is the general, hidden fact, which we are to search for under all the outer facts that envelope it\*.”

But if in reviewing at the distance of seven centuries the influence of the Norman Conquest, we have little to do with the joys and sorrows which immediately followed it, still less are we concerned with the views and purposes of the conquerors. If indeed we were endeavouring to estimate the effects of more recent events, such as the French Revolution, or our own, such considerations would naturally find a place ; because here the results may in part at least be traced backwards to the designs of the actors ; but in the infancy of society such is seldom the case. Nations, like individuals, are in their childhood the creatures of impulse ; like children they act from passion, from selfishness, from the pressure of immediate want, or the unreasoning dictates of the imagination. It is only the course of ages and civilization in the one case, as of years and education in the other, which brings reason and foresight and adaptation of means to ends. “Constitutions,” says Mackintosh, “are not *made*, but *grow*.”

The present Essay then will be an attempt to estimate the influence of the Norman Conquest upon the history of England and her neighbours, to describe results such as the selfish

\* Guizot, *Civilization en Europe*, 4<sup>ème</sup> Leçon.

conquerors never could have foreseen, and before the magnitude of which the wrongs of the conquered sink into insignificance. But before proceeding to this, the proper object of the Essay, it will contribute much to its interest, and assist us in the appreciation of the great event before us, if we consider shortly, what an Englishman of that generation would have understood by the "Effects of the Conquest of England by the Normans."

Towards the end of the Conqueror's reign England was in a state of "stern repose;" the throes and struggles of the conquered people had ceased; Hereward, the Wallace of the Saxons, had fought his last fight in the fens of Ely, and so ended that seven years' war of independence, to which none but some recent writers have done justice. The immediate terror and devastation of the Conquest was over; the Saxon population,—sympathizing with the outlaw who carried on a guerilla warfare in the forests of the north<sup>b</sup>; looking on the Norman with that horror which afterwards hailed the deaths of the Conqueror and his sons, as the just judgments of heaven<sup>c</sup>; breaking forth occasionally into desperate deeds of vengeance<sup>d</sup>, and worshipping the memory of such men as Waltheof the earl, and Wulfstan the bishop<sup>e</sup>;—had on the whole submitted to that state of things

<sup>b</sup> Thierry, ii. 128.

<sup>c</sup> "Rueful deeds he (the Conqueror) did, and ruefully he suffered." Sax. Chron. in 1086. "Normanni tyranni vindictam divinitus inflictam non evaserunt." Girald. Camb., quoted by Thierry, iii. 305.

<sup>d</sup> Thierry, ii. 293.

<sup>e</sup> Thierry, ii. 226.

from which it made no further efforts to escape. So far the coming of the Norman had added largely to the sum of human misery. The whole framework of society had suffered a cruel wrench: almost every Saxon landholder had been robbed of the inheritance and driven from the home of his fathers<sup>f</sup>; the few Cedrics who were allowed to retain their possessions, lived, we may be sure, in a state of ignominy and oppression, far greater than that which the franklin in *Ivanhoe* is represented as enduring after the lapse of more than a century. But if the thane had borne the brunt of the storm, the churl and the thrall, the citizen and the monk, had not escaped. All had been exposed to the outrage of the invader<sup>g</sup>, and all had felt in their degree the severing of old ties and long attachments. If the thane had lost land and station, the peasant and the serf had exchanged the gentleness of hereditary bondage for the hard rule of a new master; the citizen had been driven from his half ruined town, and the monk expelled from his convent by swarms of Norman priests<sup>h</sup>. "The Normans," says Henry of Huntingdon<sup>i</sup>, "had now fully executed the wrath of heaven upon the English. There was hardly one of that nation who possessed any power. They were all involved in servitude and sorrow; to be called an Englishman was considered as a reproach." "Thus," says Mr. Carlyle<sup>k</sup>, "the scanty sulky Norse-bred population are coerced

<sup>f</sup> Thierry, ii. 96—108, &c.

<sup>g</sup> Thierry, ii. 131.

<sup>h</sup> Thierry, ii. 138—144.

<sup>i</sup> Lib. iii.

<sup>k</sup> Past and Present, p. 88