



History of the Conquest of England by the Normans: All Volumes

Augustin Thierry

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This is a comprehensive history of William the Conqueror's conquest of England and the Norman takeover, the last time a foreign invader successfully subdued England.

From the intro:

“The principal states of modern Europe have at present attained a high degree of territorial unity, and the habit of living under one same government and in the bosom of one same civilization, seems to have introduced among the population of each state an entire community of manners, language, and patriotism. Yet there is perhaps not one of them which does not still present to the inquirer living traces of the diversity of the races of men which, in the progress of time, have combined to form that population. This variety of races is displayed under different aspects. Here a complete separation of idioms, local traditions, political sentiments, and a sort of instinctive hostility, distinguish from the great national mass the population of particular districts, of limited extent; there a simple difference of idiom, or even of accent, marks, though more faintly, the limit of the settlements formed by peoples of diverse origin, and long separated by deep-seated animosities. The further we go back from the time in which we live, the more distinct do these varieties become; we clearly perceive the existence of several peoples in the geographical circumscription which bears the name of one alone: instead of varying provincial dialects, we find complete and regular languages; and that which in the light of the present seems merely defective civilization and protracted resistance to progress, assumes, in the past, the aspect of original manners and patriotic adherence to ancient institutions. In this way, facts themselves of no social importance, retain great historical value. It is a falsification of history to introduce into it a philosophical contempt for all that does not enter into the uniformity of existing civilization, or to regard as alone worthy of honourable mention the peoples with whose name the chances of events have connected the idea and the destiny of that civilization.

The populations of the European continent and its islands have come at various periods into juxtaposition, usurping the one from the other, territories already occupied, and arrested only in their progress, at the point where natural obstacles, or resistance more powerful than their attack, the result of some extraordinary combination of the conquered, absolutely compelled them to stop. Thus the conquered of various epochs have become, so to speak, ranged in layers of populations, in the different directions taken by the great migration of peoples. In this movement of successive invasions, the most ancient races, reduced to a few families, have deserted the plains and flown to the mountains, where they have maintained a poor but independent existence; while the invaders, invaded in their turn, have become serfs of the soil in the plains they occupied, from want of a vacant asylum in the impregnable recesses already possessed by those whom themselves had driven there.”

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