

THIS SOVEREIGN REALM

THE AGE OF CHIVALRY

The Lion Heart – John Lackland - The Great Charter – Runnymede – Vox Populi, Vox Dei – Hubert de Burgh and the Black Band – The Black Death in England



A procession for Richard the Lionheart's coronation.

Charles Dickens – The Lion Heart **From a *History of England***

[Henry II] had four sons – Henry, Richard, Geoffrey, and John, his favourite, a young boy whom the courtiers named LACKLAND, because he had no inheritance, but to whom the King meant to give the Lordship of Ireland. All these misguided boys, in their turn, were unnatural sons to him, and unnatural brothers to each other. [All rose in rebellion against their father the king, and were none to trustworthy even amongst themselves when it came to scheming to obtain the throne. During their rebellions, the eldest brother, Henry, died, and so when their father, Henry the II was finally laid in the Earth, it was his second son, Richard, who inherited, and would become one of the most famous of the English kings, remembered chiefly through the legends of Robin Hood. But even before they were even composed, he made a name for himself.]

In the year of our Lord one thousand one hundred and eighty-nine, Richard of the Lion Heart succeeded to the throne of King Henry the Second, whose paternal heart he had done so much to break. He had been, as we have seen, a rebel from his boyhood; but, the moment he became a king against whom others might rebel, he found out that rebellion was a great wickedness. In the heat of this pious discovery, he punished all the leading people who had befriended him against his father...He was crowned King of England, with great pomp, at Westminster: walking to the Cathedral under a silken canopy stretched on the tops of four lances, each carried by a great lord....



King Richard, who was a strong, restless, burly man, with one idea always in his head... was mightily impatient to go on a Crusade to the Holy Land, with a great army [to rescue the persecuted Christians, who were suffering greatly at the hands of Saladin and his Saracens, and to reclaim the great Christian shrines for the Church.] As great armies could not be raised to go, even to the Holy Land, without a great deal of money, he sold the Crown domains, and even the high offices of State; recklessly appointing noblemen to rule over his English subjects, not because they were fit to govern, but because they could pay high for the privilege. In this way, and by selling pardons at a dear rate and by varieties of avarice and oppression, he scraped together a large treasure.

He then appointed two Bishops to take care of his kingdom in his absence, and gave great powers and possessions to his brother John, to secure his friendship. John would rather have been made Regent of England; but he was a sly man, and friendly to the expedition; saying to himself, no doubt, 'The more fighting, the more chance of my brother being killed; and when he *is* killed, then I become King John!'

... [The Crusade] t was undertaken jointly by the King of England and his old friend Philip of France. They commenced the business by reviewing their forces, to the number of one hundred thousand men. Afterwards, they severally embarked their troops for Messina, in Sicily, which

was appointed as the next place of meeting. King Richard's sister had married the King of this place, but he was dead: and his uncle TANCRED had usurped the crown, cast the Royal Widow into prison, and possessed himself of her estates. Richard fiercely demanded his sister's release, the restoration of her lands, and (according to the Royal custom of the Island) that she should have a golden chair, a golden table, four-and-twenty silver cups, and four-and-twenty silver dishes. ... King Richard took his sister away, and also a fair lady named BERENGARIA, with whom he had fallen in love in France, and whom his mother, Queen Eleanor (so long in prison, ... but released by Richard on his coming to the Throne), had brought out there to be his wife; and sailed with them for Cyprus.

He soon had the pleasure of fighting the King of the Island of Cyprus, for allowing his subjects to pillage some of the English troops who were shipwrecked on the shore; and easily conquering this poor monarch, he seized his only daughter, to be a companion to the lady Berengaria, and put the King himself into silver fetters. He then sailed away again with his mother, sister, wife, and the captive princess; and soon arrived before the town of Acre, which the French King with his fleet was besieging from the sea. But the French King was in no triumphant condition, for his army had been thinned by the swords of the Saracens, and wasted by the plague; and SALADIN, the brave Sultan of the Turks, at the head of a numerous army, was at that time... defending the place from the hills that rise above it....

[The Kings of England and Frances made] a joint assault on Acre; but when they did make up their quarrel for that purpose, the Saracens promised to yield the town, to give up to the Christians the wood of the Holy Cross, to set at liberty all their Christian captives, and to pay two hundred thousand pieces of gold....

[The French king soon set out for home,] being offended by the overbearing conduct of the English King; being anxious to look after his own dominions; and being ill, besides, from the unwholesome air of that hot and sandy country. King Richard carried on the war without him; and remained in the East, meeting with a variety of adventures, nearly a year and a half. Every night when his army was on the march, and came to a halt, the heralds cried out three times, to remind all the soldiers of the cause in which they were engaged, 'Save the Holy Sepulchre!' and then all the soldiers knelt and said 'Amen!' Marching or encamping, the army had continually to strive with the hot air of the glaring desert, or with the Saracen soldiers animated and directed by the brave Saladin, or with both together. Sickness and death, battle and wounds, were always among them; but through every difficulty King Richard fought like a giant, and worked like a common labourer. Long and long after he was quiet in his grave, his terrible battle-axe, with twenty English pounds of English steel in its mighty head, was a legend among the Saracens; and when all the Saracen and Christian hosts had been dust for many a year, if a Saracen horse started at any object by the wayside, his rider would exclaim, 'What dost thou fear, Fool? Dost thou think King Richard is behind it?'



Saladin meets with Richard the Lionheart

No one admired this King's renown for bravery more than Saladin himself, who was a generous and gallant enemy. When Richard lay ill of a fever, Saladin sent him fresh fruits from Damascus, and snow from the mountain-tops. Courtly messages and compliments were frequently exchanged between them—and then King Richard would mount his horse and kill as many Saracens as he could; and Saladin would mount his, and kill as many Christians as he could. In this way King Richard fought to his heart's content at Arsoof and at Jaffa; and finding himself with nothing exciting to do at Ascalon, except to rebuild, for his own defence, some fortifications there which the Saracens had destroyed, he kicked his ally the Duke of Austria, for being too proud to work at them.

The army at last came within sight of the Holy City of Jerusalem; but [after] fighting, soon retired, and agreed with the Saracens upon a truce for three years, three months, three days, and three hours. Then, the English Christians, protected by the noble Saladin from Saracen revenge, visited Our Saviour's tomb; and then King Richard embarked with a small force at Acre to return home.

But he was shipwrecked in the Adriatic Sea, and was fain to pass through Germany, under an assumed name. Now, there were many people in Germany who had served in the Holy Land under that proud Duke of Austria who had been kicked; and some of them, easily recognising a man so remarkable as King Richard, carried their intelligence to the kicked Duke, who straightway took him prisoner at a little inn near Vienna.

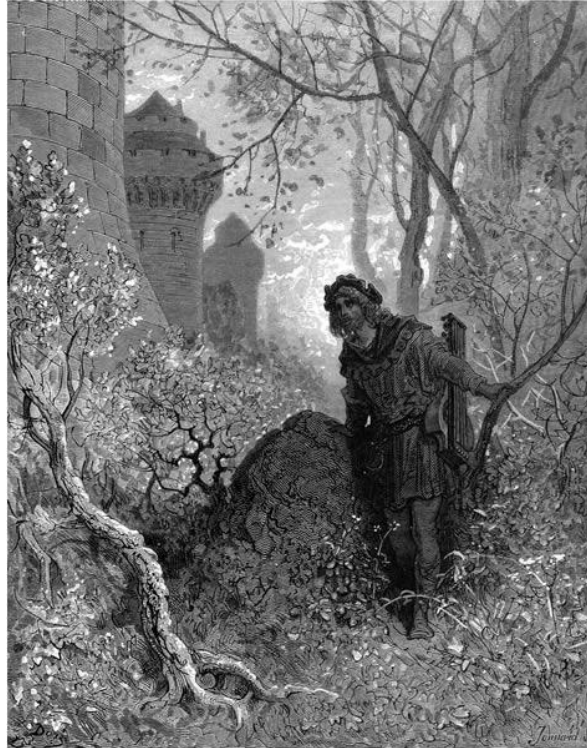
The Duke's master the Emperor of Germany, and the King of France, were equally delighted to have so troublesome a monarch in safe keeping... [The French King] monstrously pretended that

King Richard had designed to poison him in the East; he charged him with having murdered, there, a man whom he had in truth befriended; he bribed the Emperor of Germany to keep him close prisoner; and, finally, through the plotting of these two princes, Richard was brought before the German legislature, charged with the foregoing crimes, and many others. But he defended himself so well, that many of the assembly were moved to tears by his eloquence and earnestness. It was decided that he should be treated, during the rest of his captivity, in a manner more becoming his dignity than he had been, and that he should be set free on the payment of a heavy ransom. This ransom the English people willingly raised. When Queen Eleanor took it over to Germany, it was at first evaded and refused. But she appealed to the honour of all the princes of the German Empire in behalf of her son, and appealed so well that it was accepted, and the King released. Thereupon, the King of France wrote to Prince John—‘Take care of thyself. The devil is unchained!’

Prince John had reason to fear his brother, for he had been a traitor to him in his captivity. He had secretly joined the French King; had vowed to the English nobles and people that his brother was dead; and had vainly tried to seize the crown. He was now in France, at a place called Evreux. Being the meanest and basest of men, he contrived a mean and base expedient for making himself acceptable to his brother. He invited the French officers of the garrison in that town to dinner, murdered them all, and then took the fortress. With this recommendation to the good will of a lion-hearted monarch, he hastened to King Richard, fell on his knees before him, and obtained the intercession of Queen Eleanor.

‘I forgive him,’ said the King, ‘and I hope I may forget the injury he has done me, as easily as I know he will forget my pardon.’

While King Richard was in Sicily, there had been trouble in his dominions at home: one of the bishops whom he had left in charge thereof, arresting the other; and making, in his pride and ambition, as great a show as if he were King himself. But the King hearing of it at Messina, and appointing a new Regency, this LONGCHAMP (for that was his name) had fled to France in a woman’s dress, and had there been encouraged and supported by the French King. With all these causes of offence against Philip in his mind, King Richard had no sooner been welcomed home by his enthusiastic subjects with great display and splendour, and had no sooner been crowned afresh at Winchester, than he resolved to show the French King that the Devil was unchained indeed, and made war against him with great fury....



There is an old tune yet known—a sorrowful air will sometimes outlive many generations of strong men, and even last longer than battle-axes with twenty pounds of steel in the head—by which this King is said to have been discovered in his captivity. BLONDEL, a favourite Minstrel of King Richard, as the story relates, faithfully seeking his Royal master, went singing it outside the gloomy walls of many foreign fortresses and prisons; until at last he heard it echoed from within a dungeon, and knew the voice, and cried out in ecstasy, ‘O Richard, O my King!’ You may believe it, if you like; it would be easy to believe worse things. Richard was himself a Minstrel and a Poet...

H. E. Marshall: John Lackland **From *Our Island Story***

WHEN Richard Cœur de Lion died, his brother John, who had plotted and rebelled against him when he was alive, became King. He was called by the French John Sans Terre, which means "without land," and John Lackland by the English. He was so called because, when his father, Henry II., died, John had no kingdom left to him as his brothers had. John was the youngest... of all Henry's sons, and he was not the heir to the throne of England.

The real heir was Prince Arthur of Brittany, the son of John's elder brother Geoffrey. And now the French king, Philip, who had fought against Richard and helped John, suddenly turned round and began to fight against John because he would not let Arthur be king. John... easily got Arthur into his power and shut him up in prison. But John was not content with that. He greatly feared that the English people might want to have Arthur as their King, and he resolved to make that impossible.

Prince Arthur was placed in the charge of a man called Hubert, and... King John ordered this man to put out Arthur's eyes. Hubert actually said he would do this cruel deed. One morning he brought two men into Arthur's room, ready to put out his... blue eyes with... hot irons. Arthur was a gentle, loving boy, and he was fond of his stern gaoler, and Hubert in his own rough way was fond of the little prince. Now he felt sad and sick at heart at the thought of what he had to do.

"Are you ill?" said Arthur. "You look so pale. I wish you were a little ill so that I could nurse you and show you how much I love you," he added. When Arthur spoke to him so kindly the tears came into Hubert's eyes. But he brushed them away and determined to do what the King had commanded.

"I am not ill, but your uncle has commanded me to put out your eyes," he said roughly.

"To put out my eyes! Oh, you will not do it, Hubert?"

"I must."

"Oh, Hubert! Hubert! how can you?" said Arthur, putting his arms round Hubert's neck. "When your head ached only a little I sat up all night with you. Now you want to put out my eyes. These eyes that never did, nor never shall, so much as frown upon you."



"I have sworn to do it," said Hubert sadly.

"Oh, but you will not do it! You will not! You will not, Hubert?" and so Arthur begged and prayed till Hubert could resist no longer, and he sent the wicked men with their dreadful red-hot irons away. But Hubert was afraid that King John would be angry because his orders had not been obeyed, so he told him the cruel deed had been done, and that Prince Arthur had died of grief and pain.

Then... King John was glad. But the people both in France and England... mourned for the young prince. All through the land bells were tolled as if for a funeral. There was so much anger against John, and so much sorrow for the prince, that at last

Hubert told the people that what he had said was not true, and that Arthur was still alive. Then everyone was glad. Even King John was glad at first because many of his nobles had told him plainly that he would find no knight to follow him to battle, nor to guard his castles at home, if he had really killed his little nephew.

But King John... could not rest while he knew that Prince Arthur lived. So one dark night he came to the castle in which his nephew was kept prisoner. After that night no one ever saw Prince Arthur again. Next morning when the sun shone in at the narrow window where he used to sit it shone into an empty room. For Arthur's poor little body was lying at the bottom of the Seine, with a great wound in his heart made by his wicked uncle's cruel, sharp knife.

The French barons soon grew weary of John and his misrule, and they all leagued against him. They fought and conquered him, and he had to fly from Normandy which, with all his other French possessions, was lost to him forever. But although he was no longer Duke of Normandy, Count of Anjou, Lord of Touraine and Maine, John was still King of England, and to England he returned to rob and oppress the people.

The wise man, called Hubert Walter, who had ruled England during the last years of Richard Cœur de Lion, now died. He had been Archbishop of Canterbury, and John was very glad when he died, as he was one of the few men who kept him from doing just as he liked. John chose a friend of his own as the next archbishop, but the monks of Canterbury chose someone else. Both these men went to the Pope to ask him which of them ought to be the archbishop. Henry II., you remember, had quarrelled with Thomas Becket over this very point, because, he said, he had the right to choose the English bishops, and the Pope had nothing to do with it.

The Pope said that neither of these men should be archbishop, and he chose another man altogether, called Stephen Langdon... In fact no better archbishop could have been chosen. But John was furiously angry when he heard that his friend was not to be allowed to be archbishop, and he banished Stephen Langdon from the country.



Pope Innocent III

Then the Pope... told him that, if he did not allow Stephen to come back at once, he would lay England under an Interdict. Interdict comes from a Latin word which means "to forbid." The Pope meant that he would forbid [the Sacraments to be celebrated publicly, marriages to be witnessed by the Church, or bodies to be buried in consecrated ground. Interdicts are occasionally used in emergencies of injustice to force a change in favour of justice. The interdict was not merely over the matter of the appointment of the bishop, but because the pope had heard of the inhumane way the people of England were treated, and how they were taxed to the hilt.]

John did not care. He meant to have his own way... John would not give in and the churches were closed. No bells were rung, no services were held. People could not be married, little babies could not be christened, dead people could not be buried. Cobwebs and dust filled the churches, weeds choked the graveyards. It was a sad and gloomy land.

Still John did not care. Then the Pope excommunicated him. Excommunicate is another Latin word and means that John was put out of union [with the Church.] The Pope told the people that John was no longer king and that they need not now obey him. They were forbidden to eat or drink with him or to serve him...

Still John did not care. He laughed at the Pope. Then the Pope told the King of France that he would be doing a good and Christian act if he conquered John and took possession of England. The French king was only too pleased to have a good excuse for invading England, and he began at once to prepare to fight.

Then suddenly John grew frightened and gave way. He had found out that not only the Pope and the French were against him, but the Scotch, the Irish, the Welsh, and even the English were all ready to fight. He was alone in the world, hated and despised by all. So [respected was] the Pope.

From being insolent and scornful, John now became meanly humble... The Pope sent a messenger to England, and John, kneeling before this messenger, took the crown from his head and gave it to him. The Pope's messenger kept the crown for five days and then he gave it back to John.... One good thing at least followed. The Interdict was taken from the land. Once more church bells rang, hymns were sung, and the silent gloom passed away. ...

"At last I am really King of England," he cried, for he thought that there was no one else in all the land to hinder him.... But he was mistaken. Stephen Langdon, the man whom the Pope had made Archbishop of Canterbury, turned out to be the people of England's best friend.

You remember that King Henry I had granted a Charter of Liberties to the people. That charter had been broken, set aside and forgotten. Stephen Langdon and the barons now drew up another charter which they determined to make John grant to them. This charter was much the same as that of Henry, only it gave still greater liberty to the people. It is called the Magna Carta or Great Charter. Magna means "great."

Selections from Magna Carta – The Great Charter

JOHN, by the grace of God King of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Count of Anjou, to his archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls, barons, justices, foresters, sheriffs, stewards, servants, and to all his officials and loyal subjects, Greeting.

KNOW THAT BEFORE GOD, for the health of our soul and those of our ancestors and heirs, to the honour of God, the exaltation of the holy Church, and the better ordering of our kingdom, at the advice of our reverend fathers... and other loyal subjects:

+ (1) FIRST, THAT WE HAVE GRANTED TO GOD, and by this present charter have confirmed for us and our heirs in perpetuity, that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired. That we wish this so to be observed, appears from the fact that of our own free will, before the outbreak of the present dispute between us and our barons, we granted and confirmed by charter the freedom of the Church's elections - a right reckoned to be of the greatest necessity and importance to it - and caused this to be confirmed by Pope Innocent III. This freedom we shall observe ourselves, and desire to be observed in good faith by our heirs in perpetuity.



TO ALL FREE MEN OF OUR KINGDOM we have also granted, for us and our heirs for ever, all the liberties written out below, to have and to keep for them and their heirs, of us and our heirs: ...

(5) For so long as a guardian has guardianship of such land, he shall maintain the houses, parks, fish preserves, ponds, mills, and everything else pertaining to it, from the revenues of the land itself. When the heir comes of age, he shall restore the whole land to him, stocked with plough teams and such implements of husbandry as the season demands and the revenues from the land can reasonably bear.

(6) Heirs may be given in marriage, but not to someone of lower social standing. Before a marriage takes place, it shall be made known to the heir's next-of-kin.

(8) No widow shall be compelled to marry, so long as she wishes to remain without a husband. But she must give security that she will not marry without royal consent, if she holds her lands of the Crown, or without the consent of whatever other lord she may hold them of.

(9) Neither we nor our officials will seize any land or rent in payment of a debt, so long as the debtor has movable goods sufficient to discharge the debt. . .

+ (13) The city of London shall enjoy all its ancient liberties and free customs, both by land and by water. We also will and grant that all other cities, boroughs, towns, and ports shall enjoy all their liberties and free customs.

(16) No man shall be forced to perform more service for a knight's 'fee', or other free holding of land, than is due from it.

(17) Ordinary lawsuits shall not follow the royal court around, but shall be held in a fixed place.

(20) For a trivial offence, a free man shall be fined only in proportion to the degree of his offence, and for a serious offence correspondingly, but not so heavily as to deprive him of his livelihood. . .

(21) Earls and barons shall be fined only by their equals, and in proportion to the gravity of their offence.

(23) No town or person shall be forced to build bridges over rivers except those with an ancient obligation to do so.

(24) No sheriff, constable, coroners, or other royal officials are to hold lawsuits that should be held by the royal justices.

* (25) Every county, hundred, wapentake, and tithing shall remain at its ancient rent, without increase, except the royal demesne manors.

(28) No constable or other royal official shall take corn or other movable goods from any man without immediate payment, unless the seller voluntarily offers postponement of this.

(31) Neither we nor any royal official will take wood for our castle, or for any other purpose, without the consent of the owner.

(38) In future no official shall place a man on trial upon his own unsupported statement, without producing credible witnesses to the truth of it.

+ (39) No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgement of his equals or by the law of the land.

+ (40) To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice.

* (42) In future it shall be lawful for any man to leave and return to our kingdom unharmed and without fear, by land or water, preserving his allegiance to us, except in time of war, for some short period, for the common benefit of the realm. People that have been imprisoned or outlawed in accordance with the law of the land, people from a country that is at war with us, and merchants - who shall be dealt with as stated above - are excepted from this provision.

* (45) We will appoint as justices, constables, sheriffs, or other officials, only men that know the law of the realm and are minded to keep it well.

(47) All forests that have been created in our reign shall at once be disafforested. River-banks that have been enclosed in our reign shall be treated similarly.

* (52) To any man whom we have deprived or dispossessed of lands, castles, liberties, or rights, without the lawful judgement of his equals, we will at once restore these. In cases of dispute the matter shall be resolved by the judgement of the twenty-five barons referred to below in the clause for securing the peace.

(54) No one shall be arrested or imprisoned on the appeal of a woman for the death of any person except her husband.

* (55) All fines that have been given to us unjustly and against the law of the land, and all fines that we have exacted unjustly, shall be entirely remitted or the matter decided by a majority judgement of the twenty-five barons referred to below in the clause for securing the peace (§ 61)

* (61) SINCE WE HAVE GRANTED ALL THESE THINGS for God, for the better ordering of our kingdom, and to allay the discord that has arisen between us and our barons, and since we desire that they shall be enjoyed in their entirety, with lasting strength, for ever, we give and grant to the barons the following security:

The barons shall elect twenty-five of their number to keep, and cause to be observed with all their might, the peace and liberties granted and confirmed to them by this charter.

If we, our chief justice, our officials, or any of our servants offend in any respect against any man, or transgress any of the articles of the peace or of this security, and the offence is made known to four of the said twenty-five barons, they shall come to us - or in our absence from the kingdom to the chief justice - to declare it and claim immediate redress. If we, or in our absence abroad the chief justice, make no redress within forty days, reckoning from the day on which the offence was declared to us or to him, the four barons shall refer the matter to the rest of the twenty-five barons, who may distrain upon and assail us in every way possible, with the support of the whole community of the land, by seizing our castles, lands, possessions, or anything else saving only our own person and those of the queen and our children, until they have secured such redress as they have determined upon. Having secured the redress, they may then resume their normal obedience to us.

Any man who so desires may take an oath to obey the commands of the twenty-five barons for the achievement of these ends, and to join with them in assailing us to the utmost of his power. We give public and free permission to take this oath to any man who so desires, and at no time will we prohibit any man from taking it. Indeed, we will compel any of our subjects who are unwilling to take it to swear it at our command.

If one of the twenty-five barons dies or leaves the country, or is prevented in any other way from discharging his duties, the rest of them shall choose another baron in his place, at their discretion, who shall be duly sworn in as they were.

In the event of disagreement among the twenty-five barons on any matter referred to them for decision, the verdict of the majority present shall have the same validity as a unanimous verdict of the whole twenty-five, whether these were all present or some of those summoned were unwilling or unable to appear.

The twenty-five barons shall swear to obey all the above articles faithfully, and shall cause them to be obeyed by others to the best of their power....

* (62) We have remitted and pardoned fully to all men any ill-will, hurt, or grudges that have arisen between us and our subjects, whether clergy or laymen, since the beginning of the dispute. We have in addition remitted fully, and for our own part have also pardoned, to all clergy and laymen any offences committed as a result of the said dispute between Easter in the sixteenth year of our reign (i.e. 1215) and the restoration of peace...

* (63) IT IS ACCORDINGLY OUR WISH AND COMMAND that the English Church shall be free, and that men in our kingdom shall have and keep all these liberties, rights, and concessions, well and peaceably in their fulness and entirety for them and their heirs, of us and our heirs, in all things and all places for ever.

Both we and the barons have sworn that all this shall be observed in good faith and without deceit. Witness the abovementioned people and many others.
Given by our hand in the meadow that is called Runnymede, between Windsor and Staines, on the fifteenth day of June in the seventeenth year of our reign (i.e. 1215: the new regnal year began on 28 May).

H. E. Marshall: Runnymede **From *Our Island Story***

But King John was very unwilling to grant it. When he first read this charter he was furiously angry. "Why do they not ask for my kingdom at once?" he cried. "I will never, never grant anything that will make me a slave of the people."

But the Church and the barons and the people were all against John. Agree he must. Yet he kept delaying, from Christmas till Easter, from Easter till midsummer. Friend after friend deserted him, till at last he found that the whole country had risen against him like one huge army, and he had only seven knights left who were still true to him.

The angry barons would no longer be put off. They forced the King to meet them at a little place on the Thames called Runnymede. The barons and their army camped on one side of the river, the King and his friends on the other. On a little island between, they met and talked, and there, on 15th June 1215 A.D., the Great Charter was sealed with the king's great seal.



The King was sullen and angry. At the last he would have refused to set his hand to the seal, but Stephen Langdon stood beside him and the stern barons around. Then he found that he had to bend his will to that of the people. John not only sealed the charter, but he agreed that twenty-four barons should be appointed to see that he kept the promises which it contained. He agreed only because he was compelled, because the

barons stood there in bright armour with sharp swords and fierce looks, because he knew he had no friend to stand by him and help him to resist.

When the meeting was over, and John went back to his palace, his anger was terrible. He threw himself on the floor foaming with passion. "They have given me four-and-twenty over-lords," he screamed. "I am no king with four-and-twenty over-lords." He cursed the barons and the people with terrible curses. He tore and bit the rushes with which the floor was covered. He gnashed his teeth, growling and snarling like a wild animal mad with rage.

Yet this charter, against which John fought so fiercely, was nothing new; the laws and promises it contained were the laws and promises of Edward the Confessor, of Alfred the Great. But they were also the laws and promises which the foreign kings of England had broken and trampled on ever since William the Conqueror had won the battle of Hastings. Many copies of the great charter were made, and these copies were sent to cathedrals and other safe places to be taken care of. This was done so that the people throughout all the land should know of their liberties, and if one copy were lost or destroyed, there should still be others....

The loss of Normandy, which was caused by John's cruelty, proved to be a blessing to England. Norman lords no longer came to England expecting to fill the best places in the land. French was spoken less and less, until only a few French words remained, which we still use, and which now form part of the English language. The hatred between Norman and English died out, because the differences disappeared, and the Norman barons became English barons.

John Lackland was succeeded by Henry III, under whom the first Parliament of England was formed, led by Simon de Montfort. After him reigned Edward I, who was known as "Longshanks" or "the Hammer of the Scots," because of the wars he made against Scotland, fighting against such renowned warriors as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce.

Robert Lacey: Vox Populi, Vox Dei **From *Great Tales From English History***

'Fair of body and great of strength', Edward of Caernarfon, England's first Prince of Wales, was widely welcomed when he came into his inheritance as King Edward II at the age of twenty-three. But as he made his way down the aisle of Westminster Abbey at the end of February 1308 with his young queen Isabella, daughter of the French king Philip IV, all eyes turned to the individual behind him – Piers Gaveston, a young knight from Gascony. The new king had awarded Gaveston pride of place in his coronation procession, bestowing on him the honour of carrying the crown and sword of Edward the Confessor, and Gaveston, in royal purple splashed with pearls, was certainly dressed for the occasion. His finery was such, wrote one chronicler, that 'he more resembled the god Mars, than an ordinary mortal'. According to the gossips, King Edward was so fond of Gaveston that he had given him the pick of the presents that he had received at his recent wedding to Isabella...

Edward's father, Edward I, the pugnacious 'Hammer of the Scots', had been infuriated... The old king had made Gaveston, the son of a trusted knight, a ward in the prince's household, but there were complaints that the two men got up to mischief together, frequenting taverns and

running up debts. On Edward I's last unsuccessful campaign against the Scots in Carlisle in the winter of 1306–7, the prince had suggested giving Gaveston some of the royal estates in France. His father exploded, seizing Edward by the hair and tearing it out in tufts. He ordered Gaveston into exile.



Edward II's Coronation

On coming to the throne, Edward II's first concern had been to expedite the return of his friend Piers. When he went off to France to marry Isabella in January 1308, a few weeks before the coronation, he placed Gaveston in charge of England, and, to the fury of just about every baron in the land, he also bestowed on him the rich earldom of Cornwall...

[In generally, people began to get the idea that Edward's manner was unkingly.] For a start, he dressed like his friend Piers, a little too extravagantly. He enjoyed the unusual sport of swimming and also rowing, which was considered demeaning – kings traditionally showed their power by getting others to row them. He kept a camel in his stables. He pursued a whole range of 'common' pursuits such as digging, thatching, building walls and hedges, and he enjoyed hammering away at the anvil like a blacksmith. Nowadays England might welcome a do-it-yourself king, but in the fourteenth century such activities, not to mention the pleasure Edward took in hobnobbing with grooms and ploughmen, were considered abnormal.

The major grievance, however, was the disproportionate favour that Edward showed Piers Gaveston. When the barons in Parliament called for the exile of the favourite, Edward's response was to endow him with still more castles and manors. He did agree, reluctantly, that Gaveston should go over to Ireland for a while as his representative, but he was clearly unhinged by his

departure. The King took his entire household to Bristol to wave Gaveston ... When, in an attempt to curb the King's aberrations, Parliament presented him with a set of 'Ordinances' in 1311, along the lines of Simon de Montfort's Provisions of Oxford, Edward took the extraordinary step of offering to agree to any restriction on his own powers provided that his favourite [friend, Piers] was in no way affected.

As approved by Parliament and reluctantly agreed by the King, the Ordinances of 1311 imposed stringent controls on royal power. Building on Magna Carta and the Provisions of Oxford, championed by Simon de Montfort, it was now laid down that the King could not leave the kingdom without the consent of the barons, and that parliaments must be held at least once or twice a year and in a convenient place. Clearly, the immediate purpose of the Ordinances was to deal with Gaveston, who was promptly sent out of the country for a second time. But he sneaked quietly back, and by the end of November there were reports of the favourite 'hiding and wandering from place to place in the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset'. That Christmas he appeared openly at Edward's side at Windsor.

For the indignant barons, this act of defiance was the last straw. Using the authority of the Ordinances, they summoned troops, while Edward and Gaveston headed north to rally forces of their own. Cornered at Newcastle, they managed to escape, Edward to York and Gaveston to Scarborough, where the barons besieged him. Lacking supplies, Gaveston surrendered, and under promise of safe conduct he was escorted south. But just beyond Banbury the party was ambushed by the Earl of Warwick, who whisked the favourite back to his castle.... On 19 June 1312, Piers Gaveston was beheaded at Blacklow Hill on the road between Warwick and Kenilworth. The killing of Edward II's beloved 'brother' devastated the King and prompted a backlash of sympathy in his favour. But two years later, finally doing what a king was supposed to do and leading his army north against Scotland, Edward was heavily defeated between Edinburgh and Sterling in June 1314. Robert the Bruce's brave and cunning victory at Bannockburn is one of the great tales of Scottish history, but in England its consequence was a massive further blow to Edward's authority. Early in 1316 at the Parliament of Lincoln, the King humbly agreed to hand over the running of the country to the barons.

The trouble was that Edward had found himself another Gaveston. Hugh Despenser was an ambitious young courtier whose father, also named Hugh, had been an adviser and official to Edward I and still wielded considerable power. The Despensers came from the Welsh borders or Marches, and they used their influence shamelessly to extend their lands. Once again the barons found themselves rallying together to restrict the power of a royal... favourite, and this time a new element came into play. In 1325 Edward's long-suffering wife Isabella seized the chance of a journey to France to take a stand [with the aid of Lord Mortimer, a Welshman.]

When Mortimer and Isabella landed in England in 1326, they had only a few hundred men, but they held a trump card – Isabella's elder son by Edward, the thirteen-year-old Prince Edward. As heir to the throne, the boy represented some sort of hope for the future, and London welcomed the Queen, whose cause, according to one chronicler, was supported by 'the whole community of the realm'. In a widespread uprising, the hated Despensers were tracked down and executed... England now set about doing something it had never attempted before – the deposition of a king by legal process. Prelates prepared the way. Early in January, the Bishop of Hereford preached to

a clamorous London congregation on the text ‘a foolish king shall ruin his people’, and a parliament of bishops, barons, judges, knights and burgesses was convened in Westminster. Preaching to them on 15 January 1327, the Archbishop of Canterbury took as his text ‘Vox populi, Vox dei’ – ‘The voice of the people is the voice of God.’ By the unanimous consent of all the lords, clergy and people, he announced, King Edward II was deposed from his royal dignity, ‘never more to govern the people of England’, and he would be succeeded by his first-born son, the Lord Edward. So Edward III would be the first English monarch appointed by a popular decision in Parliament.

It remained to break the news to the King himself, then imprisoned at Kenilworth Castle, and a deputation of lords, churchmen, knights and townsfolk set off forthwith for the Midlands. Dramatically clad in black, Edward half fainted as he heard William Trussell, a Lancastrian knight, read out the verdict of the whole Parliament. It grieved him, he said in response, that his people should be so exasperated with him as to wish to reject his rule, but he would bow to their will, since his son was being accepted in his place. Next day Trussell, on behalf of the whole kingdom, renounced all homage and allegiance to Edward of Caernarfon, and the steward of the royal household broke his staff of office, as if the King had died. The deputation returned to Parliament and the new reign was declared on 25 January 1327.



Now formally a non-king, Edward was imprisoned in the forlorn and ponderous Berkeley Castle overlooking the River Severn just north of Bristol. It is possible that, with time, his imprisonment might have been eased so as to allow him to potter around the grounds, digging his beloved ditches and hammering out a horseshoe or two. But in the space of just a few months there were two attempts to rescue him, and... Mortimer, decided that he was too dangerous to be left alive.

It is not known precisely how Edward II was murdered, as there are conflicting accounts, but we do know that they had a hard time killing him, and that various methods were used, including trying to smother him with cushions, (which one source says were so heavy that fifteen men

couldn't live them – what is meant here is not entirely understood) to crush him with weights, starvation, and leaving him in a foul-smelling cell in hopes that the stench would prove too much for him. Some say eventually he was killed by being stabbed with a red hot poker, others say they were finally successful in smothering him.

Charles Dickens – Hubert de Burgh and the Black Band A History of England

The Protectorship [of Henry III, who was still a young boy] was now divided. PETER DE ROCHES, whom King John had made Bishop of Winchester, was entrusted with the care of the person of the young sovereign; and the exercise of the Royal authority was confided to EARL HUBERT DE BURGH. These two personages had from the first no liking for each other, and soon became enemies. When the young King was declared of age, Peter de Roches, finding that Hubert increased in power and favour, retired discontentedly, and went abroad. For nearly ten years afterwards Hubert had full sway alone.

But ten years is a long time to hold the favour of a King. This King, too, as he grew up, showed a strong resemblance to his father, in feebleness, inconsistency, and irresolution. The best that can be said of him is that he was not cruel. De Roches coming home again, after ten years, and being a novelty, the King began to favour him and to look coldly on Hubert. Wanting money besides, and having made Hubert rich, he began to dislike Hubert. At last he was made to believe, or pretended to believe, that Hubert had misappropriated some of the Royal treasure; and ordered him to furnish an account of all he had done in his administration. Besides which, the foolish charge was brought against Hubert that he had made himself the King's favourite by magic. Hubert very well knowing that he could never defend himself against such nonsense, and that his old enemy must be determined on his ruin, instead of answering the charges fled to Merton Abbey.

Then the King, in a violent passion, sent for the Mayor of London, and said to the Mayor, 'Take twenty thousand citizens, and drag me Hubert de Burgh out of that abbey, and bring him here.' The Mayor posted off to do it, but the Archbishop of Dublin (who was a friend of Hubert's) warning the King that an abbey was a sacred place, and that if he committed any violence there, he must answer for it to the Church, the King changed his mind and called the Mayor back, and declared that Hubert should have four months to prepare his defence, and should be safe and free during that time.

Hubert, who relied upon the King's word, though I think he was old enough to have known better, came out of Merton Abbey upon these conditions, and journeyed away to see his wife: a Scottish Princess who was then at St. Edmund's-Bury.

Almost as soon as he had departed from the Sanctuary, his enemies persuaded the weak King to send out one SIR GODFREY DE CRANCUMB, who commanded three hundred vagabonds called the Black Band, with orders to seize him. They came up with him at a little town in Essex, called Brentwood, when he was in bed. He leaped out of bed, got out of the house, fled to the church, ran up to the altar, and laid his hand upon the cross. Sir Godfrey and the Black Band, caring

neither for church, altar, nor cross, dragged him forth to the church door, with their drawn swords flashing round his head, and sent for a Smith to rivet a set of chains upon him.

When the Smith (I wish I knew his name!) was brought, all dark and swarthy with the smoke of his forge, and panting with the speed he had made; and the Black Band, falling aside to show him the Prisoner, cried with a loud uproar, 'Make the fetters heavy! make them strong!' the Smith dropped upon his knee—but not to the Black Band—and said, 'This is the brave Earl Hubert de Burgh, who fought at Dover Castle, and destroyed the French fleet, and has done his country much good service. You may kill me, if you like, but I will never make a chain for Earl Hubert de Burgh!'



The Black Band never blushed, or they might have blushed at this. They knocked the Smith about from one to another, and swore at him, and tied the Earl on horseback, undressed as he was, and carried him off to the Tower of London. The Bishops, however, were so indignant at the violation of the Sanctuary of the Church, that the frightened King soon ordered the Black Band to take him back again; at the same time commanding the Sheriff of Essex to prevent his escaping out of Brentwood Church.

Well! the Sheriff dug a deep trench all round the church, and erected a high fence, and watched the church night and day; the Black Band and their Captain watched it too, like three hundred and one black wolves. For thirty-nine days, Hubert de Burgh remained within. At length, upon the fortieth day, cold and hunger were too much for him, and he gave himself up to the Black Band, who carried him off, for the second time, to the Tower.

When his trial came on, he refused to plead; but at last it was arranged that he should give up all the royal lands which had been bestowed upon him, and should be kept at the Castle of Devizes, in what was called 'free prison,' in charge of four knights appointed by four lords. There, he remained almost a year, until, learning that a follower of his old enemy the Bishop was made Keeper of the Castle, and fearing that he might be killed by treachery, he climbed the ramparts one dark night, dropped from the top of the high Castle wall into the moat, and coming safely to

the ground, took refuge in another church. From this place he was delivered by a party of horse despatched to his help by some nobles, who were by this time in revolt against the King, and assembled in Wales. He was finally pardoned and restored to his estates, but he lived privately, and never more aspired to a high post in the realm, or to a high place in the King's favour. And thus end—more happily than the stories of many favourites of Kings—the adventures of Earl Hubert de Burgh.

Brother Knighton - The Black Death in England, 1348

In this year there was a general mortality among men throughout the world. It began first in India, and then appeared in Tharsis, then among the Saracens, and last among the Christians and Jews, so that in the space of one year, namely, from Easter to Easter, 8,000 legions of men, according to widely prevalent rumors in the Court of Rome, died in those remote regions, besides Christians. The King of Tharsis, seeing such a sudden and unheard-of mortality among his people, set out with a great multitude of nobles, intending to seek out the Pope at Avignon and have himself baptized as a Christian, believing the vengeance of God to have overtaken his people because of their sinful disbelief. But when he had traveled twenty days he heard along the road that the plague had invaded the ranks of the Christians as well as other nations, and therefore he turned about to go back to his own country....

The dreadful pestilence penetrated the sea coast by Southampton and came to Bristol, and there almost the whole population of the town perished, as if it had been seized by sudden death; for few kept their beds more than two or three days, or even half a day. Then this cruel death spread everywhere around, following the course of the sun. And there died at Leicester in the small parish of St. Leonard more than 380 persons, in the parish of Holy Cross, 400; in the parish of St. Margaret's, Leicester, 700; and so in every parish, a great multitude...



In the same year there was a great murrain of sheep everywhere in the kingdom, so that in one place in a single pasture more than 5,000 sheep died; and they putrefied so that neither bird nor beast would touch them. Everything was low in price because of the fear of death, for very few people took any care of riches or property of any kind. A man could have a horse that had been worth 40s for half a mark (6s 8d), a fat ox for 4s, a cow for 12d, a heifer for 6d, a fat wether for 4d, a sheep for 3d, a lamb for 2d, a large pig for 5d; a stone of wool (24 lbs) was worth 9d. Sheep and cattle ran at large through the fields and among the crops, and there was none to drive them off or herd them; for lack of care they perished in ditches and hedges in incalculable numbers throughout all districts, and none knew what to do. For there was no memory of death so stern and cruel since the time of Vortigern, King of the Britons, in whose day, as Bede testifies, the living did not suffice to bury the dead.

In the following autumn a reaper was not to be had for a lower wage than 8d, with his meals; a mower for not less than 10d, with meals [For so few men were left to do the work, as one in every three men died.] Wherefore many crops wasted in the fields for lack of harvesters. But in the year of the pestilence, as has been said above, there was so great an abundance of every type of grain that almost no one cared for it.

The Scots, hearing of the dreadful plague among the English, suspected that it had come about through the vengeance of God, and, according to the common report, they were accustomed to swear "by the foul deth of Engelond." Believing that the wrath of God had befallen the English, they assembled in Selkirk forest with the intention of invading the kingdom, when the fierce mortality overtook them, and in a short time about 5,000 perished. As the rest, the strong and the feeble, were preparing to return to their own country, they were followed and attacked by the English, who slew countless numbers of them.

Master Thomas of Bradwardine was consecrated by the Pope Archbishop of Canterbury, and when he returned to England he came to London, but within two days was dead... Meanwhile the King sent proclamations into all the counties that reapers and other laborers should not take more than they had been accustomed to take, under the penalty appointed by statute. But the laborers were so lifted up and obstinate that they would not listen to the King's command, but if anyone wished to have them he had to give them what they wanted, and either lose his fruit and crops, or satisfy the lofty and covetous wishes of the workmen. And when it was known to the King that they had not observed his command, and had given greater wages to the laborers, he levied heavy fines upon abbots, priors, knights, greater and lesser, and other great folk and small folk of the realm... Afterwards the king had many laborers arrested, and sent them to prison; many withdrew themselves and went into the forests and woods; and those who were taken were heavily fined. Their ringleaders were made to swear that they would not take daily wages beyond the ancient custom, and then were freed from prison. And in like manner was done with the other craftsmen in the boroughs and villages... After the aforesaid pestilence, many building, great and small, fell into ruins in every city, borough, and village for lack of inhabitants, likewise many villages and hamlets became desolate, not a house being left in them, all having died who dwelt there; and it was probable that many such villages would never be inhabited.

When Edward III grew to be a man, he grew convinced that he was rightful king of many of the territories of France, being a descendant of Henry II, whose French wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine,

had brought more than half of France with her marriage as dowry. As the lords of English came to be more English and less Norman, France began less and less to acknowledge that they had anything to do with French territory. As such, Edward III decided it was expedient to make his claim to France now. His invasion was the beginning of an enormous war between the two nations which would come to be known as the Hundred Years' War. The war constantly wavered between the two sides, but the English won two great and famous victories in the early days of the war – the Battle of Crecy, when Edward, the Black Prince of Wales, made a great name for him, and the Battle of Poitiers, which increased England's control. Things were looking up... until a certain maid named Joan of Arc came along. More more on her next time.