ABSTRACT

Nobility, Knighthood, and Chivalry in Medieval Britain: William Marshal and Simon de Montfort, 1150-1265

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Director: Jeffrey S. Hamilton, Ph.D.

Chivalry is a word which holds complex meanings. During the Middle Ages, the idea of chivalry was at the heart of the conception of what it meant to be both a knight and a noble. In this thesis, I argue that through comparing the careers of William Marshal, earl of Pembroke (c.1147-1219) and Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester (c.1208-1265), one may see how chivalry evolved in Britain during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Originally chivalry was purely military in its outlook, but by the mid-thirteenth century other elements such as courtly behavior and administrative service had contributed to an alteration of its original conception. By examining the political changes that occurred in the lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort, I demonstrate how the political role of the nobility changed. This provides another way of looking at the constitutional history of medieval England during this period.
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NOBILITY, KNIGHTHOOD, AND CHIVALRY IN MEDIEVAL BRITAIN
WILLIAM MARSHAL AND SIMON DE MONTFORT, 1150-1265

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It is always a pleasure to note the debts that go into a project such as this. Firstly, my family has borne the intrusion of long dead medieval figures in their lives for many years now. They have always expressed support for my interests and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

My time at Baylor University has allowed me to meet so many wonderful people. I offer particular thanks to the many friends I have made on my collegiate journey. I have also been fortunate to meet many professors who have aided me on during both my time at Baylor. I should particularly mention Beth Allison Barr and Cristian Bratu. It was under their auspices that my study of both the Middle Ages and the French language was nurtured respectively. Both also served as my readers for this thesis and its final form owes much to their questions and observations. For any errors that remain, I alone am responsible.

To name the others who have helped form both me as a student and scholar would run the risk of omission. I trust that many know who they are and I thank them all dearly. The dedication I believe speaks for itself.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated twice over

Firstly, to my mother, Patricia, without whom this thesis would not exist and my career at Baylor would not have been possible. For all she has given me in my life, I will be forever in her debt

Je t’aimerai toujours ma mère

Secondly, this thesis is dedicated to Jeffrey S. Hamilton, my mentor. It has been my greatest privilege while at Baylor being able to learn from him and I have become a far better historian than I would have otherwise. For that I shall forever be grateful. If I become half the scholar he is, I will count myself very successful indeed. I shall finish my dedication to him in a manner with which he will be familiar.

PRO J. S. H.

MAGISTER DOCTISSIMUS

AMICUS OPTIMUS
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Chivalry is one of the most discussed, yet least understood concepts associated with the Middle Ages. Often it is spoken about as though it was one universal code of behavior, written down for the benefit of knights everywhere, and drummed into them in a supposed classroom setting. The truth is more complex. There was no universal code of chivalry; such a code was never written down; and a knight’s education focused more on physical skills than cultural ones. Chivalry, unlike feudalism, was a word that actually was used during the Middle Ages and so its meaning to contemporaries was crucial. That meaning, however, was both variable and imprecise.

The question this thesis seeks to address is whether and how chivalry changed over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Britain. This is combined with an exploration of the role of the nobleman in Britain at the same time, and how that too may have changed over the period as well. Instead of looking at chivalry or the nobility as a whole, this thesis looks at the lives of two prominent nobles from these centuries: William Marshal, earl of Pembroke (c. 1147-1219) and Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester (c. 1208-65). These two men were selected for a number of reasons. They are connected by family ties. They were both as much French as they were English, and existed in the context of an Anglo-French world. Both were gallant soldiers as well as skillful politicians who found themselves wielding power at the center of major events. Finally, they were prominent barons who lived in the same societal and cultural milieu at the opposite ends of a period spanning a century.
This thesis will first begin by discussing the history of the idea of chivalry. Elements of chivalry emerged in the Early Middle Ages, but it was not until around the end of the First Crusade (c. 1100) that chivalry began to exist in a form which historians would recognize today. The chapter will end by presenting the author’s own view of what chivalry meant as well as a discussion of the significance of two other terms used throughout this thesis: knighthood and nobility. The second chapter will introduce readers to William Marshal by providing a biography of the man. It will then attempt to analyze Marshal as a chivalric figure, including his roles as husband, father, and servant of the king. The third chapter will explore the life of Simon de Montfort and conduct a similar analysis of him as a chivalric figure. The fourth chapter will compare the two noblemen to see what was similar as well as different in their approach to chivalry. This will be done by elaborating on their military, political, and baronial careers. It will also examine the interests of both men in the activities common to the nobility at the time, including their approach to religion. The fourth chapter will then conclude by examining the two men’s contrasting approaches to the chivalric ideas of courtliness and honor. Finally, the thesis will conclude with an examination of the two men to see how well they embodied the respective spirit of their ages and the question of what their careers reveal about a change in the both the nature of chivalry and the nature of the nobility at a political and social level.

The evidence included in this thesis is primarily secondary. In particular, I have relied heavily on the works of David Crouch and John Maddicott, the principal biographers of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort respectively. In terms of primary sources, anyone studying William Marshal is grateful to the earl’s family. They
commissioned an epic verse account of his life, written in French, shortly after he died. Known as the *History of William Marshal*, it contains many details on Marshal’s career as a tournament knight, battle captain, and magnate. It demonstrates too how he related to other members of his society, in particular the five kings—Henry the Young King, Henry II, Richard the Lionheart, King John, and Henry III—that he served. Above all, the *History of William Marshal* is an account of the history of Britain and France from the mid-twelfth to the early thirteenth century written from the perspective of a layman. Another principal source for William Marshal is the *Acts and Letters of the Marshal Family: Marshals of England and Earls of Pembroke, 1145-1248*. Edited by David Crouch, this volume lists all the charters that were made for various members of the Marshal family over a one hundred year period.

No biography was commissioned by Simon de Montfort’s family after his death, but he was a subject of many of the great chronicles written during the thirteenth century, especially the *Chronica Majora* written by Matthew Paris. Other chroniclers that have been utilized to a degree are William de Rishanger, the Melrose chronicler, the Tewkesbury annalist, and Robert of Gloucester. Finally, there is the *Song of Lewes*, which was an epic poem written in praise of Montfort after his victory at the Battle of Lewes in 1264. Much of the evidence presented in this thesis will be known to historians of medieval Britain, but the way in which the evidence is presented will hopefully be new.

In terms of the evidence used, pride of place has been given to those which present William Marshal and Simon de Montfort in a military and political light due to chivalry being the domain of the military elite of Europe. No attempt has been made to
discuss the social or religious histories of this period outside of their relation to the lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort. The history of chivalry in a cultural sense and its importance to the context of Marshal and Montfort’s life is analyzed in the first chapter. Thus this thesis is primarily one which discusses elements of the political, cultural, and military history of Britain during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In order to understand the lives of men like William Marshal and Simon de Montfort, this thesis contends that an understanding of chivalry is essential. William Marshal has been analyzed in a chivalric context by many historians, while Simon de Montfort has rarely has. A comparative study of these two nobleman will reveal chivalric tendencies of Marshal’s life that have been less explored by historians, while also providing the first examination at length of Montfort as chivalric figure. The careers of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort parallel each other and have the ability to communicate how the ideas and practices of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility changed between 1150 and 1265, as well as how the political and social role of the medieval noble in Britain was altered by the events of the thirteenth century. It is for these reasons that an exploration of careers of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort is an important contribution to both the study of chivalry in medieval Britain and the history of medieval Britain in general.
“[It] is a very difficult word. It would be nice if we didn’t use it at all. It has too many different meanings.”¹ Historian Michael Prestwich was referring to feudalism, but this description could equally well apply to the concept of chivalry during the medieval period. In fact, in May 2016, D’Arcy Jonathan D. Boulton presented a paper on “Why Both the Term and Construct of ‘Chivalry’ Must be Abandoned: A Study of over Forty Proposed Codes and Their Use of Chevalerie and Its Cognates.”²

There is no set definition for chivalry. Four of the most recent monographs on chivalry have each given different definitions. For Maurice Keen, chivalry, the abstract ideal, was elusive: “Sometimes chivalry is spoken of as an order…sometimes it is spoken of as an estate, a social class…sometimes it is used to encapsulate a code of values apposite to this order or estate…but it remains a word elusive of definition, tonal rather than precise in its implications.”³ At first, Nigel Saul is clearer in his definition: “Chivalry was the value system and behavioral code of the secular aristocratic elite of the Middle Ages.”⁴ Saul, then, however, adds a few qualifications: “Yet if we recognize chivalry when we see it, it is tantalizingly hard to define precisely. Indeed, it is tempting

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¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_UjnfoHvww. This is a YouTube interview conducted in 2015 for the History Faculties for secondary schools. Prestwich’s topic was military recruitment in the English Middle Ages.
² This paper was presented at the 51st Annual Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo, Michigan in May 2016.
to say that it is almost beyond definition. Medieval chivalry was more an outlook than a
document, more a lifestyle than an explicit ethical code.”⁵ Richard Kaeuper had suggested
that “Chivalry in fact provided the esprit de corps for the laity in the medieval world; it
framed not only war and peace, but status, acquisition and distribution of wealth, the
practice of lay piety, the elevated and elevating nature of love, and ideal gender
relationships, among much else.”⁶ Kaeuper was also quick to add that “Chivalry may
sometimes seem to slip through our fingers and separate into discrete spheres. This
quicksilver quality may tempt scholars to jettison use of the term altogether, considering
it too fragmented to sustain meaning.”⁷ Finally, Jean Flori wrote that “Chivalry, in fact, is
linked with the nobility, but cannot be assimilated with it.”⁸ Flori then goes to say that the
role of the knight who practiced chivalry was made up of various elements such as his
service to his lord, to the Church, and his sense of honor and greatness, but he presents no
set definition of what chivalry entailed.⁹ These four historians of medieval chivalry are
all agreed on one point then: a full definition of chivalry that every scholar of the Middle
Ages would agree upon is not to be found.

Nevertheless, as with the term feudalism, it is to be expected that the word
chivalry will continue to be used. Though chivalry might be hard to define, at its heart it
was the way of thinking that dominated the upbringings, lives, and deaths of the members
of the aristocracy of Medieval Europe, and it described the value system and beliefs that
dominated their mentality as well. The word chivalry itself, though devoid of a universal

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⁵ Saul, p. 3.
is mine.
⁹ Ibid, pp. 7-8.
meaning, was one which was used during the medieval period. Of central importance within the construct of chivalry as Kaeuper noted, was the prowess so prized by the military elite, but the values associated with chivalry also included elements of religious piety, social convention, and political agency. If a chevalier could master these complex and potentially competing values, he would be esteemed the best of men or, in the words of the day, a prudhomme.

Chivalry had coalesced by the twelfth century through a variety of factors, though its history, as its definition, is by no means clear cut. Some writers imagined that chivalry had its origins in ancient Greece and Rome. The personalities of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar were refashioned by romance writers into chivalric figures that were widely known. There was a great popularity of these manuscripts during the latter half of the twelfth century. Some examples of these texts are Benoît of St Maure’s Le Roman de Troie, Thomas of Kent’s Le Roman d’Alexander ou Le roman du toute chevalerie, Alexandre de Paris’s Roman d’Alexandre, and Chrétien de Troyes’s Clignés. For some contemporaries, then, chivalry was simply a refashioning of the virtues of honor and prowess that had guided the great cultures of antiquity. However seductive this prehistory was for contemporary medieval writers, modern historians have looked for more tangible beginnings for chivalry. These have been found in three different phenomena: the military developments of the Carolingian era and its successors, the development of the Peace Movement and the idea of crusading, and the literature produced by romantic writers.

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10 Kaeuper, pp. 7-8.
The emergence of chivalry in its military sense had its origins in the Germanic peoples known as the Franks. The Franks, who gradually took control of much of Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, had a long tradition of cavalry warfare. The Franks had become notably strong as horsemen by the time of Clovis’s conversion to Christianity in 496. On that occasion, Bishop Remigius of Reims, according to Gregory of Tours, referred to Clovis as Sigambert, a reference to the ancestors of the Franks, the Sicambri, who Julius Caesar had identified as strenuous horsemen during his conquest of Gaul. By the eighth century, the tradition of mounted horsemen in Frankish armies had become a norm. It was reinforced under the rule of the greatest of the Frankish kings, Charlemagne. Charlemagne was King of the Franks and Emperor of Rome (768-814; emp. 800-14), and by his death had conquered a large swathe of territory which included parts of modern-day France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Italy. However, after the death of his son Louis the Pious in 840, this so-called empire fractured and reemerged as three different kingdoms under the control of Louis’ sons. It was during this time of expansion and fracture that some of the ideas later to be known as chivalry came into being, alongside the institutions that have been collectively referred to as feudalism.

At the heart of chivalry lies military prowess. The practitioners of chivalry were above all warriors. At the beginning of ‘chivalric’ history in the ninth and tenth centuries, these warriors were known as milites. This Latin word originally implied a mounted

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15 For an overview of the milites and some of the problems they pose to historians, see Kaeuper, pp. 71-7.
warrior. In French, the word was *chevalier* due to the horse or *cheval* being central for the role of these military men. In Germany, the word became *ritter*, the word for rider, while in the kingdoms of Iberia, as in France, the word for horse, *caballo*, was transformed into *caballero*. The word knight would emerge in Anglo-Saxon England, where the word *cniht* would be applied to the followers of William the Conqueror. For a long time, many historians believed that the development of the stirrup was crucial to the emergence of chivalry in the time of Charlemagne. The stirrup was incredibly useful for mounted warriors because it gave them balance and allowed both the power and speed of the horse and man joined together to be exerted in one blow, making them into a decisive element on the early and high medieval battlefield. However, some historians now question whether the stirrup was as important for the years 800-1100 as it became after the beginning of the twelfth century. If knights were the most important military force in Medieval Europe, it was most likely just before and primarily after the year 1100 that they became so.

More important for the development of chivalry was how closely both the great lords and the *milites* of the Carolingian era bound themselves together in bonds of military service and the extent to which being part of a recognized ‘military’ elite determined the medieval ordering of society. Whether the great lords or *nobiles* of the Carolingian empire believed that it was prowess in arms that defined their position in society is doubtful. Evidence of this can be found in the differences inherent in the positions of the *milites* and *nobiles* around the year 1000 through evidence of the charters.

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16 Keen, pp. 27.
of the counts of Anjou. For the nobles, military service was merely one attribute of their privileged status. For the level of men beneath these great aristocrats, the men who made up the majority of the milites, however, there is a sense that military service was crucial to their self-identity. Richard Kaeuper has suggested that the word miles implied a servitor status in the Carolingian world—just as the terms vassus and vassal evolved from a term of servitude into one of dignity in feudalism. In time, the emerging military class came to be seen as a separate ordo: those who fight.

A parallel development occurred in the form of military architecture, with the emergence of lordly or seigniorial fortresses or castles throughout the Carolingian territories. These castles transformed the nature of warfare, with regional wars to be fought through sieges. This in turn led to the ideas of surrender and ransom. Before the advent of “chivalric warfare,” defeated enemies were often killed after battle or sold into slavery. As more of these mounted warriors came to see themselves as part of the elite in society, they also became more hesitant to kill one another. Therefore, the idea of ransom, whereby the defeated milites would be sold back to their families and supporters for a set price, came into being. This was central to the evolving chivalric ethos because it gave rise to the concepts of honor and mercy for the defeated. These combined with the ideals of valor, largess, loyalty, and prowess, all virtues to be found in warrior societies from the dawn of time, to form a primitive version of chivalric ideology.

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Chivalry had its origins in the military world of the Carolingian empire. It was the medieval Church, however, that provided the intellectual framework for chivalry as both an ideology and status for the aristocrats of medieval Europe. The Church during the medieval period was often ambivalent towards warfare. The Church fathers of the later Roman Empire, particularly St. Augustine, had developed a “just war” tradition where war could be fought if justly sanctioned and justly fought for a just cause. However, such a war was still a sinful enterprise; after all, God had proclaimed in the Ten Commandments, “thou shall not kill.” It was also the case that after the defeat of “just” enemies such as the Vikings or the Magyars in the ninth and tenth century, Western Europe was still heavily militarized. The milites turned on one another and bloodied the countryside. Often it was the Church, as a repository of great wealth, that became the victim of this type of violence. In response, leaders within the Church decided to step in and take control of the situation. This led to the so-called Peace Movement of the early eleventh century.

The Peace Movement commenced around the year 989 in the southern French provinces of Aquitaine and Provence. It was promulgated through a series of informal councils which often involved vast assemblies of people and normally took place in fields to accommodate the crowd as well as the relics on display. It came into fruition primarily for two reasons. Firstly, the power of the king of France was retreating inwards

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to the royal holdings in the Île-de-France. According to Georges Duby, “Henceforth, the latter [local lords] exercised for their own private profit the *regalia*, the prerogatives of command which were formally delegated by the sovereign and were now held by hereditary right.”

As the power of the crown shrank, local lords began intruding on traditional royal spheres through these various hereditary positions. The bishops and abbots of the area posited that if the king could not rein in these troublesome men, then the Church should step in and do the job. They even managed to ally with the greater nobles of the area due to the fact that the main target of the bishops’ councils were the *milites* and castellans further down the social scale. A second reason for the development of the councils was that both the wealth of the Church and many of its offices in southern France had passed into the hands of private lords. This development was akin to what had happened in terms of royal power. The bishops and abbots had a responsibility to God to protect the independence of His Church, and the Peace Movement was a mechanism for regaining this independence.

“The dispositions of the first councils were thus simple. They were plainly aimed at protecting the ‘sacred things,’ that is the sanctuaries and the servants of God and, in addition, the poor from the violence and intrusions of the new emergent lay powers which confronted them so aggressively.” This can be seen from two councils held during the period. At the council of Charroux in 989 three types of violence were prohibited: violation of churches, violence against unarmed clergy, and the destruction of

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26 Ibid, 126. At the first council held at Poitiers in 1011-4, the bishops were working “‘for the restoration of peace and justice’—an eminently royal task.”
28 Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, p. 126.
peasants or other poor men. During the council held at Limoges some forty years later in 1031, the *milites* were instructed not to violate the sanctuaries or oppress the poor under their care.\(^{30}\) The product of these councils came to be known as the Peace of God, though their end result was quite simple. The councils essentially condemned the *milites* for using violence in a negative fashion, not its outright use. Furthermore, it deepened the divide between the *milites* and other laymen since the Church began to espouse that only the *milites* were permitted an access to warlike behavior, according them an elite hierarchical position in medieval society.\(^{31}\)

By 1033, however, the councils began to take their reforming mission further. Now it was not only imperative that the *milites* restrict the reach of their violence, but that they should try and reform themselves by abstaining from violence altogether. The Church councils took active steps to promote this ideal by banning violence during holy festivals, such as Lent. Fighting was limited during an average week, but it goes without saying that violence was banned on Sundays. From Wednesday evening through to Monday morning, no fighting between *milites* was to take place. This initiative was an added component to the Peace of God, and quickly gained its own identity as the Truce of God. All of these initiatives added up to an attempt to “Christianize” the warrior class.\(^{32}\) The movement had reached such an idealistic height by 1054 that during the Council of Narbonne the canons declared “Let no Christian kill another Christian, for there is no doubt that he who kills a Christian spills the blood of Christ.”\(^{33}\) The Church did not always abide by this high standard. At times the prohibition against fighting

\(^{30}\) Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, p. 125  
\(^{31}\) Ibid, pp. 126-9.  
\(^{32}\) Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, pp. 130-1  
\(^{33}\) Ibid, p. 132.
would be relaxed by the Church for a lay authority of whose actions it approved.\textsuperscript{34} There is little doubt, however, that these councilor movements throughout the late tenth and eleventh centuries had done far more than attempt to place military action within a Christian context. By 1100, the Church had helped to further refine the social \textit{ordo} of “those who fight” by defining its boundaries and rules in a more stringent manner.\textsuperscript{35} Many lay authorities also saw the importance of this act and began to promote it themselves. In areas such as Catalonia, Normandy, and Picardy, the Peace and Truce of God quickly became identified as the peace of each territory’s respective lord, whether a count or a duke. By 1150 both were known as the King’s Peace within the kingdom of France.\textsuperscript{36}

The Church councils had another byproduct. Despite the admonitions of both the Peace and Truce of God, there were still a significant amount of \textit{milites} and knights who yearned for some kind of violence. It was in the 1020s and 1030s then, when as the Peace Movement was progressing, knights in Normandy, Picardy, and Hainault began holding mock battles where they could channel their energy into aggressive sporting with other warriors and—hopefully—refrain from killing one another.\textsuperscript{37} One of the reasons that these games may have originated in areas like Picardy is that they could be held along the borders of these respective lordships, giving the impression that the knights who attended

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\item[\textsuperscript{34}] Kaeuper, \textit{Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe}, p. 73.
\item[\textsuperscript{35}] Ibid, p. 133.
\item[\textsuperscript{36}] Kaeuper, \textit{Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe}, pp. 73-4. An example of this was Duke William of Normandy’s support of the Truce of God in 1047 as he began to stabilize his position in the duchy after an eventful minority. He confirmed the Truce again in 1064 as a fully adult ruler. The creation of the Peace and Truce of God in northern France was different to the presence of strong central authority in respective areas such as the duchy of Normandy. The church here occupied a role in supporting the desire of the various potentates to control the local and usually disruptive nobility. See D. Bates, \textit{William the Conqueror} (Yale University Press: London and New Haven, 2016), pp. 77-8 and 204.
\end{itemize}
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were still keeping the duke or count’s peace, sanctioned by the Church. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the Peace Movement’s involvement in the development of tourneying is that Lent—the forty day period preceding Easter where the Church had decreed that no violence of any kind was to take place—was still being honored by knights during the later twelfth century as a time when mock battles were canceled—a ‘closed season’ in the words of David Crouch.\(^{38}\) Though the Church would later condemn such affrays, most notably at the council of Clermont in 1130, it had had a hand in the development of what would become known in the twelfth century as the tournament.\(^{39}\) The tournament would also become a way of separating knights off from others in medieval society. In the words of Richard Kaeuper “formal tourneying was essentially a knightly activity that marked participants as superior beings.”\(^{40}\)

The Church may have been successful at limiting some of the violence of the eleventh century through the Peace Movement. Yet, while the tournament gave many knights an available recourse, there still remained large numbers of warriors in Europe whose raison d’etre was to fight, but who had no non-Christian enemy to channel their aggression toward. The Church decided at the end of the eleventh century to harness the power of war to its cause of defending Christendom from the oncoming armies of the Seljuk Turks as well as to recover the city of Jerusalem from Muslim hands. At the council of Clermont on 27 November 1095, Pope Urban II issued a call to arms for all people to go on pilgrimage and liberate Jerusalem and all eastern Christians from the

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\(^{38}\) Crouch, *Tournament*, p. 6
\(^{39}\) Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, p. 80.
\(^{40}\) Kaeuper, p. 215.
oppressions of the Muslims.⁴¹ And for the knightly audience who heard Urban’s sermon, he promised them a path from their dilemma of cyclical violence:

“God has instituted in our time holy wars, so that the order of knights and the crowd running in their wake…might find a new way of gaining salvation…[they] can attain some measure of God’s grace while pursuing their own careers.”⁴²

What Urban had promised these knights was akin to a grand act of penance. Knights would still confess their sins, but the crusade would now serve as their penance.⁴³ However, many knights came to believe that the crusade would gain them a remission of their sins if they fought for the cause of God and His Holy Church.⁴⁴ The proclamation of the First Crusade then could be said to have been the ultimate culmination of the mixing of religion and the development of chivalry in the latter half of the eleventh century.

The assumption that the call to arms for Christian knights to fight a war with the opponents of their faith was invented at Clermont is palpably false. Holy war was not a new phenomenon in 1095. The wars of Alfred the Great in the 870s in England had been couched in the language of holy war, as had the battle of Lechfeld in 955, fought between the pagan armies of the Magyars and the Christian forces of King Otto the Great, the future Holy Roman Emperor.⁴⁵ Yet holy war that had the approval of the papacy was something new and it had an amazing effect on the religious landscape of Medieval

Europe. The road to the First Crusade was about a century long, with the Peace
Movement in the late 990s acting as its first catalyst.

Another important catalyst could be found after the year 1060, when knights from
around Europe began to descend on the Iberian Peninsula to take part in the emerging
wars against the Moors of Spain known as the Reconquista. The Reconquista was to be
fought continually from the mid-eleventh century to 1492, when the last Moorish strong-
hold, Granada, fell.\textsuperscript{46} Many of the Spanish princes and kings made appeals for their
fellow knights from across Europe to come and join them and this would continue
throughout the history of the Reconquista.\textsuperscript{47} French soldiers of fortune had begun
entering Iberia around the year 1020. The pivotal moment for the purposes of this thesis,
though, lies in the enigmatic siege of Barbastro in 1064. That year, knights and lords
from as far afield as Normandy, Burgundy, Aquitaine, and Italy, as well as knights from
Catalonia and Aragon, were coordinated into a single force that converged on Barbastro,
a strategically important northern city-fortress of the Moorish kingdom of Zaragoza.\textsuperscript{48}
After a siege of forty days, the city fell and the besiegers sacked the city. While the city
was eventually retaken in April 1065 by the Moorish king of Zaragoza, this proved to be
only the beginning of a wide European, especially French, engagement with the exploits
of the Reconquista.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{46} For an account of the Reconquista, see J. F. O’Callaghan, Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain
\textsuperscript{47} A. Giunta, “Migrations, milites et idéologies dans le royaume d’Aragon (XIème - XIIème siècles).
Réflexions sur les motivations des chevaliers non ibériques venus participer à la Reconquista,” Memini,
travaux et documents (Montréal, 2012), p. 66.
\textsuperscript{48} M. Bull, Knightly Piety and the Lay Response to the First Crusade: The Limousin and Gascony, c.970-
\textsuperscript{49} O’Callaghan, Reconquest and Crusade, pp. 26-7.
The interest for the historian regarding the siege of Barbastro is whether it can be classified, in the words of the famed Spanish historian Ramón Menéndez Pidal, as “a crusade before the crusades.”\textsuperscript{50} Joseph F. O’Callaghan, author of one of the most recent histories of the \textit{Reconquista}, agrees with Menéndez Pidal and many other medieval Spanish historians that the expedition to Barbastro can be called a proto-crusade. According to O’Callaghan, the Church, under the leadership of Pope Alexander II (1061-73), backed the expedition to Barbastro. Alexander issued a remission of penance for these foreign knights and it was taken as a general indulgence in the same manner as that of Urban II would be thirty years later. Even if the remission did not specifically mention the siege of Barbastro, the knights would have understood the implicit meaning of the pope’s letter. O’Callaghan further suggests that Alexander II knew of the various armies gathering and tried to bring them together under the banner of the Church. According to a chronicler, he even sent a man who was “a commander of the cavalry of Rome” with a papal banner to be displayed above the force assaulting Barbastro.\textsuperscript{51}

Taken at face value, the suggestions of O’Callaghan and other historians would seem to point to the fact that Barbastro was a crusading expedition before the advent of the First Crusade. There are, however, dissenters to this opinion. The most vocal is Marcus Bull, who argues that Alexander II’s letter pardoning penance was just that, not a general indulgence in the manner of the First Crusade. “As the ‘indulgence’ letter stands” according to Bull “it would seem more realistic to treat it as a straightforward exercise in pastoral advice rather than as a proto-crusade bull.”\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[51] Ibid, pp. 24-7.
\item[52] Bull, \textit{Knightly Piety}, p. 76.
\end{footnotes}
war in the Augustinian tradition of acceptable at certain points, but never praiseworthy.\textsuperscript{53} Thus, Bull argues, while the European contribution to the siege of Barbastro was substantial, it was not a proto-crusade, nor were the expeditions between 1065 and 1095, even though some of the latter expeditions during the 1080s contained future participants of the First Crusade.\textsuperscript{54} Bull’s most crucial criticism, however, is that Alexander II may have granted the letter because he believed the group he was writing to consisted of pilgrims, not knights.\textsuperscript{55} Jonathan Riley-Smith, the doyen of crusade studies, agrees with Bull, stating that the letter was addressed to pilgrims venturing to Compostela, not soldiers embarking on a military conquest.\textsuperscript{56} O’Callaghan, on the other hand, argues that Alexander knew that he was addressing men going to war at Barbastro rather than on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.\textsuperscript{57}

There is a central issue, however, that gives more weight to Bull and Riley-Smith’s interpretation. This is the fact that the \textit{Reconquista} only started to be merged with religious beliefs and motifs after 1100. Between 1050 and 1100, the \textit{Reconquista} was a war of re-conquest, or, putting it a bit more simply, a war of conquest between the Christian kingdoms of the north and the Moorish kingdoms of the south.\textsuperscript{58} Richard Fletcher even goes so far as to refer to the siege of Barbastro as a red herring of crusading history in Spain.\textsuperscript{59} Seemingly then, most historians do not regard Barbastro as the beginning of the crusading movement in Spain. Certainly many knights, especially from

\textsuperscript{53} Bull, \textit{Knightly Piety}, pp. 77-8
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, pp. 80-6
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{56} Riley-Smith, \textit{The First Crusaders}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{57} O’Callaghan, \textit{Reconquest and Crusade}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{59} Fletcher, “Reconquest and Crusade in Spain,” p. 42.
France, came to Iberia between the 1060s and 1090s as well as after, but their motivation primarily lay in land and wealth, not in religion. Perhaps some of these knights considered that they were being religious since they were attacking the enemies of God and the Church rather than assaulting the clergy and peasantry of Western Europe. This may even get to the heart of the matter for the knights participating on the Barbastro expedition. Whether or not the pope actually approved and sponsored the expedition—and the evidence suggests that he may have not—many of the knights who heard Alexander II’s letter may have made the connection that the Church was intimating that fighting for Christ could lead to reemission of sins.\(^6\) While the siege of Barbastro was not a crusade under papal authority, the spirit that might have lain behind the action of many of the knights present was something akin to a crusading spirit in embryo.\(^6\) In this sense, Menéndez Pidal’s belief that this was a ‘crusade before the crusades’ rings true to a degree.

If Barbastro was not a military expedition under papal blessing, however, there were other campaigns throughout the eleventh century that were. At the battle of Civitate fought in 1053, Pope Leo IX famously absolved all the knights of his coalition army that fought against his Norman enemies. He even went so far as to extend the title of martyr to those who fell during the battle. After the battle, the pope claimed to have been visited by an angel who persuaded him that no mass needed to be said for the souls of his dead because God approved of the death of these so-called saints.\(^6\) Pope Alexander II, though he did not bless the actions of the army around Barbastro, was persuaded in 1066 to

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61 Giunta, “Migrations, milites et idéologies,” p. 73.
62 Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders*, pp. 48-9 and 73.
dispatch a papal banner to Duke William of Normandy, which William subsequently flew over his army at the battle of Hastings. This action placed William in accord with many of his Norman subjects across Europe: at Civitate, the enemies of Pope Leo IX and his army had been Normans and there would be a large Norman contingent on the First Crusade. Yet while Leo absolved the sins of those who fought at Civitate and Alexander sent Duke William a papal banner, neither pope granted a remission of sins similar to Urban II’s indulgence of Clermont in 1095. William in particular had to pay penance for those slain at Hastings and throughout his conquest of England. One of the more visual representations of that penance is Battle Abbey which was built on the site of Hastings itself. Like Barbastro, Civitate and Hastings had what might be termed crusading overtones, but they were not crusades organized by the Church.

If the early events of the Reconquista or battles like Civitate and Hastings did not have much influence on the crusades, then what explains the outpouring of emotion that surrounded the taking of the cross in 1095? It has to be addressed at the outset that despite the claims of several historians, the motivations of the First Crusade were not financial. Urban II forbade men to go for honors or pay, and a prospective crusader might have to raise money four or five times his annual revenue to go on crusade. Likewise, there was little in land hunger that motivated the crusaders, most of whom went home

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64 Ibid, p. 188.
65 Bull, Knightly Piety, p. 76; Bates, William the Conqueror, pp. 385-6; Ibid, p. 328
66 Ibid.
after the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. The creation of the crusader states known as Outremer was a result of the success of the First Crusade, not a catalyst for it.67

Seeing the First Crusade as the ultimate consequence of the Peace Movement may seem seductive, but Marcus Bull has presented a convincing case in regard to the Peace Movement as inconsequential to those who took on the call of the First Crusade, at least in southern France. According to him, the Peace Movement in Aquitaine had been in abeyance for sixty years by 1095; it had been pitched predominantly at great lords and princes rather than local knights, and in southern Gascony, the movement had never gained enough traction to be relevant.68

Bull’s contention is that what explains the active participation of many knights, especially those from the south of France, were the contacts that had formed between the lay and clerical communities. The piety of these late eleventh-century knights should not be doubted, and the crusade did not dissipate it, but rather enhanced it.69 Many of these knights had indeed taken part in events such as the Peace Movement and the Reconquista, but it was their proclivity towards pilgrimages that was central, because pilgrimages played a crucial role in attracting crusaders in late eleventh century southwestern France because it was an expression of the layman’s piety, and the First Crusade was often described as pilgrimage in the years directly following the conquest of Jerusalem.70 It was these connections that informed the participation of many of the knights of the First Crusade.

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67 Bull, Knightly Piety, p. 5; Riley-Smith, The First Crusaders, p. 15.
69 Ibid, pp. 285-6
70 Ibid, p. 287.
Urban II’s sermon at Clermont was one of the most defining moments in the development of chivalry. Urban had tapped into the chief conundrum that surrounded knights in the eleventh century: their piety was genuine, but their lifestyle meant they would not inherit the benefits of their religion. Urban’s masterstroke was to present crusading as a means of atonement for knights living a violent life.\(^{71}\) He went on to present the crusade as an action to defend the patrimony of the kingdom of God, the lands of the Lord. This appeal to lineage and knightly duty may have had a pull with many of the knights who heard it in 1095-6. The phrasing of the crusade as an armed pilgrimage may have appealed to many of the knights as well. It was a chance for them to practice their two apparent favorite pastimes: war and pilgrimage.\(^{72}\) According to the chronicler Fulcher of Chartres, Urban called upon the knights present to use their violence for their spiritual benefit:

“Now will those who once were robbers become Christian milites; those who once fought brothers and relatives will justly fight barbarians; those who were once mercenaries for a few farthings will obtain eternal reward.”\(^{73}\)

The ideas unleashed at the Council of Clermont took on a life of their own. Many indeed would find their way into later chivalric literature.\(^{74}\) Knights found appeal in what Urban is supposed to have said. It presented the crusade as the ultimate pilgrimage for knights and also presented the idea of the knight as penitent in war. The combination of the ideologies of valor, honor, prowess, loyalty, largess, and mercy was now mixed with one final element: Christian piety. The evolution of chivalry from a code of war to a code that

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[73] Ibid.
would underpin the life and souls of the second ordo of medieval society was one of the crusading movement’s most powerful legacies. From 1095 to the end of the Middle Ages, “good” chivalry, at least in the eyes of the Church, was to be used in causes such as the crusade, but also in defending the weak and oppressed. For the practitioners of chivalry themselves, the ideas associated with the crusade formed a powerful ideological imperative for their role in life. The chivalric calling had become a Christian mission.

The military and religious developments that underpinned chivalry were central, but there was a third element at work as well: chivalric literature, whether in treatises or romances proved influential in the rise of a chivalric ideology. In terms of popular chivalric treatises, the eleventh to the mid thirteenth centuries—the time period that bordered the lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort—is rather poor. The Book of the Order of Chivalry by Ramon Llull (c.1274-6) and the Book of Chivalry by Geoffrey de Charny (c. 1351-2) still lay in the future. This fact, however, may have had little bearing on the exploits of William Marshal, Simon de Montfort, or their knightly contemporaries. Historians have been unable to determine to what extent such chivalric treatises ever played in role in shaping the education of knights. They certainly had value in articulating the ideas that many contemporary knights had about the right way to practice chivalry, but there is also the possibility that the books written by Ramon Llull, Geoffrey de Charny, and others have a wider readership today among medieval scholars than they ever did among knights during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Many knights may not have been exposed to works like those of Llull or Charny during their

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75 Keen, pp. 8-15.
training. The one popular tract on chivalry and warfare that might have had a high readership was *De Re Militari*, the famed military manual of the Roman writer Vegetius. The interest here, however, was on the practicalities of waging war rather than the ideals of proper knightly conduct. Vegetius was read by knights “because they knew the Romans conquered the world and wanted to know how they did it.”\(^{76}\) The works of Llull and Charny certainly had value, but how prevalent they were is debatable. For the period of William Marshal, Simon de Montfort, and their contemporaries, there were few chivalric manuals on hand in any case. If any chivalric literature was to have effect on knights in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, then it most likely resided in the stories told in medieval romances.

The romances or *chansons de geste* (songs of great deeds) written during the Middle Ages would have had a wider effect on the knightly values than manuals on chivalry if for no other reason than they were more popular and better known. Some historians, most notably Richard Kaeuper, have shown that many knights certainly were aware of the literature of their age and even made reference to it. Many knights owned chivalric literature and some even wrote romances themselves or used romances in the writing of chivalric treatises.\(^{77}\) There even seems to have been an inkling that many who wrote the romances wanted knights to use them as a possible how-to guide for behavior,

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\(^{76}\) Keen, p. 111.

especially in the battle scenes of the romances where the equipment employed by knights was presented in a realistic manner that they would have recognized.\textsuperscript{78}

The romances were incredibly popular, containing various stories such as those of the heroes of Greece and Rome as well as King Arthur and his noble knights. There was also a chance that certain famous knights could become templates onto which medieval romantic characters were built. This may have been the case with the reputation of William Marshal, one of the subjects of this thesis. Marshal’s prowess was such that his life was used as a template for other knightly figures in romances, especially Sir Lancelot in Arthurian literature.\textsuperscript{79} There is a particular example of how one moment in his career might have informed later fictional stories. During a crisis at the court of his master, Henry the Young King, Marshal was accused of sleeping with the queen. This accusation of adultery was certainly made, though its veracity is to be highly doubted. Laura Ashe has commented upon this episode’s real importance: it provided yet more evidence of the growing literary culture of the late twelfth century. Marshal’s enemies in the household were his accusers and they may have taken this literary device as another accusation to be hurled at him. And given how Sir Lancelot’s career in Arthurian literature mirrors William Marshal’s career in history, they may have been successful in another way. Sir Lancelot is accused by Sir Mordred and Sir Agravaine, who come to King Arthur in secret with their concerns, trying to turn the king against his most loyal knight. The

parallels with how Marshal’s biographer describes his subject’s enemies telling the Young King of their suspicions are striking.\textsuperscript{80}

Beyond the imposition of real knights onto knightly characters in fiction, the medieval romances were powerful for other reasons. This was the case whether the events they recorded were true or not. The imagined development of chivalry during the age of Greece and Rome may have been poor history, but it was inspiring to the men who heard it while the exploits of King Arthur and Charlemagne, such as the \textit{Knight of the Cart} and \textit{The Song of Roland}, were not only inspiring, but perceived as real history, doubly worthy to be emulated.\textsuperscript{81} The writers who composed these epics and pseudo-histories, such as Chrétien de Troyes and Geoffreyy of Monmouth, had as much, if not more, influence on knightly behavior as Ramon Llull and Geoffrey de Charny.\textsuperscript{82} Work such as theirs alongside the popular \textit{chansons de geste} had a particular purpose beyond entertainment. They were written to inspire knights to perfect themselves as well as their society by exhibiting the height of prowess and wisdom in their exploits.\textsuperscript{83} The expressions of chivalry in medieval literature were thus “no simple ‘mirror to society’ but an active social force. To read chivalry in romance simply as a set of personal qualities in a knight risks reducing chivalry to a ‘micro’ force; it was, in fact, a ‘macro’ force doing


\textsuperscript{82} Saul, pp. 39-45.

\textsuperscript{83} Kaeuper, pp. 21 and p. 87.
major social work."\textsuperscript{84} The connection between chivalric literature and knightly society then was a crucial one.

The military influence on the romances is clear, but clerical ideas also filtered their way in. An example of this is the tale of the knight Sir Hugh of Tabarie. According to the poem, Hugh was captured fighting against the Saracens in the Holy Land in the twelfth century. He was brought before the great Muslim sultan, Saladin. After esteeming Hugh as a worthy knight—a worthy knight capable of raising a large ransom—Saladin questions Hugh on how he can become a knight. While Hugh makes it clear that Saladin cannot be a knight because he is not a Christian, Hugh does yield in explaining to the sultan the significance of each part of the dubbing ritual of knighthood, which has a Christian context. For example, the sword symbolizes courage, justice, and loyalty while the bed the knight lays in the evening before his knighting stands as a reminder of the repose he will gain in Paradise if he lives a chivalric life.\textsuperscript{85} The story of Hugh de Tabarie is certainly fiction, but in it can be glimpsed the way the Church wanted knights to view themselves and their accoutrements. The romances then are exponents of the military and clerical ideas around chivalry. It was these three elements together that contributed to the emergence of chivalry.

Chivalry then was much more than one simple code that defined behavior. The essence of an unwritten set of values that underpinned the lives of the elite of Medieval Europe had formed through military innovation, religious reform, and literary construction. By the year 1200, chivalry as an independent phenomenon had formed.

\textsuperscript{84} Kaeuper, “The societal role of chivalry,” pp. 98-9.
However, so far, this thesis has mainly focused on the history of chivalry in France. While France was in many respects the home of chivalry, men like William Marshal and Simon de Montfort operated in an Anglo-French world. For proper context then, the history of chivalry in Britain has to be examined as well, along with the development of the relationship between the kingdom of England, its king, and its noble hierarchy.

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While the emergence of chivalry in most of Western Europe does not have a specific date, the beginning of its influence on culture in Britain does: the Norman Conquest of 1066. In that year, William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy, sailed across the English Channel and defeated the Anglo-Saxon army at the battle of Hastings. He was crowned King William I on Christmas Day. Though it would take nearly a decade of unrest and rebellion for Norman rule to be established, by 1075 William was master of England. And with him came hundreds of French and Norman nobles and knights who soon established themselves as the kingdom’s new elite. The infusion of chivalry into the political and aristocratic culture of England was part and parcel of these bloody events.

The introduction of chivalry into England after 1066 was termed as a revolution by historian James Holt. This term has merit behind it if we take chivalry to mean, as it almost certainly did, a code between aristocrats excluding the lower orders. Anglo-Saxon

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86 For the most recent study of William’s career and his conquest of England, see Bates, William the Conqueror.
87 Saul, pp. 20-30.
England was a particularly violent polity. When elite enemies of the king fell into his hands, they were usually killed so to remove them from the political scene. Two kings of Anglo-Saxon England, Edmund I (r. 939-46) and Edward the Martyr (r. 975-78), were murdered as well. This contrasted with the character of politics in Normandy during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The dukes of Normandy from Richard II (r. 996-1026) forward practiced a policy of clemency where a rebellious noble might have his estates confiscated or be exiled, but his life was normally spared. It was these ideas that William the Conqueror began to practice as king of England after the final settlement of the conquest in 1076, and it was a form of political action hitherto unknown to most Anglo-Saxons. The Conqueror may indeed have had a “savage and pitiless career” in many respects, but he also has a claim to being “the first chivalrous king in English history.”

William’s conquest also ushered in the beginning of feudalism alongside chivalry in England. This was a necessity since in order to hold his newly won kingdom William had to give the warriors who had followed him a stake in the country both to defend and profit by. Men like William FitzOsbern, Robert, count of Mortain, and William de Warenne expected to be rewarded for helping William win his new kingdom. There was a strong independent streak to these great lords who had aided the Conqueror. Their descendants shared this characteristic and it helped and sometimes hindered the Norman, Angevin, and Plantagenet kings who were the heirs of William the Conqueror.

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89 Gillingham “1066 and the introduction of chivalry,” pp. 36-40.
90 Ibid, p. 54.
In France and Germany, the individualistic chivalric tendencies of the nobility tended to threaten the interests of each country’s respective monarchy. By 1066 the king of France, for example, was merely overlord of his great territorial magnates, and often an ineffectual overlord. William the Conqueror was himself a product of this state of affairs, and was determined to halt its advance in England. This led to one of William’s signal achievements during the conquest of England: the limitation of the possible power of the nobility. Unlike in France, the lands William parceled out to his lords were not consolidated regional holdings, but scattered estates across the whole of England. This often meant that the titles born by the great magnates of England had very little to with geography. Perhaps the best example that can be given is that the De Vere earls of Oxford held no land in Oxfordshire. With his great lords’ estates set up in this manner, William’s foresight led to an advantage that would be beneficial for his successors: the landed power of the nobility was such that if they sought to truly challenge the crown, they would have to join together almost to a man to effect any substantial change of policy upon the king.

William’s conquest also had the effect of creating a cross-channel empire that would hold the imagination of many of the future kings of England until the reign of Henry VIII. It also bound the nobility of England and Normandy together, drawing them into partnership with the crown, for a continued king-duke relationship between England and Normandy was in the interests of most of the nobility on both sides of the Channel. This was why the Capetian conquest of Normandy in 1204 came as such a shock to

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William Marshal and his contemporaries. This continuing cross-channel connection was also why Simon de Montfort, a man born in the Île-de-France and raised in Languedoc and Gascony, was able to become an “English” lord and earl of Leicester in the 1230s.

The bearing that this territorial revolution had upon chivalry was to localize it within an English context. Knights in England soon began to take on wider responsibilities outside of fighting. One example of this is the various roles and responsibilities that Magna Carta lay upon the knightly class. Clause 18 of the Magna Carta of 1215 laid down that four knights alongside two royal justices were to visit each county four times a year and to hear the petty (possessory) assizes made by the residents. The knights of county society had a role to play in the very enforcement of Magna Carta itself. In Clause 48 of the 1215 charter, the sheriffs of the various counties had to swear to uphold Magna Carta, the orders of the twenty-five barons appointed to supervise King John’s actions, and, finally, twelve knights who at the next county court would investigate and abolish all of the ‘evil customs’ of the sheriff as was maintained in the charter. The emergence of the knights as a political force was one of the many consequences of Magna Carta.

The thirteenth century saw other developments for knights in England, particularly in local government. A good example of this can be seen in the role of knights in the judicial system by the early-thirteenth century. Often in legal matters, such as comprising a jury or viewing the state of health for a defendant in court, it would be county knights who discharged the obligation of sitting on the jury or the panel. And for

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many judges and lawyers, it was important that these men by actual knights who had been “girt with the sword.” The great legal text known as Bracton, written in the mid-thirteenth century, stated that these men must be actual knights or, in Latin, *milites*.  

Another role for the knights in early thirteenth-century England was helping the royal government during the minority of King Henry III impose the regulations of the Charter of the Forest, a new charter given by the royal government in November 1217 which sought to reduce the size and scale of the royal forest in England.  

According to the chronicler Roger of Wendover, “twelve knights or free and legal men” were appointed in 1225 to aid the officials, Hugh de Neville and Brian de Lisle, “to perambulate the bounds of the forests, and to determine on their oath what forests ought to remain as they were before, and which ought to be deforested.” The role of knights in society was clearly expanding.

The legal and societal role prescribed for many county knights in England, beginning in the early thirteenth century, would have found few parallels across Europe during the same period. However, in another sense, knights as agents of local government and society harked back to the earliest days of chivalry. The Holy Roman Empire in the tenth century had based control of its territories on two factors: the wealth of the imperialized Church and the control that each successive emperor or ‘King of the Romans’ maintained over his family estates. The need for effective managers for the

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96 Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 4-8.
absentee emperor led to the emergence of the ministerials or serf knights. However, tied to the land though they may have been, the position of the ministerial quickly became hereditary and formed an estate “composed of territorial administrators, household officials, reeves (Meier, villici), and knights.” In this sense, their position as serf knights was unlike that of ordinary serfs in England and France; their duties in the Holy Roman Empire of supervising their lord’s estates, serving in his hall, and following him to war would have made them men of knightly dignity in both England and France. It was this tradition of service that can also be found in the developing role of the knight in thirteenth-century England.

The middle of the thirteenth century in England saw the most important development in the political role of the English knight. This occurred in 1254 with the introduction of a wider role for knights in the developing assembly of parliament. That year, two knights were summoned from every shire. In itself, this may not have been unusual. There is evidence that knights had been attending assemblies since John’s reign and had even been elected to other assemblies before the one in 1254 as well. The king’s hope was that they would grant him the money that his magnates had hitherto refused him. The king was in Gascony, trying to defend his inheritance from the invading forces of Alfonso X of Castile. The regents in charge of his kingdom, the queen, Eleanor of Provence, and the king’s brother, Richard of Cornwall, had opened a parliament on 27 January 1254 to request aid for the embattled Henry III. But while some of prelates and

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98 Keen, p. 34.
100 Keen, p. 35.
most of the magnates agreed to muster their feudal service for the expedition to Gascony by 3 May, provided that the threat from Castile became a reality, the knights and gentry seem to have impressed upon Queen Eleanor and Earl Richard that they would only grant the king financial aid if he ordered both Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest to be firmly observed by his sheriffs, bailiffs, and other local officials.\footnote{Maddicott, “The earliest known knights of the shire,” pp. 109-10} It was in order to convince the knights and gentry to support the king’s demands that, before parliament was to reassemble on 26 April, writs were served on the sheriffs to send two knights to the council who had been chosen by and could presumably speak for the knights and gentry of the county.\footnote{Ibid, p. 111.} When parliament did meet on 26 April 1254 and the king’s plight was made known to his subjects, there was a hostile reception to the demand for taxation. Yet the magnates, and presumably the prelates, knights and clergy, agreed that if the threat from Castile was genuine, aid was promised for Henry III. However, the prospect of triumph of the regency government was upturned by the sudden arrival of Simon de Montfort, fresh from the continent, who protested that the king was in no danger from Alfonso X. Parliament broke up soon after this, with many members fuming with anger against Henry’s alleged deception. No tax was granted and the army that Eleanor of Provence took to Gascony later in the year was only a fraction of what a full feudal muster would have raised.\footnote{Ibid, p. 125.}

Although it may not have seemed so at the time, the summoning of two knights from each county for the parliament of 1254 was to have long-standing implications for the history of England and English chivalry. The most immediate consequence was to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102] Maddicott, “The earliest known knights of the shire,” pp. 109-10
\item[103] Ibid, p. 111.
\item[104] Ibid, p. 125.
\end{footnotes}
introduce Simon de Montfort and the knights of the shires to one another, a relationship which Montfort would take forward in the parliaments of the 1260s. In both of the parliaments he held as virtual ruler of England in 1264 and 1265, Montfort summoned the knights to attend parliament in the manner of 1254. The difference was that they were invited to consult on not just taxation but also the great affairs of the kingdom. Montfort’s death at Evesham did not end this development, for knights were attending parliament even more frequently in the last years of Henry III’s reign.\textsuperscript{105} His son and successor, Edward I, continued this practice on occasion, and in 1295 held what Bishop William Stubbs denoted as the ‘Model’ Parliament, where one pair of knights were summoned to parliament with powers to do what had been ordained by the common counsel of the county.\textsuperscript{106} The process of incorporating knights into parliament was one of the great accomplishments of the medieval English monarchy.\textsuperscript{107} From local to national government, knights were given a role in helping the king not only to fight his enemies, but rule his kingdom. This was an achievement that had few parallels in the other kingdoms of medieval Europe.

Aside from feudalism, the cross-channel realm, and the advances in local and national government, the Norman Conquest and the introduction of chivalry had other developments that changed the nature of cultural feeling and with it the nature of warfare, in Britain. This had much to do with the interaction of the Anglo-Norman elite with the other countries of the British Isles—Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. From the twelfth

\textsuperscript{107} For the history of parliament in general, alongside its incorporation of knights and gentry, the best account by far is J. R. Maddicott, \textit{The Origins of the English Parliament, 924-1327} (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 2010).
century onwards, the English began to look at their neighbors and start thinking of them as inferior and in need of civilizing. These feelings in turn led to brutal practices between the elites of the Anglo-Norman world and the elites of the other lands within the British Isles. One example is the discussion between Raymond le Gros and Hervey de Montmorency after the skirmish at the creek of Baginbun in 1170 during which they captured seventy prisoners. Raymond, according to Gerald of Wales, argued that since the fighting was now over, the prisoners should be treated well and looked after since they were men defending their country. Besides, they might fetch a ransom. Hervey de Montmorency, however, had none of this. He argued that until the conquest was complete, there was no room for mercy and these native Irish prisoners would not have ransomed them if they had been the ones defeated. Montmorency’s argument won out with the rest of his and Gros’ compatriots.

This argument is interesting in further illuminated the issue of chivalry and war. Gerald of Wales for one agreed with Raymond le Gros that mercy should have been shown to the prisoners. However, there was a reason that Hervey de Montmorency won out in the end. Part of the rationale lay with the sense of cultural superiority that these members of the Anglo-Norman elite personified. Another part of the rationale, however, had to do with chivalry or at least a chivalric ethos. These native Irish prisoners were not felt to be part of Christendom, and could not therefore claim the brotherhood of chivalry. This can be seen in Montmorency’s argument that if the Anglo-Normans had been the defeated party, there would have been no mercy for them. Chivalry was strictly

for those who were chivalric, whether that was a fellow knight or lord. Native Irish warriors as well as men of more common stock were outside this charmed circle and could thus be dispatched with far less offence to conscience. One of the more famous instances of this is the battle of Brémule in 1119 between the forces of King Henry I of England and King Louis VI of France. Supposedly, 900 knights joined in the battle but only three were killed. According to the monastic historian Orderic Vitalis this was because of the pious chivalric ethos around these men:

“They were all clad in mail and spared each other on both sides, out of fear of God and fellowship in arms (notitia contubernii); they were more concerned to capture than kill the fugitives. As Christian soldiers, they did not thirst for the blood of their brothers, but rejoiced in a just victory given by God for the good of Holy Church and the peace of the faithful.”\(^{110}\)

This, then, was the chivalric context that was woven around nobles like William Marshal and Simon de Montfort: a sense of being a part of a wider group of united Anglo-Norman barons who fought in the same way and belonged to a shared status of elite men. Those inside the elite, such as fellow knights and perhaps even simply fellow Christians at times, were to be treated with all due honor and respect, especially in defeat. Outside this hierarchy however, enemies could be butchered as inferior. Indeed, the lower classes in England themselves might be seen as inferior for they were not descended from the Anglo-Norman elite of William and his lieutenants. This was the context that all men who wanted to be prudhommes like William Marshal had to understand. This was the

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\(^{110}\) Quoted in Strickland, “Killing or Clemency?,” p. 94.
context that outsiders like Simon de Montfort had to embrace in order to become members of their society.

The history of chivalry in England from 1066 to 1265 is one of progress—in terms of knights becoming essential agents in the government of the kingdom—and violence, as attested by the brutal treatment of England’s opponents in the British Isles during the same period. Both William Marshal and Simon de Montfort were aware of these factors and how each practiced the ideas of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility has much to tell us about how great knights valued the ideas that have been considered in this chapter. Before embarking on the analysis of the lives of Marshal and Montfort and their chivalric credentials, one final note needs to be added explaining how the terms chivalry, knighthood, and nobility will be used in this thesis.

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Chivalry as a term, as has been made clear, is not strictly definable. There are manifold problems with the word and one is indeed tempted to follow the advice of Kaeuper and Prestwich to jettison terms such as chivalry and feudalism. However, chivalry was not simply an elusive word, devoid of definition. It was an ethos that men aspired to in the Middle Ages. It was a real force that informed the politics, society, religion, and warfare of the day. As such it could not but inform the lives of men such as William Marshal and Simon de Montfort. It may elude a neat definition, but that does not mean it did not exist.

Chivalry was the ideal that underpinned the lives of all knights in the Middle Ages. It was not necessarily the sort of personal knightly piety that it is often said to be,
but in many respects it was not far off it. It dictated, as far as possible, the conduct of
knights in war and society, though what was chivalrous for knights may seem
unchivalrous to many in the modern world. It was also connected to a knight’s station in
life. Chivalry was the strict hierarchical priority of “those who fought.”\textsuperscript{111} As an ideal, of
course, few reached it in its entirety, and it is perhaps time that historians dispensed with
the notion of the perfect knight embodied in Chaucer’s poetry in the fourteenth century,
for he certainly never existed. Men like William Marshal and Geoffrey de Charny came
close, but their careers are not without blemish either.\textsuperscript{112} There are three last things to be
noted. Firstly, the four virtues that seem to have been the crux of chivalric behavior were
prowess, wisdom, loyalty, and honor, with honor being the most important of all.
Secondly, chivalry was elastic. It could be stretched across different geographic areas and
different time periods. One of its ideas that did remain constant was that winning in war
or tournament was important to the medieval knight. Yet chivalry eventually came to
encompass the idea that losing with honor could be just as crucial to the self-image of the
knight. Another idea that was important to chivalry was the ability for individual knights
to win renown during their careers. William Marshal was certainly interested in renown.
According to his biographer, he “enjoyed such a fine career in tournaments and wars that
he was the envy of many. He made his way to every land where a knight should wish to
win renown.”\textsuperscript{113} The renown to be won on the tournament circuit or the battlefield
certainly inspired many knights, nobles, and even kings to devote themselves to the

\textsuperscript{111} Keen, pp. 145-7.
\textsuperscript{112} For Charny, see The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny: Text, Context, and Translation, ed. R. W.
\textsuperscript{113} HWM, p. 43. See also Kaeuper, p. 159.
practice of chivalry. Thirdly, chivalry was connected to hierarchy. Only “those who fought” could be worthy of the epithet of “chivalrous.” One would not apply the word to a man of the cloth or a peasant working in the field.

Given the elusiveness of a universal definition of chivalry, two other words will be applied to the study of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort. These are knighthood and nobility. With knighthood, we are on the firmest ground. There is no doubt that knighthood did exist. It was not just a definition, but a rank in society. For a man to practice chivalry, he had to be a knight. And lineage was of little consequence to this: the son of a knight or noble would be expected to become a knight, but his birth did not automatically make him one. He had to undergo the ceremony of dubbing. The image one gets from cinema and books is that the dubbing ceremony followed a universal rule. This is not true, and, as Richard Kaeuper has noted, if it were so, the work of scholars would have been made infinitely easier. Many knights were not knighted in grand ceremony, but in haste the evening before or perhaps only minutes before a military engagement. Such was the case with William Marshal, who was knighted in a ceremony just before the battle of Neufchâtel. He received a new cloak, his sword of knighthood was girded to his side by his master, the count of Tancarville, and then Tancarville gave him the ritual blow to the shoulder, the colée in French. This blow, instead of the more traditional sword tap to each shoulder, was the actual mark of the dubbing and it was the last blow the newly made knight was to receive without giving one in return. Knighthood

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114 One knight during the late Middle Ages who was certainly devoted to the idea of renown was the Castilian knight, Don Pero Niño, who, during the fifteenth century, devoted himself to winning as much renown as he could, at least according to his biographer. See Kaeuper, pp. 31-2, 35, 42, and 43-4.
115 For the ceremony of dubbing, see Keen, pp. 64-82.
116 Kaeuper, p. 106.
and chivalry were woven together. Knighthood was the physical rank that practitioners of chivalry needed to hold, while chivalry was the ideal to which knights aspired for “if we think chivalry was only ideals, we will miss the rough texture of real life; if we think it meant only actions, we will deprive knighthood of the ideals that were so important to them.”¹¹⁸ In certain respects, we cannot talk about one without the other.

Nobility is another word that is hard to define. Akin to knighthood, it might apply to a rank in society. Indeed, by William Marshal’s day, it was becoming accepted that knighthood was the prerequisite for status as a noble and that every knight who had undergone the ceremony of dubbing was immediately introduced into this upper tier of society.¹¹⁹ In general, all members of the lay nobility in Medieval Europe would carry out the duties of knighthood and were expected to be knights themselves.¹²⁰ By 1200, it was becoming common for knights to be recognized as members of the nobility, as seen by the fact that all knights could expect to be referred to as sir or messire, a form of address that had only been given to earls and barons before 1150.¹²¹ Nobility could also be used as an adjective to be applied to an ideal of behavior like chivalry. One central component of being noble was lineage. Lineage was important to knights at all times and of all ranks in society. But if all male members of the nobility were knights, did this necessarily mean that all knights were nobles? Clearly not. Certainly a duke, an earl, or a count was higher than an ordinary knight. A king was higher still, but he too was a member of the circle of knighthood during the Middle Ages.¹²² Then there was the matter of gentility. Every knight from the king to an ordinary knight could be described as gentle, but not all of

¹¹⁸ Kaeuper, p. 11.
¹¹⁹ Crouch, p. 198.
¹²⁰ Asbridge, The First Crusade, p. 50.
¹²¹ Crouch, p. 197.
¹²² Kaeuper, p. 243.
them could be described as noble. Increasingly the idea of being noble was reserved to those who came from knightly families, whether or not one had actually been dubbed a knight. Nobility began to be mixed with chivalry during the same period. According to the Grand Coutumier of Normandy “the estate of nobility is called the state of chivalry.” To be chivalrous was to be noble; one would hardly find the terms of chevalerie or noblesse being applied to peasants. This was one of the more lasting consequences of the Middle Ages. In later centuries the officer and the gentleman was expected to feel the same sense of pride as a medieval knight would have felt to “his king or lord.” Nobility thus might apply to one’s place in society, but it also might apply to an inspired idea of one’s self. Like chivalry, the idea of nobility has too many meanings to be given one set definition.

As will be clear the terms of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility interact in so many ways that using one at the expense of the others would be fruitless. In the great histories of chivalry written by Jean Flori, David Crouch, Richard Kaeuper, Maurice Keen, and Nigel Saul, a discussion of all three terms can be found somewhere in the text. For the careers of men like William Marshal and Simon de Montfort, the use of all three terms is important, for they embodied the connections between chivalry, knighthood, and nobility. Both were knights, having undergone the rituals of dubbing and coming from an ancestry of other knights. This ancestry also made them noble, but they also rose to become members of the high nobility, with Marshal being the earl of Pembroke and Montfort for the earl of Leicester. Finally, they both were aware of the ideals of chivalry.

123 Keen, p. 144. This was becoming more common in the thirteenth century.
125 Keen, p. 247.
Marshal was ultimately more famous than Montfort in this respect, but neither man would have been capable of ignoring the ideals. Marshal was the archetypal *prudhomme*, or man worthy of honor, because of his exploits in the tournament as well as in battle. Montfort was one the nobles of medieval England who mixed perfectly the idea of the man of God and the man of war; he was the ideal chivalrous knight in the eyes of the Church, the type of layman churchmen most wanted to create in the Middle Ages.\(^{126}\) For these men the ideas of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility were real concerns of life. As will be seen, perhaps the lives of no two other men of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in medieval Britain demonstrate these three ideas more clearly. For this to be seen, an exploration of their careers alongside the comparisons and contradictions between both men will be necessarily.

\(^{126}\) Maddicott, pp. 97-9.
CHAPTER TWO

William Marshal

In David Crouch’s study of William Marshal the famous knight is described as “a ruthless opportunist, astute courtier, manipulative politician and brutal but efficient soldier.”\(^1\) It is these qualities that have led historians, Crouch and others, to suggest that William Marshal provides the template of the typical medieval magnate. This view has much to commend it: certainly through his skills as a courtier and warrior, Marshal was typical of his class. However, there are also unique features of William Marshal’s career, such as his status as a younger son and his drive for advancement, that suggest there is still much to explore in his life. Marshal is also unique in being the subject of one of the first vernacular biographies of the Middle Ages, the *History of William Marshal*, providing additional insight into how he exercised the qualities of chivalric prowess and good lordship in his career along with his desire to become a *prudhomme*, or an ideal noble warrior.\(^2\) These features also reveal how Marshal made himself into one of the great thirteenth century exemplars of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility in Britain.

William Marshal was born around the year 1147.\(^3\) His date of birth is uncertain, not surprisingly given that Marshal was the product of a second marriage, and because he

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\(^1\) Crouch, p. i.
\(^3\) A brief biographical sketch can be found in D. Crouch, “Marshal, William (I), fourth earl of Pembroke (c.1146–1219)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., May

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was also the second son of that marriage. His father, John the Marshal, was the hereditary marshal of the king’s household having inherited the role from his own father Gilbert, who had acquired the position from either William Rufus or Henry I by 1100. The History of William Marshal described William’s father this way: “Sir John the Marshal, so spirited, bold and tireless in his ventures that good men flocked to him—not that he was an earl or a baron of great wealth, but he bestowed largesse on such an ever-growing scale that it was a marvel to all.” He was able to flourish due to the chaotic situation in England during the reign of King Stephen (1135-1154). In this respect, he was like greater magnates during this period such as Robert of Gloucester (c. 1090-1147) and Ranulf II of Chester (1099-1153) who used the so-called Anarchy to expand their power at the expense of the Crown. In his father, William Marshal had his first example of how ruthless opportunism and military skill could advance a man’s station in life.

If John the Marshal provided for his son an image of the ruthless warrior and opportunist, he also demonstrated for the young man the value of loyalty as well as the dangers of disloyalty to one’s sovereign. John the Marshal was initially well rewarded by King Stephen with castles and land upon the latter’s accession to the throne. However, by 1141 Marshal had switched his allegiance to Matilda, daughter and heiress of Henry I, and throughout the rest of the Anarchy he proved himself a loyal knight at his lady’s side. In 1141, while Matilda was retreating from the siege of Winchester, John the Marshal fought a rearguard action in defense of the so-called Lady of the English. He was pursued
to Wherwell Abbey, where he took refuge. His pursuers set fire to the church in an attempt to force his surrender, but the undaunted baron stood his ground and in the process lost his eye to molten lead falling from the roof of the burning building. After his pursuers had withdrawn, the wounded Marshal fled on foot for twenty-five miles until he reached safety. While historians have questioned the details of this daring exploit on the part of John the Marshal, there seems to be evidence to support the general account. If William Marshal ever heard this tale, as he certainly must have, it would have further influenced his emerging idea of chivalry. Unfortunately, the young man would also learn the perils of chivalry and good lordship at a very young age through both his father and his own experience.

In 1152, King Stephen was trying to bring a semblance of order to his kingdom after more than a decade of brutal civil war. One of his targets was John the Marshal, a constant thorn in his side since 1141. Marshal had taken the opportunity, as had so many other barons during Stephen’s reign, to erect a fortified outpost in defiance of the king’s license. According to the History of William Marshal, the outpost was located at the town of Newbury in Berkshire, close to John the Marshal’s principal seat at Hamstead Marshall. King Stephen brought his army and laid siege to Newbury, then being held by the constable of John the Marshal’s household. The defenders fought hard, but eventually asked for a truce. This was relayed to John the Marshal, who asked that Stephen extend

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7 HWM, pp. 29-30.
8 Crouch, p. 17, describes how the continuation of the Worcester chronicle of Gloucester Abbey written during the 1140s contains a story of one John, who fought with Empress Matilda, taking refuge in Wherwell Abbey. The account is similar to the one presented in the History of William Marshal.
9 HWM, p. 31.
the truce in order that he could consult with Empress Matilda about the fate of his outpost.¹⁰

Stephen knew the measure of the man he was dealing with, and John the Marshal was aware of the king’s distrust. Therefore, as was common during negotiations in medieval warfare, John offered up a hostage as a token of his good intentions. His choice fell upon the second son of his marriage to Sybil of Salisbury—William Marshal.¹¹

Stephen perhaps thought that since John the Marshal had offered his own son as a hostage, his word might prove his bond this time. If so, the king was once again deceived. According to the History, as soon as John the Marshal entered Newbury, he resupplied and strengthened the fortress “with good knights and men-at-arms and archers, all committed to its defense.” The History went on to comment, very aptly, that “The Marshal [John] wasn’t interested in peace!”¹² Stephen and his inner circle were enraged at this affront to the king’s clemency and authority, and resolved to punish William for his father’s crimes. Although the History laid the blame for the boy’s proposed execution on Stephen’s advisors, there can be little doubt that it was the king who gave the order for William to be hanged for his father’s treachery. And when the king told John the Marshal that William would be killed for his duplicity, the baron reportedly responded that he did not care for he had the hammer and the anvil to make other and better sons.¹³

¹⁰ HWM, pp. 31-2. Matilda by this time had retired to Normandy, leaving her cause in the hands of her eldest son and heir, the future King Henry II. One wonders how quickly John the Marshal believed he would be able to consult his liege lady.
¹¹ John the Marshal had contracted this marriage c. 1147. Sybil was the sister of the main power broker in Wiltshire in the 1140s, Earl Patrick of Salisbury, who had become a territorial rival of John the Marshal. The marriage brought the two families together, but also forced John the Marshal to put away his first wife, Adelina, though the succession rights of his two sons by her were protected. See Crouch, pp. 18-19.
¹² HWM, p. 32.
¹³ HWM, p. 32.
For many children all these events would certainly have produced terror and shock. William, on the other hand, was seemingly giddy at the delights of the armed camp around him. Three times, we are told, Stephen decided to put him to death and three times William’s innocence melted the heart of the king. When he was going to be hanged, William saw the earl of Arundel, attendant upon the king, holding a javelin. He asked to play with it, and Stephen refrained from executing him. When Stephen next proposed to throw him over the castle walls with a catapult, William compared it to a seesaw and said he must have a ride. The heart of the king proved no match again for William’s innocent nature. Finally, when the king’s soldiers attempted to crush William with a giant stone, he thought it a great game to play, while the king, for the third time halted his attempt on William’s life. By the end of the siege, William and King Stephen could be found playing “knights” with figures made of flower stems.

Stephen kept Newbury under siege for many months until finally it fell in the autumn of 1153. The king then moved on to Wallingford and a possible confrontation with Henry of Anjou. This ended, however, not in a battle, but a peace treaty that recognized Stephen as king for the duration of his life with Henry to succeed on his death, despite the existence of Stephen’s second, surviving, son, William. During all this time William was kept in Stephen’s household as a hostage, but also as an honored guest one suspects. It was apparently after the peace at Wallingford was negotiated that

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14 Ibid, pp. 32-3.
16 Stephen’s eldest son Eustace had died in August 1153, apparently choking to death at dinner. This along with the death of Stephen’s queen Matilda might have sapped the last of the exhausted king’s moral strength to press on.
William Marshal finally returned to the embrace of his family.\(^\text{17}\) It is hard to assess what Marshal might have learned from this encounter at such a young age. He clearly remembered these events later in life.\(^\text{18}\) One might surmise though, that the values of loyalty and honor imprinted themselves on his mind; he also was given an instruction on how the wrath of kings could unmake a man as quickly as kingly generosity could make him.

During the years immediately after 1153, William drifts out of sight. He witnessed one of his father’s charters along with his brothers in 1156, but whereas his brothers were provided with gold and horses for their part in consenting to their father’s charter, William received nothing from him.\(^\text{19}\) By 1156, John the Marshal’s fortunes were waning as King Henry II apparently viewed his mother’s partisan as a loose cannon rather than a dependable ally. Opportunities for William following this estrangement between his father and the king diminished even further. In 1160, John the Marshal was finally persuaded to make some provision for his youngest son. He resolved to send him to the court of William, count of Tancarville, a relative of William’s mother Sybil. Here, William Marshal might find a way to overcome the limitations of being a landless younger son.

The count of Tancarville was a member of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy that had grown up in the decades after the Norman Conquest, and held the hereditary position of

\(^{17}\) Crouch, p. 21.  
\(^{18}\) Witness the story of him and King Stephen playing knights which he supposedly recounted orally and which found its way into the History of William Marshal. See Crouch, p. 21  
\(^{19}\) Crouch, p. 21.
chamberlain of Normandy. He was also revered as one of the greatest patrons of knights and he went everywhere accompanied by a large retinue of knights. Here then was a model lord for William Marshal, a man who commanded even greater resources than his father and could provide a place for Marshal in the chivalric society of the Anglo-Norman world.

There was little written about Marshal’s education in the Tancarville household, even in the History of William Marshal itself. Indeed, it seems as though the young knight-to-be did not exactly distinguish himself during his training. The History relates a story where Marshal was labelled by his fellow trainees as ‘gasteviande’ or ‘greedy guts’ because of his constant consumption of food. He was also known to go to bed early, but then sleep in. Even if Marshal did not exactly distinguish himself during the eight years he was a member of the count of Tancarville’s retinue or mesnie, we can be sure that he learned all the skills necessary for a knight including the use of the lance and the sword, though his skills with the latter seem not to have been attuned to graceful movements but rather brutal hammer blows. Most importantly, he developed the ability to ride a horse, for the cheval was the cornerstone of chevalerie. He would also have learned the basics of the hunt and courtliness, which was the etiquette of how one was to behave in, or rather survive the plots and intrigues of, the courts of the great and the good. What Marshal showed little aptitude for, in sharp contrast to later nobles like Simon de

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20 He was the lord of the town of Grantham (Lincolnshire) as well as other estates in England. In Normandy, he was the lord of three castles (Tancarville, Hallebosc, and Mezidon) as well as the baronies that went with Tancarville and Hallebosc. See Crouch, p. 24.
21 The newest translation of the History of William Marshal by Bryant records the nickname as “William Waste-o’-Food.” HWM, p. 35. The History has the count of Tancarville respond that “He’ll come up trumps,” though this was probably added with the benefit of hindsight.
22 Asbridge, p. 43.
23 Ibid, p. 49.
Montfort, were literary or theological pursuits. His Christian faith was entirely conventional and plain, though that is not to describe him as a man lacking in devotion. He never seems to have developed interests in the literary world of chivalric romances and though he mastered enough Latin to make his way in the world, Marshal was unusual compared to some contemporaries in that he was illiterate to a degree. The triumphs of the so-called “Twelfth Century Renaissance” seem to have left Marshal behind. He, however, would have paid scant regard to this, especially in his youth. His goal was to become a warrior, not a clerk, and his time at Tancarville certainly fitted him for that purpose.

In 1166, when he was around nineteen years old, William Marshal was finally dubbed a knight. Whereas one might expect to hear of a grand ceremony beloved of Arthurian traditions, Marshal’s knighting was apparently more matter of fact. The History of William Marshal, the source most expected to have glorified Marshal’s knighting, described it in just six lines of text. The reason for this is that Marshal was dubbed in preparation for battle. This was more commonplace than grand ceremonies inside castles. More important for the History than the ceremony of knighting was the battle inside the town of Neufchâtel that immediately followed Marshal’s knighting.

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25 See Crouch, pp. 25-6; Asbridge, p. 46. Crouch compares him to Robert, Earl of Leicester and co-justiciar for King Henry II, one of the great barons of the realm, yet a man who also had interest in writing letters to Cistercian abbots, astronomical treatises, and debates about how a magnate might enter heaven.
The battle of Neufchâtel has been excellently recounted in the *History* and by historians elsewhere. Needless to say, Marshal proved his prowess in the encounters in the streets of the town. However, what is more striking is that this young tyro seems not to have paid much attention to the business side of chivalry. When the fighting was over, William de Mandeville, heir to the earldom of Essex, asked Marshal to make him a gift of saddlery. Marshal’s response was that he had never owned any saddlery, but had used that provided by Tancarville. Mandeville replied by saying that since he had bested forty or even sixty knights, how could he not make over such a little gift. This was a revelation that successful chivalry meant profit as well as prowess. In the words of David Crouch “If his calling were now arms, its fees were now ransoms and the equipment of the men he had defeated. He had acted the epic hero, and although his efforts were ungrudgingly respected, his lack of realism—given the circumstances—was not.” Thomas Asbridge was blunter: “All he had to show for his efforts was damaged armor and a dead horse.”

From 1166 to 1168, Marshal remained a member of the count of Tancarville’s *mesnie*. As well as his first battle, Marshal also participated in his first tournament. He had to pester the count of Tancarville to supply him with a new horse after he sold the mantle he had received at his knighting and still had not been able to furnish himself a suitable warhorse. In his first tournament, Marshal did exceedingly well, capturing three knights and making off with four-and-a-half horses. He seems to have made a circuit of the tournament scene during 1166-7, experiencing all its ups and downs. During these years Marshal became well acquainted with the sport by which he would make his name.

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27 See in particular *HWM*, pp. 36-9; Asbridge, pp. 54-6; Crouch, pp. 36-7.
28 Crouch, p. 37.
29 Asbridge, p. 56.
30 *HWM*, pp. 39-40.
in the 1170s and 1180s. By 1168, Marshal had returned to Tancarville, but he seems to have immediately recognized that the count of Tancarville was not going to employ him as a permanent retainer in his mesnie. He therefore returned to England after an absence of eight years. His father had died in the interim and had made no provision for him in his will. After a brief visit to his family, Marshal went to Salisbury and placed himself at the service of his maternal uncle, Earl Patrick of Salisbury.

Earl Patrick was great nobleman like the count of Tancarville. He was also a patron of knights and had around fifty to sixty in his mesnie. Family ties would have obliged Salisbury to aide his young nephew, but perhaps the earl had heard stories of his prowess in battle and tournament as well. He accordingly found Marshal a place in his service as he organized his followers for service overseas. No sooner had William Marshal arrived back home than he was once again returning to France. The power of Henry II was being threatened across his vast empire once again. This time the trouble was in Poitou, and Earl Patrick had been appointed to aid Henry’s queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, in governing the region.

During Marshal’s sojourn in Poitou, an event occurred which was to transform his circumstances entirely. At first, however, it was a tragedy for the young man. While Salisbury and Marshal were escorting Queen Eleanor between castles, they were set upon by a rebellious group of Poitevin nobles, led by Geoffrey and Guy de Lusignan. Salisbury managed to organize a party to see Eleanor safe to the nearest castle, but he and the rest of his men were unarmed and not prepared. While he tried to arm himself, Salisbury was

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32 John the Marshal died in 1165 at around the age of sixty. It is possible that William’s mother, Sybil, had also died by this point. See Asbridge, p. 74.
33 Crouch, p. 39.
run through the back with a lance and died instantly. William Marshal, according to the
History, was so enraged at this vile act that he charged forward and fought like a crazed
man until he too was wounded from behind, this time in the thigh.\(^{34}\) His enemies captured
him while the rest of the mesnie fled.

The Poitevins clearly hoped that Marshal would be forced to pay a ransom, but
the landless knight was without the funds to achieve his freedom. Without the protection
of a powerful male patron, he seemed doomed to be incarcerated indefinitely. It was a
female patron that came to his aide: Eleanor of Aquitaine had heard of Marshal’s valor in
both safeguarding her retreat and his attempt to avenge his uncle. She paid Marshal’s
ransom and subsequently bestowed on the young knight horses, robes, arms, and
money.\(^ {35}\) The queen also offered the young knight a place in her mesnie. This was a
breakthrough moment for William Marshal. With a place beside Queen Eleanor, the door
was open to advancement into the highest circle of them all, the royal court. For the next
two years, Marshal was by the queen’s side, most likely in Aquitaine, helping her impose
order on her duchy.\(^ {36}\) According to the History, during these years of service to the most
powerful woman in the Angevin world, “He grew so in prowess, goodness and largesse
that he was held in high regard by kings, queens, dukes, and counts.”\(^ {37}\) Even accounting
for the exaggeration of his biographer, there can be little doubt that Marshal did indeed
increase in status between 1168 and 1170.

\(^{34}\) HWM, pp. 44-5.
\(^{35}\) E. Mullally, “The reciprocal loyalty of Eleanor of Aquitaine and William Marshal,” Eleanor of
241. For Eleanor’s life and career see J. Martindale, “Eleanor, suo jure duchess of Aquitaine (c.1122–
\(^{36}\) Asbridge, p. 86-7.
\(^{37}\) HWM, p. 47.
In 1170, William Marshal’s career made another crucial advance. Due to his service to Queen Eleanor, Marshal had come to the notice of King Henry II of England. The king had decided to crown his eldest son, another Henry, as king in his lifetime, following both Capetian royal practice and his desire to avoid another succession struggle. The Young King, as he was to be known for the rest of his life, was duly crowned on 14 June 1170. The youth of fifteen was already known for his handsome looks and athletic figure. However, given his age, he would still need tutors to instruct him in both the physical and literary requirements for Angevin kingship. For his tutor-in-arms or *magister militum*—the man who would supervise the Young King’s knightly development—Henry II chose William Marshal.

The choice brought Marshal into the orbit of the man, and possibly the relationship, he would value above all others. When Marshal founded Cartmel Priory in 1189, he dedicated his new foundation to pray for the souls of himself, his wife, his children, and the three kings he had served so far—the Young King, Henry II, and Richard I. It was the Young King, however, that the charter for Cartmel referred to as “his [Marshal’s] lord.” From 1170 to 1183, his bond with the Young King grew from that of guiding mentor to intimate friend and counselor. There was no man closer to the Young King in his *mesnie* than Marshal. Although in 1182 the Marshal would be accused by his envious enemies in the *mesnie* of both *lèse-majesté* against the status of the Young King and adultery with the Young King’s queen, Margaret, the row was only temporary

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38 Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, p. 89.
and the Young King seems never to have countenanced the second charge. Indeed, on his deathbed in 1183, the Young King conveyed the cloak he had received as a promised crusader and asked Marshal to take it to Jerusalem on his behalf, speaking at length on Marshal’s loyalty to him. This scene became a moment of reconciliation between the two friends after the events of 1182-3 and Marshal’s exile from the Young King’s household, and solidified Marshal in the minds of one chronicler at least as the Young King’s carissimus—his dearest friend. Indeed, David Crouch in his biography of Marshal has been led to wonder whether the presentation of the relationship between William Marshal and the Young King in the History of William Marshal can been interpreted in a homosexual light. There is no evidence that Marshal or the Young King were anything but heteronormative in their emotional outlooks. Suffice to say, Marshal probably only bound himself to one other person as closely as he bound himself to the Young King, that being his wife and the foundation of his fortune, Isabel de Clare.

From 1170 to 1183, William Marshal was the senior knight of the Young King’s mesnie. During this time, he experienced both war and tournaments on an increasing scale. The Young King, along with his brothers and mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, rebelled against Henry II in 1173-4. There are many excellent accounts of this rebellion.

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41 Crouch, pp. 56-64.
42 Strickland, Henry the Young King, p. 308. The chronicler was Geoffreys de Vigeois.
43 Crouch, p. 181.
44 Marshal had an illegitimate son, Gilbert, born before his marriage, to whom he made over two manors to later in life. The Young King and his queen Margaret had an apparently affectionate marriage, though their only child together died shortly after its birth in 1177. See Ibid, pp. 181-2; Strickland, Henry the Young King, p. 31.
and its details need not concern us here. The one thing that should be noted is that on the eve of an impending battle with his father during the revolt, the Young King was persuaded upon to be knighted by his supporters. Instead of choosing a great aristocrat, however, the Young King gave the honor to William Marshal according to the History. While the Young King had probably already been knighted in 1170 at his coronation, Matthew Strickland has suggested that his second knighting in 1173 was a way of asserting his independence from his father’s control. It is a measure of the two men’s closeness that he turned to Marshal to perform this important act for him.

At the end of the rebellion in 1174, the Young King made peace with his father and was taken back to England with him. The Marshal presumably went with his master and lived in England from 1174 to 1176. However, in the latter year, the Young King departed for France to try his luck anew in building up personal power and prestige. Having failed in rebellion and war to do so, he turned to the emerging venue of the tournament. Although the tournament was originally intended as training for knightly combat, it had evolved into serious war games where a knight or lord could make a name for himself. The Young King used it as a vehicle to build a reputation for prowess, largesse, spectacle, and chivalry. He also used it, like his descendant Edward III of England, to unite a team of young nobles together in quests for glory on the tournament field that, had the Young King lived, might have translated into lasting political and patronage bonds for his kingship. William Marshal, as the Young King’s tutor-in-arms, was with him all the way through these endeavors. He also had a chance to shine himself.

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47 Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, p. 154.
It was during the period from 1177 to 1182 that Marshal built his reputation on the tournament circuit. The *History* gloried in Marshal’s prowess; fully one third of its text is taken up in recounting the various stories of Marshal’s tournament exploits, such as his helmet having to be hammered from his head and how he and Roger de Jouy spent a year together as brothers-in-arms on the tournament fields, splitting everything evenly; they ended up taking 103 knights prisoner.\textsuperscript{49} Marshal was not just known for his prowess on the tournament field, but for his cleverness as well. One of his favorite techniques was to ride alongside a knight, seize the bridle of his horse, and carry him away to be his prisoner. The tournament was where William Marshal found his particular métier. On his deathbed, he spoke of having captured 500 knights with all their armor and equipment during his days as a tournament knight.\textsuperscript{50} And that armor and equipment was important. Still landless, Marshal could use objects like captured horses and arms to make substantial sums of money. He had come a long way from the naïve tyro of Neufchatel.

These glamourous chivalric days came to an end in 1182. That year, Marshal was in effect banished from the Young King’s household after the accusation of *lèse-majesté* and adultery. Although he tried to defend himself at the Christmas court at Caen before both the Young King and Henry II, this was denied to him.\textsuperscript{51} He then absented himself to tournaments in Picardy and Flanders until the middle of 1183, when he was called back to the Young King’s side.\textsuperscript{52} The Young King was at war with his father and brother Richard and needed the Marshal’s aide. It was all for naught, however, because the Young King soon died, but with his greatest friend reconciled to him on his deathbed.

\textsuperscript{49} *HWM*, pp. 62-3; Crouch, pp. 188, 243, and 252.
\textsuperscript{50} *HWM*, pp. 62-3; Crouch, pp. 188, 243, and 252
\textsuperscript{51} Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, p. 279.
\textsuperscript{52} Crouch, pp. 62-3.
We now come to the least understood part of Marshal’s career: his crusade to the Holy Land in fulfillment of the Young King’s vow. He left in 1184 and did not return to Western Europe until 1186. However, the History is silent on William Marshal’s exploits in the East, puzzling since the crusade was considered the epitome of Christian knighthood. While commenting that Marshal did many great deeds in the Holy Land, the biographer simply offers an apology for the shortness of his account, saying that “I refer to them only briefly because I wasn’t there to witness them and have never found anyone who could tell me even the half of it—it’s a big subject!”53 The most recent account of Marshal’s crusade suggests that the reason for the biographer’s reticence might have lain in the hard times facing the Kingdom of Jerusalem during the 1180s. He was faced with the choice of either relating the gloomy circumstances of Marshal’s crusade and the fact that it achieved nothing, or else with creating a fictional account of chivalric acts of derring-do that had no basis in reality. He chose instead to pass over the crusade quickly and in silence and return to the main action of events he and those around Marshal would have known better.54

In 1186, Marshal returned to the court of Henry II, father of the Young King. Before he had embarked on his crusade, the king had given Marshal a promise of service in his court which he duly fulfilled. For Marshal, this was a transitional period. The old warrior of the tournament field had to mold himself into a senior counselor and military advisor to the king.55 So far as is known, Marshal never fought in another tournament

53 HWM, p. 103.
55 Asbridge, p. 175.
after this period. His career was now focused on the world of court politics, military service, and, perhaps most importantly for himself at this stage, noble advancement.

Marshal served in Henry II’s court from 1186 until the king’s death in 1189. The new retainer soon found his service rewarded when the king granted to him his first estate at Cartmel in Lancashire as well as making over to him the wardship of Heloise of Lancaster, heiress to the barony of Kendal in Westmoreland. A marriage to Heloise would have transformed William Marshal into a minor baron in the north of England.\(^{56}\) Henry II seems to have expected Marshal to wed the girl and thus translate his lordship into a significant holding. For whatever reason, Marshal did not do this. Also in this period Marshal gained the services of John of Earley, the man who would go on to be his chief retainer for the next thirty years and who played a prime role in the conception of the *History of William Marshal*.\(^{57}\) The Marshal also had an opportunity to prove his military worth to the king in 1188 when he advised him on how to outwit Philip Augustus, the new king of France. When Philip had disbanded his army, Marshal told the king to do the same but then reassemble his men in secret from where they could launch a *chevauchée* into the French king’s territory. It was done and the Angevin troops came back loaded with plunder, having devastated the French king’s lands. It was said that the king’s son Richard—the future Lionheart and no mean judge of military efficiency himself—applauded Marshal’s advice.\(^{58}\)

It was in the next year, however, that Marshal was fully able to prove his worth to Henry II. In 1189 Philip attacked Henry again, this time with the aid of Henry’s eldest

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\(^{56}\) Crouch, p. 70.  
\(^{57}\) Asbridge, pp. 183-4.  
\(^{58}\) Gillingham, “War and Chivalry in the *History of William the Marshal*,” p. 5.
son and heir, Richard. The two men pursued the old king to his birthplace of Le Mans. The French eventually managed to cross the river and burn Le Mans as Marshal attempted to escort the king to safety. Richard, lightly armed, pursued his father. Marshal noticed this and managed to engage Richard’s party in a separate action that stopped the count’s advance.\(^59\) During this encounter, Marshal came into direct combat with Richard. The scene has all the makings of a Hollywood epic:

“Seeing him coming, the count roared “God’s legs, Marshal, don’t kill me! It wouldn’t be right—I’m quite unarmed!” “No” replied the Marshal, “I won’t kill you—I’ll leave that to the Devil.” And he drove his lance clean through Count Richard’s horse.”\(^60\)

This action saved the royal party, but the events at Le Mans demoralized the king. On 6 July 1189, having learned that his youngest and favorite son John had joined Richard and Philip Augustus, Henry II of England died at the age of fifty-six.

With Richard’s accession, many around the Marshal felt nervous for his safety since he had so recently personally fought the new king. They need not have worried, for Richard saw the value of Marshal’s prowess and loyalty and forgave him for the incident at Le Mans. He also raised the household knight to a baron of the realm. Henry II had promised Marshal the hand of Isabel de Clare after having toyed with Heloise of Lancaster and Denise of Chateauroux as possible spouses for the ageing warrior, but at the time of his death this pledge had yet to be fulfilled.\(^61\) Richard needed any aid he could muster as his greatest ambition was to depart on the Third Crusade. Thus, to secure a man

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\(^{59}\) Crouch, pp. 74-5.  
\(^{60}\) HWM, p. 119.  
\(^{61}\) Crouch, pp. 71-8.
of Marshal’s worth, Richard fulfilled his father’s pledge, emphasizing, however, that it was through his patronage that Marshal was obtaining his much needed bride.  

Of all the transformational effects that had so far occurred in Marshal’s life, this was the greatest. Isabel de Clare, heiress of Earl Richard Strongbow of Clare, held titles to the lordships of Longueville in Normandy, Striguil (Chepstow) in Wales, and Leinster in Ireland, as well as valuable manors in England. These lands would allow Marshal a steady income as well as a base of operations from which he could flex his own political muscle and ambitions, and it was to Isabel de Clare that he owed all this.

Isabel de Clare has not made the same impression on history as her husband. Her age at the time of her marriage to Marshal is unknown, though she was a good deal younger than him. We have limited evidence of how close the couple were to one another, except for the fact they produced ten children (five sons and five daughters) and were married for thirty years. There is also a touching scene in The History of William Marshal where Isabel and William share a last embrace just before the dying man joins the Templar Order:

“Then he said to the countess, to whom he was always loving, kind, and good

“Kiss me now my dear: you will never do so again.” She drew close and kissed

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62 Asbridge, p. 206.
63 Asbridge, p. 208. The manors included Caversham (Berkshire) and Long Crendon (Buckinghamshire).
64 Asbridge says sixteen, while Crouch says twenty. Her parents married in August 1170 and Strongbow was dead by 1176. Therefore, any age between twelve and twenty is possible at the time of the marriage. She was the second child and became heir to her family’s lands on the death of her brother, Gilbert, in 1185. See G. Kenny, “The wife’s tale: Isabel Marshal and Ireland,” William Marshal and Ireland, ed. J. Bradley, C. Ó Drisceoil, and M. Potterton (Four Courts Press: Dublin and Portland, 2017), p. 315; Asbridge, 208; Crouch, p. 69.
him; he wept and so did she, and all the good people present shed tears of love and pity: the whole household grieved piteously at the sight.”

This description seems to indicate that at least to their households, the couple presented an image of a loving marriage. Regardless, the marriage of William and Isabel Marshal was a productive one, both domestically and politically. Their partnership preserved the rights of Isabel and enhanced those of Marshal. They were also able to protect their children’s rights and to provide them with good marriages. When Marshal married Isabel in 1189 it was not merely the creation of a loving marriage but of a noble partnership as well.

One of the more interesting facts of Marshal’s career is that he did not join the Third Crusade. This was the greatest chivalric adventure of the late twelfth century, yet Marshal stayed home attending to, in the words of Sidney Painter, “the unfamiliar duties of a great landowner, a sheriff, a royal justice, and a baron of the exchequer.” Whether this was his personal choice is unclear, as the king seems to have needed Marshal far more in England than he did in the Holy Land. The king appointed him as one of four co-regents of England under William de Longchamp, the man Richard had appointed as chancellor. Although he did not travel to the Holy Land, Marshal did accompany the king on his journey as far as Vézelay, where he met Philip Augustus before both kings departed for the Holy Land.

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66 HWM, p. 218.
67 Painter, William Marshal, p. 82.
68 Ibid, p. 83. The other three regents were Geoffrey fitz Peter, William Brewer, and Hugh Bardolf.
69 Crouch, p. 86.
The years 1189-94 were difficult ones for the Angevin polity. William de Longchamp proved an arrogant and overzealous servant of his master, bullying many barons into taking up arms against him and sending envoys to the king, demanding the haughty chancellor’s dismissal. Meanwhile, Philip Augustus, having returned from the crusade early, connived with Richard’s younger brother, John, to usurp the Lionheart and dismember the Angevin empire. To cap it all off, Richard was taken prisoner by Leopold, duke of Austria and held on the orders of the Holy Roman Emperor from December 1192 to February 1194. William Marshal was caught in the middle of these events. His brother, John Marshal, seems to have followed the party of Count John while William personally struck a middle course of publicly remaining loyal to Richard, though he tried ingratiating himself to John who was being touted as the future king. Finally, Richard was released after a ransom was paid. He returned to England briefly in 1194 before returning to France to undo the damage Philip Augustus had done to his lands. Marshal went with him and both men spent the next five years battling French forces to restore Angevin power. During this time, the two men became comrades-in-arms with Marshal serving as both soldier and diplomat for Richard. And even now, in his fifties, he still found time to demonstrate his prowess. During the siege of the castle of Milly in 1197, Marshal leapt into the dry moat and up the ladder to the aid of another knight, eventually stunning one William of Monceaux with his sword. The History has Richard say to Marshal that he was being reckless and selfish; reckless because he was a man of

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71 For Richard’s captivity, see Gillingham, Richard I, Ch. 13.
72 Crouch, pp. 90-4. Marshal seems to have preferred John to William de Longchamp and rallied to John’s side during the struggle between the two men in 1191-2.
73 Excellent accounts of this period can be found in Crouch, pp. 94-99, Asbridge, Chs. 8 and 9, Painter, William Marshal, Ch. 5 and 6, and HWM, pp. 128-149.
importance who need not throw himself into the fray in such a manner, and selfish because he prevented other, younger knights from gaining renown.\textsuperscript{74} In light of what was to happen in 1199, Richard should have taken his own advice.

In that year, the king was besieging the castle of Chalus when a crossbow bolt struck him in the shoulder. The wound became infected and he died on 6 April.\textsuperscript{75} Immediately there was a question mark over the succession, for there were two candidates for the kingship of England and the overlordship of the Angevin lands: Richard’s brother, John, Count of Mortain and Lord of Ireland; and Richard’s nephew, Arthur of Brittany.\textsuperscript{76} When the news of the king’s death reached Marshal at Rouen castle four days later, he was confronted with a choice over whom to support. The \textit{History} presents a scene between William Marshal and Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury and former Justiciar of England, a man who had served as Richard the Lionheart’s right hand man since 1193. Walter argued for Arthur saying his right was better while Marshal argued for John because he was older and would be able to preserve the Angevin empire, while Arthur, under the advice of Philip Augustus, might seek to break it up.\textsuperscript{77} Walter eventually conceded to Marshal, but he supposedly uttered to the old knight that “you will never come to regret anything you did as much as what you’re doing now.”\textsuperscript{78} The \textit{History} probably produced this speech with hindsight, but there were many reasons for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} Asbridge, pp. 249-50.
\item \textsuperscript{75} J. Gillingham, \textit{The Angevin Empire} (Arnold: London, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, 2001), pp. 86-7.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Arthur was the son of Geoffrey, duke of Brittany, the son in-between Richard and John, who had died of wounds sustained in a tournament in 1186.
\item \textsuperscript{77} M. Morris, \textit{King John: Treachery, Tyranny, and the Road to Magna Carta} (Hutchinson: London, 2015), pp. 103-5.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 105.
\end{itemize}
the Anglo-Norman barons to be apprehensive towards the accession of John, a man who possessed a thoroughly unattractive personality.79

One of the great values of the *History of William Marshal* is that it presents a chronicle account of the reign of King John through the eyes of a secular lord. Many historians of the mid-twentieth century, inclined to give John what they considered a fairer deal, dismissed many of the chronicles because they had been written by churchmen, and therefore, their opinions were colored by John’s struggle with the church from 1205 to 1213. The *History*, however, cannot be dismissed as such and it reveals the views of a man who, though he may have stayed loyal to John till the end, did not like the king and certainly did not trust him.

At first, this hostile view was not so apparent. Marshal supported John’s candidature for the throne and the new king promptly dispatched both him and Archbishop Walter to England to take oaths of loyalty to him while he assumed control of the Angevin lands in France.80 For this service, John awarded Marshal the title and lands of the earldom of Pembroke, the lost title of Isabel de Clare’s father, Strongbow. This allowed Marshal to take control of the marcher lordship of Pembroke which complemented his power in South Wales.81 All of this spoke of John’s trust in Marshal as a devoted servant of the Angevin family and his desire to have continued use of such a loyal lord.

80 Crouch, p. 101.
In 1201, after a brief visit to his and his wife’s lordship of Leinster in Ireland, Marshal returned to Normandy with John. While it seemed to many contemporaries that John would be successful in his attempt to bring peace to the Angevin world, war flared up with Philip Augustus and many of John’s barons in 1202. Marshal was not present at John’s great victory of Mirebeau, where the king captured Arthur of Brittany, his rival for the throne, and around 250 other knights. He seems to have remained with other barons who were guarding Normandy from the aggressions of Capetian Paris during this period. In 1203, however, the Angevin empire began to collapse, largely because of John’s own mistakes. His marriage to Isabella of Angoulême had alienated the powerful Lusignan family in Poitou and in 1203, it was rumored that John had murdered Arthur of Brittany while the young man was in his custody. Philip Augustus took advantage of these errors and launched an attack on all fronts against the English king. Marshal was involved in efforts to save the empire’s frontiers, particularly in Normandy. When the forces of King Philip attacked Chateau-Gaillard, Richard the Lionheart’s great castle just to the southeast of Rouen, Marshal was dispatched along with King John’s great mercenary captain Lupescar and a relief force in tandem with a royal fleet of ships coming along the Seine to relieve the castle. While Marshal and Lupescar were able to take the French camp by surprise, inflicting casualties on them, the fleet was late in arriving and William des Barres, Marshal’s knightly equivalent at the French court, launched a counterattack which defeated Marshal’s army and forced the old warrior to retreat. After dealing with the land forces, the French turned around and defeated the fleet when it subsequently

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82 Asbridge, p. 274.
arrived.\textsuperscript{84} This setback sent Angevin control in Normandy to new depths and King John was clearly panicked. On 5 December 1203, the king quit his ancestral lordship to return to England to gather more men and money. Marshal went with him.\textsuperscript{85} It was all for naught. In March 1204, Chateau-Gaillard fell to Philip’s army. The rest of Normandy soon followed. The connection between the kingdom of England and the duchy of Normandy that had been forged in the year 1066 was over. This crisis presented the Anglo-Norman barons with a stark choice: which king would they serve? If they followed John across the channel, then they might lose their ancestral French lands. Alternatively, if they stayed in Normandy, they might be required to give up their rights in England. William Marshal opted for a third choice: to become the king of England’s man for his lordships in Britain, but to render homage to the king of France for his lands in Normandy.

In 1204, John sent Marshal to negotiate with Philip Augustus. There, he made a private deal with the king. He would hand over to the French king his lands in Normandy for a one year respite and, if John was not able to reconquer Normandy, he would return and pay homage to Philip for his lands.\textsuperscript{86} The next year, King John having failed to retake Normandy, Marshal did just that. On his return to England, John was furious with him. Despite Marshal’s manifold protests that the king had given him permission to make the accord with Philip, John, according to the \textit{History} retorted “By God, I did nothing of the sort!”\textsuperscript{87} Even accounting for King John’s slippery reputation, there is no doubt that

\textsuperscript{84} Morris, \textit{King John}, pp. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{85} Crouch, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{87} Morris, \textit{King John}, p. 65.
Marshal’s homage to Philip Augustus was a breach of the chivalric code that Marshal was held to be an examplar of since he had in fact sworn liege homage to King Philip, making him Philip’s man in France when John was in need of his support in regaining the lost territories of the Angevin patrimony. When John attempted to return to France to salvage his position in Poitou and Aquitaine, Marshal refused to go. John asked his barons to deliver judgement upon this treacherous noble but they demurred, for many were in a similar position to Marshal. The king eventually relented to a degree, but he took Marshal’s eldest son, William, as a hostage for the earl’s good behavior.⁸⁸

These events occasioned William Marshal’s period of disgrace within the Angevin court. For the first time since 1182-3, he was out of royal favor. He had to find new avenues for himself and, with his growing family with Isabel de Clare, the dynasty he hoped to found. For the moment, he decided to concentrate on his estates in Wales and Ireland, power centers far away from John’s court. This proved to be particularly galling to King John since he viewed Ireland as his personal lordship in a greater way than his father or brother ever had due to his personal history with Ireland. He had almost become its king in 1177 and had been given the land as a lordship in 1185. It was thus his oldest sphere of influence.⁹⁹ Marshal’s activities in Wales and Ireland will be discussed in more detail below. Suffice to say for now that, John, because of his personal history as well as the control he wished to exert on Ireland, did not entirely leave his disgraced earl to his own devices and there was a period of conflict between them from 1207 to 1211, especially heightened during the years 1208-10. This conflict derived from Marshal’s ambitions to extend his own regional power in Ireland and John’s desire to bring the

⁸⁸ HWM, pp. 164-66.
⁹⁹ Morris, King John, pp. 29-33.
whole of the lordship into the regality of the English crown. By 1211, the feud between the two proud men began to cool and in 1212, on the eve of a possible French invasion of England blessed by the pope, Marshal returned to the king’s fold. He bade the lords of Ireland swear fealty to the king and offered his personal services to John. The king was seemingly delighted and his response to the earl was a sort of reconciliation between the two men.  

King John’s row with Marshal had been replicated many times over with many of the other barons of England. John ruled through fear, both physical and financial. His goal from 1205 to 1213 was the accumulation of money in order to win back the Angevin empire. He used many techniques to achieve this goal. He held the debt of various lords over their heads as political weapons, and when one lord, William de Briouze, refused to pay up, John destroyed him, going so far as to have Briouze’s wife and eldest son starved to death. He seized much of the property of the Church during his quarrel with the pope. Beyond the financial aspects, John also affronted his barons personally. One example is how he was rumored to have seduced the wives and daughters of his barons. By 1214, he was ready to strike back at Philip Augustus. He invaded the southwest while his ally and nephew, the Holy Roman Emperor, Otto IV, met Philip in battle at Bouvines in the northeast on 27 July 1214. However, either John invaded too early or Otto invaded too late, resulting in a lack coordination between John’s forces and those of his allies. Philip Augustus was able to divide and conquer: he sent his son and heir Louis to handle John, while he engaged the army of Otto IV in battle. Bouvines was a disaster for John: Otto was defeated and the king was forced to return to England, defeated, impoverished, and 

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at the mercy of the men he had tyrannized for nearly a decade. Very few barons rallied to his side. One who did was William Marshal, earl of Pembroke. He had returned to England and John’s court in 1213, to serve as one of the king’s most important counsellors, and in the struggle that was now unfolding between the king and much of the English baronage, Marshal would be one of the central personalities.

In 1215, much of the baronage of England joined together to bring John to account. Eventually this culminated in John’s grant of what has come to be known as the Magna Carta to his barons. Marshal’s attitude to the 1215 charter is unknown. Sidney Painter believed that William Marshal and Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury acted as the joint inspiration for the charter, but David Crouch disputes this. In keeping with the limited skills Marshal had in writing and reading, let alone the development of academic or political arguments, it would appear that Crouch is correct. Marshal’s attitude was probably more ambivalent than Painter suggested. He was loyal to the House of Anjou or Plantagenet and the person of the king, but he had been on the receiving end of John’s tyranny too often not to want to see him reined in. Both James Holt and David Carpenter, in their books on Magna Carta, present Marshal as one of the chief negotiators for the king during the crisis, but little else. Though this would have made Marshal a protagonist of the debate, he would have been second rank to the king and the baronial leaders. He seems to have acted as a go-between between the king and the barons and served as a leading counsellor to the king, as documented in the charter itself. He may

92 Morris, *King John*, Chs. 10 and 11.

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have been able to convey the general baronial attitude as well as general baronial grievances to the king.\textsuperscript{96} Indeed, some of these grievances, particularly the taking of noble hostages, were items that Marshal was already all too familiar with. There was also an element of family division in the 1215 Magna Carta for the old earl. His son, William Marshal the Younger, was on the side of the rebels and was listed as one of the twenty-five barons who were to guarantee the continuation of the charter. Marshal might have felt that his son’s allegiance was good for the family since it would keep the family on the winning side no matter how the dice came up.\textsuperscript{97} These reasons might be why the \textit{History of William Marshal} passes over the civil war leading to Magna Carta in silence.

King John had no intention of yielding to his barons. In August 1215 the pope annulled Magna Carta on his behalf. This led to civil war with the baronage, who decided that John had to be dethroned, not simply brought to heel. They invited Prince Louis, son and heir of Philip Augustus, to cross to England as their new king.\textsuperscript{98} Throughout 1215-6, John was busy trying to bring his rebellious barons into line while Louis steadily won more territory from the beleaguered English king. By October 1216, John was exhausted. He was also ill, and on the evening of 19 October, with what must have seemed like his entire kingdom up in arms against him, the king died at Newark Castle.\textsuperscript{99}

This was the most dangerous moment the Angevin or Plantagenet dynasty had ever faced. John’s heir was his eldest son Henry, a youth of nine. King John had left the boy to the care of the papacy, represented by the papal legate Guala, and to thirteen

\textsuperscript{96} Carpenter, \textit{Magna Carta}, pp. 36-7, 289, 294-5, and 299.
\textsuperscript{97} Crouch, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{99} Morris, \textit{King John}, Ch. 14.
ordainers who would see that Henry would come into his inheritance. Yet according to the *History*, John had begged those around his deathbed to make sure that Marshal became his son’s protector saying “without his help and his alone, he’ll [Henry] never govern these lands of mine.”

This was to be the most important decision of Marshal’s career. Yet which path would he choose? He had all the skills of a survivor, and a survivor would have simply joined the side of Louis and the rebel barons who, with half the kingdom in their hands, seemed on the verge of victory. He was also an old man, nearing seventy. But Marshal at his core was a Plantagenet retainer, a man who had served the royal house of England for nearly fifty years. He chose to support Henry and become in the words of one of the new king’s clerks, *rector noster et regni nostri*, or ‘our governor and the governor of our kingdom’, or regent of England. David Crouch has suggested that the Marshal seized power in 1216 in his most recent edition of his biography of the earl, but Thomas Asbridge’s interpretation rings truer to life: “It may be that he acted out of pure selfless dedication to the dynasty that he had served for the last five decades.”

Having made his decision, Marshal acted swiftly. The new king was crowned at Gloucester on 28 October and Marshal himself knighted the boy. Marshal’s official position of regent was announced the next day. On 12 November 1216, Marshal orchestrated a crucial political move in favor of King Henry III: he, Guala, and a council

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100 *HWM*, p. 186.
101 Crouch, p. 161.
102 Ibid, pp. 159-60; Asbridge, p. 342.
103 *HWM*, p. 187.
of bishops and barons reissued Magna Carta, cutting a third of its text. This at one
stroke made King Henry and the Plantagenet monarchy the defenders of the spirit of 1215
and protectors of the rights of the baronage. Prince Louis and his cabal now seemed more
like French aggressors and stooges than the so-called “Army of God.”

The winter of 1216-7 was taken up in skirmishes between the rebels and the
royalists. Finally in May 1217 the decisive engagement of the war came. Louis had
divided his army: one half went with him to besiege Dover Castle whilst an army of
barons went north to take Lincoln Castle. Marshal seized his moment. He gathered
together the bishops and barons around him as well as an army of 406 knights, 317
crossbowmen, and an undetermined number of infantry and followers. His plan was to
defeat the forces at Lincoln which would at a stroke destroy half of Louis’ army. This
was a gamble with the highest stakes. Marshal was arguably the best and most
experienced general in England in 1217 and he would have been brought up to adhere to
the medieval military tradition of avoiding major pitched battles. Instead, he actively
sought a confrontation with the French and baronial army in Lincoln. It proved to be
the best decision of his tenure as regent for Henry III.

On 20 May 1217, Marshal drew up the royalist army to the west of the city of
Lincoln. The rebels had decided not to engage with him and had retreated back into the
city. They felt confident in being able to hold out as they had 600 knights as well as a

104 D. A. Carpenter, The Minority of Henry III. (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles,
1990), pp. 22-3. Carpenter provides the best introduction to the accession of Henry III. See also Carpenter,
Magna Carta, pp. 408-9.
105 Robert fitzWalter, one of the rebel barons, had declared himself ‘Marshal of the Army of God’ in 1215
on the eve of Magna Carta.
106 Asbridge, p. 352.
large number of infantry, outnumbering Marshal’s army. However, the bishop of Winchester found that the blocked gateway on Lincoln’s western wall could be opened for the royalists to charge into the city. Marshal took his advice. He dispatched the mercenary commander, Falkes de Breauté, and a company of crossbowman to harry the French and rebel barons from the walls while the gateway was opened. He also arranged for the earl of Chester to charge in from the north gate of the city in order to assault the enemy force from all sides. Then, according to the History, Marshal made a stirring address to his troops:

“Listen now, sirs! Glory and honour are at hand! Right here and now, you can win the country’s freedom…They’re waging war on God and the Holy Church, and I swear God has placed them at our mercy. So come, make haste, let’s fall on them—the time and the hour are upon us.”

Marshal was so eager for battle, we are told, that he nearly charged through the unblocked gate without his helmet. After being reminded by his squire, the now seventy-year-old knight led his complement of the army straight through the gate. During the battle he was able to personally engage many enemy knights, including Robert of Roppesley, a former knight of King John who had betrayed the royalist cause, and Count Thomas of Perche, Marshal’s cousin and the leader of the Franco-baronial force. When Count Thomas was stabbed through the eye with a sword, he was able to get off three strokes on Marshal’s helmet before falling from his horse dead. Marshal had demonstrated his military prowess for the final time at the most critical moment and in

108 Asbridge, p. 353.
110 HWM, p. 197.
111 Crouch, pp. 166-7.
the process he had decisively beaten Prince Louis and his army. Many of the baronial rebels, such as Robert fitzWalter, Saer de Quincy, earl of Winchester, and Gilbert de Gant, had been captured during the battle. In the words of David Carpenter “The battle of Lincoln, one of the most decisive in English history, meant that England would be ruled by the Angevin [Plantagenet], not the Capetian dynasty.”112 This, combined with the reissue of Magna Carta, was the greatest achievement of William Marshal. Three months later, after the decisive defeat of Louis’s naval reinforcements by Hubert de Burgh, the French prince made peace with the regency administration of Henry III and left England in September 1217.113

William Marshal continued to serve as regent until 1219. He was not much occupied in the day-to-day government, leaving that to men with more experience. His position was more to serve as a figurehead for the regency government, an elder statesman that could be relied upon. In this, he was successful. He arbitrated disputes between barons over land and was able to come to terms with the Scots and the Welsh.114 He did not neglect the interests of his family or retainers and was able to reward them with land, but nor did he allow his family and mesnie to overawe the government of the realm as Simon de Montfort was later to do. Perhaps his greatest achievement during his final months as regent was the joint reissue, with Guala again, of Magna Carta in 1217.115

By January 1219, Marshal was ailing. He was around seventy-two and a lifetime of tournaments, war, royal service, noble ambition, and political survival had taken its

114 For the Scots and the Welsh see Asbridge, pp. 366-7; Carpenter, The Minority of Henry III, pp. 69-70. For the settlement of disputes and the Marshal’s tenure as regent in general see Ibid, pp. 50-108.
115 Crouch, pp. 169-73; Asbridge, pp. 365-7; Carpenter, Magna Carta, pp. 412-3.
toll. Eventually he moved from London to his manor of Caversham in Berkshire where he continued to assist in the management of the government of the realm until 8 April 1219 when, at a council of nobles and bishops, including the eleven-year-old Henry III, he surrendered Henry formally to the care of the new papal legate, Pandulf.\textsuperscript{116} Finally, he had the young king brought to his bedside where he issued him a stern warning:

“Sire, I pray to almighty God that...you grow to be worthy; but if you should be otherwise inclined and emulate some wicked forebear, I pray God the son of Mary will see you not live long but die before that happens.”\textsuperscript{117}

Marshal spent the last month-and-a-half of his life in the making of his will, the legacies for his wife and children, and joining the Templar Order. Finally, he died on 14 May 1219. His corpse was escorted back to London where on 20 May 1219, the second anniversary of the great victory at Lincoln, he was laid to rest in Temple Church in London.\textsuperscript{118} William Marshal had risen from a landless younger son to become the regent of England for Henry III, and the most powerful knight in the realm. He died as both perhaps the greatest soldier-statesman of medieval England who did not wear the crown and as one of the greatest exemplars of the ideals of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility.

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The question remains as to how William Marshal achieved this status. What is it about his career that led him to such heights? Does he truly deserve to be known as one of the greatest knights who ever lived?

\textsuperscript{116} Asbridge, p. 368.
\textsuperscript{117} HWM, p. 215.
\textsuperscript{118} Crouch, pp. 173-5; Asbridge, pp. 369-75.
It needs to be stated at the outset that one of the reasons William Marshal has received such accolades is because we know so much about him. There were certainly many knights before and after him who showed great prowess on both the battlefield and in the council chamber. The *History of William Marshal* is key in this respect. As perhaps the first vernacular biography written during the Middle Ages, it highlights Marshal’s own life and times.\(^{119}\) It also serves as an exemplar of the kind of chivalric culture that was emerging across Western Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The existence of the *History of William Marshal* demonstrates that Marshal’s career was extraordinary. The preceding account has shown that he rose from relatively lowly beginnings for his class to the pinnacle of wealth, power, and fame. He did it through martial skill, cold political calculation, and an abundance of good luck, and he developed a great reputation in the process. William Marshal was, and is still, held to be a great embodiment of chivalry. Here was a man who dedicated his life to the service of his lord, his king and the kingdom. No one could fault the Marshal for any lack of prowess or political acumen, yet, if one takes a closer look at his behavior away from the tilting grounds and battlefields, cracks begin to emerge in the mold of William Marshal’s edifice as a chivalric champion. To illuminate these cracks is to understand Marshal better and to answer the questions posed above about whether or not he deserves his reputation.

The first primary crack is William Marshal’s intense regard for his own advancement. To portray Marshal from the beginning as the selfless servant of the

\(^{119}\) While the *History of William Marshal* was the first real vernacular biography, certain fragments of autobiographies of certain laymen such as Fulk le Réchin of Anjou and William IX of Aquitaine do exist from the early twelfth century. They are not, however, as full and informative as the *History*, nor were they planned as real biographies. See J. Martindale, “Secular Propaganda and Aristocratic Values: The Autobiographies of Count Fulk le Réchin of Anjou and Count William of Poitou, Duke of Aquitaine,” *Writing Medieval Biography, 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow*, ed. D. Bates, J. Crick, and S. Hamilton (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2006), pp. 143-59.
Angevin dynasty is not accurate. In this Marshal was one with his class. The medieval aristocracy valued notions of family, honor, and the ability to obtain increasing wealth and power. In the words of Kim Esmark “a dynastic spirit was thus fundamental to the social identity of the knight.” But the dynastic spirit can also have less wholesome qualities, such as a too intense drive for wealth and advancement. At the beginning of his career, however, Marshal had not demonstrated this drive. His behavior during the early stages of training at Tancarville had been less than exemplary. All this had changed by 1168. By then, Marshal had experienced his omission from his father’s will (probably no great surprise) and his effective lay off from the count of Tancarville’s retinue (surely more surprising and disheartening). At this point he may have become convinced that resourceful ambition and an eye to the main chance, along with his burgeoning military skill, would be the main tools for him to succeed in life. Another catalyst for William Marshal’s ambition to succeed in life seems to have been his position as a younger son. There is a comparison to be made, however much Marshal himself would have hated it, between him and King John. They were younger sons who had a deep desire to carve out a station for themselves in the world, their place in the line of birth having robbed them of one. As such, both men seemed ready to cross others in their attempts to reach such a position in life. The main qualification here is that Marshal had a sense of honor that generally restrained him. John, unfortunately for his reign and kingdom, does not seem to have possessed such a virtue.

121 Witness him sleeping in and his penchant for goring himself on food, both recorded by *HWM*, p. 35.
122 Morris, *King John*, passim, especially Chs. 2 and 4.
Another attribute that would have motivated Marshal in terms of lineage were memories of his father. The *History of William Marshal* portrays John the Marshal as a knightly ideal for his son to emulate.\(^\text{123}\) Whether or not William Marshal loved his father is hardly provable, though the events of the siege of Newbury and being left without an inheritance when the elder Marshal died must have strained the relationship between father and son to a degree. However, David Crouch argues that the role of the medieval lordly father was not to love but to educate and protect.\(^\text{124}\) And it seems that William Marshal had a respect for his father, for it is the deeds of John the Marshal that begin the biography of his son’s life, illustrating to whom William Marshal owed the advancement of his early life. If “John [the] Marshal was the first great exemplar of lordship in his son’s life” then Marshal was provided an image of both service and acquisitiveness in equal measure.\(^\text{125}\) If to become a knight was to learn the art of service, then the act of serving oneself also imprinted itself upon Marshal’s mind in his early years.\(^\text{126}\) It would be wrong to take this idea too far. Marshal may have been interested in serving himself, but events such as his rush to Patrick of Salisbury’s aide in 1168, his defense of Henry II’s retreat in 1189, and his omission of donning his helmet as he rushed into Lincoln in 1217 demonstrate another key facet of his character: the ability to throw caution to the wind and behave as a knight-errant for a cause.

The act of matching the deeds of his father and of overcoming his initial disadvantage in heritable lands propelled Marshal into a career of knightly service. When

\(^{123}\) Esmark, “Man of honour,” p. 71.
\(^{124}\) Crouch, p. 23.
\(^{125}\) Ibid.
\(^{126}\) Esmark, “Man of honour,” p. 76.
he married Isabel de Clare, he became “a millionaire overnight” in 1189. However, it was after decades as a retainer in four different mesnies. Why had Marshal waited until his forty-second year to marry? Why he had not married Heloise of Lancaster or Denise of Chateauroux earlier? It is quite possible that Marshal’s potential fiancées were casualties of the patronage politics of Henry II’s court during the late 1180s, where the king was taking these proposals from Marshal to reward other men whose aid he needed more at certain points. It is also highly possible that William Marshal’s desire to obtain a landed estate was a rather late development. For decades Marshal seems to have been content in his role as captain and knight. Maybe his interest in securing a wealthy bride with land was due to his age and with it the notion that he was too old to make money on the tournament circuit any longer. It does seem that given his limited interest in a landed estate before the mid-1180s, Marshal’s eventual ascension to the earldom of Pembroke was more accidental than planned. Regardless, having reached the position of a great magnate, Marshal, became more ambitious and sought to extend his power and the power of his family that would eventually bring him into conflict with the Angevin dynasty.

Much of this drive was connected to his marriage to Isabel de Clare. As stated above, historians lack any real knowledge of the personal nature of their relationship. On the public stage, however, Marshal and Isabel formed a dynamic partnership in both building and extending their territorial and seigniorial power. The countess might have been the primary force in making Marshal return to their lordship in Leinster in 1207 as well as providing a source of support for Marshal’s defiance of King John during the

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Isabel appears in twenty-six of her husband’s ninety-two extant charters, around 28 per cent of those issued. Isabel de Clare also was able to exercise independent power as a dowage countess after the death of her husband, even though she outlived him for only one year. While some of these charters have generic language associated with Isabel’s role as countess, others are more revealing. In one charter, where a certain Robert le Baut had his ownership of an estate confirmed, Robert offered ten marks to Marshal and one mark to Isabel for the confirmation. In another charter, where Marshal concedes a previous grant that had been given to the Abbey of St Mary in Foucarmont in Normandy, he insists that it was with Isabel’s agreement that he made the concession. Finally, when Marshal was absent from Ireland, he gave his wife the church of Kilcullen in Kildare and said “she may do with it as she wishes.” She had a part to play in William Marshal’s personal territorial ambitions as a great aristocratic lord.

William Marshal’s territorial ambitions have received very little comment from historians. Yet there was an undeniable change in Marshal’s career when he left for Ireland in 1207. Before that, he had practiced a form of what has been referred to as rentier lordship. For magnates like Marshal this meant that profit, not governance, was

128 Crouch, pp. 118-9.  
129 All are to be found in Crouch, Acts and Letters. For Isabel’s charters as a dowager countess see pp. 185-94.  
131 Ibid, p. 122. On the last occasion, Crouch had difficulty divining whether the charter was issued during the years 1200-3 or during the years 1207-8, both occasions when Marshal was absent from Ireland, but Isabel may have been there during the first period and she certainly was during the second.  
132 David Crouch did not make much of William Marshal’s dynastic ambitions during the first edition of his biography. However he has revised his own views. See both the third edition of his biography and D. Crouch, “William Marshal in exile,” William Marshal and Ireland, ed. John et al., pp. 29-40. Thomas Asbridge concurs, suggesting that his career after 1206 was more dedicated to the pursuit of power in his domains and the securing of his family’s legacy. See Asbridge, pp. 286-290.
the primary purpose of their estates.\textsuperscript{133} Even after becoming a baron of the realm in 1189
and an earl in 1199, Marshal had still felt his place was at court, not on his estates. He
had been a \textit{curialis} since 1160 and he seems to have wanted to continue to occupy this
position even after his elevation. His feud in 1204-5 with King John after the fall of
Normandy destroyed this wish and he was then anxious to get away from the court.
Marshal’s ambitions in his lands may have begun in an attempt simply to run away from
a bad situation with the king. Having begun that way, however, Marshal quickly
dedicated himself to improving his lordship and laying the groundwork for something
akin to Marshal palatinates in Wales and Ireland. Here, the old warrior had to come to
terms with techniques of lordship such as colonization and assimilation. According to
David Crouch, colonization was “to bring your friends with you into your new lordship:
it combined policy with patronage.” Assimilation, on the other hand, “meant a new lord
persuading his followers to bundle their fortunes into his cart, and forget his
predecessors. It was also necessary to persuade them that there was no alternative route
for their ambitions—a new lord could not afford pretensions to independence.”\textsuperscript{134}
Assimilation was especially important because Marshal had entered into lordships that
had been occupied before by other noble families.\textsuperscript{135} These years in Ireland were
extremely important to Marshal’s later career. The events and trials he had to contend
with prepared him in many ways for his ultimate challenge as regent in 1216-9.

Though Ireland was essentially new territory for Marshal, he arrived as one of the
greatest lords of the land. The lordship of Leinster, which came to Marshal through his

\textsuperscript{133} D. B. Crouch, “Strategies of lordship in Ancevin England and the career of William Marshal,” \textit{The
Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood II. Papers from the Third Strawberry Hill Conference 1986},
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, pp. 16-25.
marriage to Isabel de Clare, was like other Irish lordships that had been settled in the wake of the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169-71. Marshal’s father-in-law, Richard de Clare or Strongbow, had taken Leinster when he married Aoife, princess of Leinster and had started the Clare lordship of the region. It was this lordship that William Marshal acquired when he married Isabel in 1189. In 1200, Marshal began the process of imposing his lordship on his lands in Wales and Ireland. He started in Pembrokeshire in Wales and swiftly moved to Leinster. Though awarded quite a cold reception by many of the local landowners, he was successful in starting a new settlement dubbed Newtown, which may be the modern town of New Ross on the River Barrow, which he hoped would bring options for trade into the lordship. He also granted land for the founding of two Cistercian monasteries.

The foundation charters of these monasteries reveal much of how Marshal wished his lordship to be seen in Leinster and the power he saw himself able to wield. His charter for the foundation of Duiske reads: “He grants a variety of exemptions from his jurisdiction and privileges, including exemption from his forest law for the abbey and its servants…He imposes a penalty of ten marks on any of his officers who trouble the abbey and its lands [my italics].” The foundation charter of the abbey of Tintern Parva also includes the “Concession of the abbey’s subsequent acquisitions and listed rights and privileges, including that the abbey and its lands are outside the jurisdiction of the earl’s foresters, and it is to have all justice except that of life and limbs.” What is clear from these two charters is that William Marshal had a very exalted view of his lordship in

136 Asbridge, p. 292.
137 Asbridge, p. 296.
139 Ibid, p. 175.
Leinster. It was his only lordship where the king’s power did not override his own and he was determined to exert his full rights there. The charters also show how his family fit into his plans: both were founded for the benefit of the souls of his ancestors and descendants and Duiske was founded “with the agreement of his wife Isabel.”

The mention of Isabel also brings us back to how she and the Marshal children fit into William Marshal’s dreams for his family’s future.

Isabel de Clare’s position as her husband’s seigniorial partner was confirmed during the crisis years in Ireland from 1207 to 1211. The lordship of Leinster in Ireland was crucial to Isabel’s ability to exercise power in tandem with her husband. While William Marshal may have presented himself as a very independent player with regards to his English, Welsh, and French estates, in Ireland he quite notably deferred to his wife. When Marshal was recalled to England by King John, the History of William Marshal presented Isabel as the figure to whom the knights and officials of Leinster owed service. She was, in Marshal’s words “your lady by birth, the daughter of the earl who graciously bestowed your fiefs upon you after his conquest of this land.” Thus William clearly deferred to Isabel’s own rights in Ireland. This deferral was crucial in the crisis in Leinster in 1207-8 between William Marshal and King’s John justiciar in Ireland, Meilyr fitz Henry. When Marshal was recalled to England by the king, it was Isabel he left in defense of Leinster. As the daughter and heiress of both the knight who had colonized Leinster and the granddaughter of its last independent king, she provided a link to the past. As a pregnant woman, she elicited a chivalrous response from the barons of the lordship. And as a former ward of the Angevin court, she had been taught how to exercise

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140 Crouch, Acts and Letters, pp. 89 and 175.
141 HWM, p. 169.
command over the knights and soldiers Marshal had left behind. When Meilyr fitz Henry attacked Kilkenny castle, in which Isabel was staying, she had a man lowered from the battlements to find Marshal’s knights, John of Earley and Stephen of Évreux, who arrived in time with their force to lift the siege. It was due to Isabel’s ability to hold the men and structure of Leinster together that the Marshal position in Ireland was saved in 1208. Isabel even made a point of impressing upon her husband the need to punish fitz Henry and those who had aided him, when Marshal, at first, seemed a more likely to pardon them.\footnote{Kenny, “The wife’s tale,” pp. 319-21. For the attack on Kilkenny castle see HWM, pp. 171-2.} The crisis in Leinster in 1207-8 revealed to the Angevin world that Isabel de Clare was a commanding figure in her own right. According to Gillian Kenny “blessed with a devoted husband, many children and a determined disposition, Isabel Marshal was a woman who was every bit a match for her illustrious husband—a fact that, one suspects, was not lost on William.”\footnote{Kenny, “The wife’s tale,” p. 324.}

After William Marshal’s return to Ireland in 1208, he, with Isabel at his side, set about restoring some semblance of order to his lordship. Alongside this goal, there were Marshal’s plans for his dynasty. His thoughts regarding his children’s marriages and their immediate future remained uppermost in his mind at this time. Marshal was, in the end, very successful in providing for his children. Each of his sons received some form of landed inheritance in his will, drafted in 1219. He was also able to see four of his daughters married well, with provision for the last daughter until she married.\footnote{Painter, \textit{William Marshal}, pp. 280-2. His daughters had married, respectively, the heir to the earldom of Norfolk, the earl of Gloucester and Hertford, the heir to the earldom of Derby, and the heir to the Barony of Briouze.} This speaks of his sense of dynasty, for these marriages allowed the Marshal family to expand

\footnote{Painter, \textit{William Marshal}, pp. 280-2. His daughters had married, respectively, the heir to the earldom of Norfolk, the earl of Gloucester and Hertford, the heir to the earldom of Derby, and the heir to the Barony of Briouze.}
its power and landholdings throughout medieval Britain. While Marshal’s provision for his children says much for his care for their futures, there are other signs of dynastic importance historians can see from Marshal’s dealings with his children. The charters of the Marshal family provide many answers. Throughout his life William Marshal issued a total of ninety-two acts and charters that are still extant, of which twenty-four (twenty-six per cent) make mention of his family. Though many of the charters are conventional, they do convey how powerful William Marshal’s sense of dynasty had become. Most of these twenty-four charters begin with the wording “Notification that he [Marshal] has granted for his soul and those of Countess Isabel, his wife, his ancestors, and heirs…” Whatever they may lack in affection, the acts and letters demonstrate that the Marshal heirs stood high on Marshal’s list of priorities during his later career. The History of William Marshal gives the clearest picture of Marshal’s relations with his children: we are told that he died in his eldest son’s arms just days after his daughters had bade him farewell by singing a courtly song.

Secondary to Marshal’s chivalric devotion to his family was his chivalric responsibility to his own mesnie. David Crouch has calculated that Marshal had some eighteen knights who appear regularly as witnesses to William Marshal’s charters and acts. As a product of the mesnie system itself, Marshal understood only too well that his ability to reward the loyalty of these men lay at the heart of his exercise of good

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145 An example of this is how Marshal’s eldest daughter, Matilda, married into the Bigod family which held the earldom of Norfolk. Her son Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk would lead the march on Westminster Hall in 1258 during the reign of Henry III whilst her great-nephew, Roger Bigod, the last Bigod earl of Norfolk, would face down the financial demands of Edward I’s exchequer in 1297. See Crouch, Acts and Letters, pp. 37-9.
146 All are to be found in Ibid, passim.
148 Painter, William Marshal, p. 286; Crouch, p. 140.
149 Ibid, pp. 251-5.
lordship and chivalry. His sense of this importance was drawn from his own career since he had witnessed the pressures that the members of a mesnie could bring to bear against their lord. In 1173, Henry II had dismissed some members of Henry the Young King’s household for stirring up trouble between the two. Although he was not dismissed, it is easy to believe that Marshal was one of those knights around the Young King begging for landed rewards. This situation of being a crowned and anointed king with a mesnie, but not having the power and resources to reward his following was a catalyst for the Young King’s revolt in 1173.¹⁵⁰ Even after his experiences in the Young King’s household, Marshal still could use complaint and grievance as a courtly technique to persuade his lord to give him what he wanted.¹⁵¹ The most famous example of this comes in 1188 when Marshal was summoned to serve Henry II in the war against Philip Augustus. Marshal had been complaining to Henry II about his fee as a retainer leading the king to state in the document that “You have ever so often moaned (planxisti) to me about the small fee with which I enfeoffed you.”¹⁵² In recompense, the king promised Marshal the hand of the heiress of Chateauroux, the second of the two heiresses who, through the tumults or patronage politics, he did not marry.

Marshal was thus well accustomed to the demands of a retinue and he sought to maintain the loyalty of his knights through service and reward. Even here, however, the great knight faced challenges. When he returned to England in 1208 during his crisis with King John over Leinster, the king was able to persuade two of Marshal’s knights, Peter of Prendergast and John Marshal—the earl’s own nephew—to come into his patronage with

¹⁵⁰ Strickland, Henry the Young King, pp. 127-31.
rewards in Ireland. The earl was left with only Henry Hose at his side after this debacle at court.\textsuperscript{153} His failure to hold onto two of his primary retainers, even if only for a few months, demonstrates that even a man as adroit as William Marshal in the politics of the \textit{mesnie} could stumble. However, the loyalty he extracted from his \textit{mesnie} never failed again after this event. His steward and chief knight, John of Earley, was constantly at his master’s side as was John Marshal after being forgiven by Marshal. These two men were in Marshal’s inner council during the debate over his acceptance of the protectorship of the boy king, Henry III. Whilst John of Earley seems to have considered the young king’s cause lost, John Marshal at the outset told Marshal this:

“A man, they say, who doesn’t finish what he’s started has labored in vain—his time and efforts are wasted! So do it! God will assist you, and it will bring you great honour indeed.”\textsuperscript{154}

The Marshal \textit{mesnie} proved its devotion during the war against Prince Louis and Marshal was able to reward his men handsomely for their prowess.\textsuperscript{155} John Marshal was made keeper of the forest throughout England while John of Earley was rewarded with land,\textsuperscript{156} though Earley was a man who apparently thought more of the “\textit{grant amor e de l’onor}” between himself and his master rather than material reward.\textsuperscript{157} The loyalty of one’s retainers could make or break a magnate just as the loyalty of the magnates could make or break a king. William Marshal was fortunate that he was able to cultivate such loyalty from his men, though it was by no means unreserved as the events of 1208 demonstrated.

\textsuperscript{153} Asbridge, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{HWM}, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{155} Crouch, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{156} Asbridge, p. 367.
\textsuperscript{157} “The great love and honor.” Crouch, p. 212.
The devotion that Marshal gave and extracted from both his family and his mesnie was considerable. In his lordships and estates he proved himself indeed the ideal medieval magnate, dispensing justice and patronage, rewarding his supporters and punishing his enemies, and preparing his family a place in the high aristocratic world. He had power and demonstrated its potency. But what of Marshal’s own devotion towards his own lord, the king? Was that not something that was due to his sovereign as much as the devotion of his family and retainers was due to him? This is the second great crack in Marshal’s chivalric edifice: his service to his lord was fraught with self-interest at several points.

The first case of this was the accusation of Marshal’s lèse-majesté and adultery against Henry the Young King in 1182. The accusation of adultery was certainly made, though as stated above, its veracity is to be highly doubted. The accusation of lèse-majesté, however, has a ring of truth about it. It arose from a tournament held at Lagny in November 1179. This was a tournament held to celebrate the coronation of Philip Augustus as king of France in his father’s lifetime. A large number of notable lords were there on the fields of Lagny, including the count of Flanders and the son of the count of Dreux. The Young King and his mesnie were also in attendance.  

At this tournament, Marshal, for the first time, raised his own banner and company of knights who wore his colors, not those of the Young King. During the tournament, Marshal’s company captured knights and ransoms for him, not for his lord, to the degree that he may have put the Young King’s safety in jeopardy.  

This was certainly not sporting, for many, if not most, of these men had been lent to Marshal by the Young King in order for his favorite

158 HWM, p. 74.
159 Strickland, Henry the Young King, p. 278.
knight to distinguish himself.\textsuperscript{160} The Young King (or rather, Henry II) was even paying the fees of each knight, which amounted to around twenty shillings a day.\textsuperscript{161} Finally, as if courting the disapproval of the Angevin monarchy, a member of the Marshal retinue raised the war-cry of \textit{Dex aie le Mareschal} (God help the Marshal) which was an elaboration on the old war cry of \textit{Dex aie} which had been used by the dukes of Normandy and kings of England in the 1150s.\textsuperscript{162} The story found its way into the \textit{History of William Marshal} and so perhaps contains elements of truth, given that the author wrote at some length to deflect the criticism, suggesting that Marshal had been constantly at the Young King’s side throughout the tournament.\textsuperscript{163} It must be said that the seriousness of these charges needs to be conditioned by the fact that they were leveled at William Marshal by his enemies inside the Young King’s mesnie.\textsuperscript{164} However, if he was willing to upstage the dignity and even the power of Henry the Young King—a man whom he valued above all others—he was willing to upstage anyone in his pursuit of glory and advancement.

Marshal seems to have restrained himself during his service to Henry II and Richard the Lionheart, but his relationship with King John brought out this streak in his personality again. This was John’s fault as well: unlike his father and brother, he saw his own will as more important than the honor or principles of his great men and could mistake their attitudes for treason.\textsuperscript{165} However, William Marshal let his ambition and ruthless drive for advancement lead him into situations that challenged the power and authority of the king he was supposed to counsel and protect as a great lord. Marshal’s

\textsuperscript{160} Crouch, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{161} Asbridge, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{162} Crouch, pp. 56-9.
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{HWM}, pp. 76 and 82.
\textsuperscript{164} Crouch, pp. 56-7.
homage to the king of France for his lands in Normandy has already been considered above. John’s reaction may have stung Marshal, but there is no doubt that the king himself was badly stung by Marshal’s decision to swear liege homage, which deprived him of the services of one of his greatest knights in his war against the French king. John had rewarded Marshal well, but the great magnate had seemingly turned his back on the king at a crucial time of need. Even if the king was John, his patronage of Marshal deserved better than it received.

As in France, so in Ireland: during the Marshal’s sojourn in Leinster, his actions as an independent lord provoked John’s fury. William Marshal’s arrival in Leinster offered the landholders of the region a counterbalance to the king’s officials, and a great lord who many barons may have seen as a figurehead to resist the king’s designs on Ireland. It cannot have failed to escape the king’s notice that Marshal’s maneuvers in Ireland were a direct challenge to him. The king wanted to reconfigure Ireland as a true royal lordship, making Dublin into a central base akin to Westminster in England where a royal bureaucracy would extend royal power over the great lords of Ireland. It was into this background of royal assertiveness and baronial resentment that William Marshal entered when he returned to Leinster in 1207.

By the time Marshal determined to return to his lordship, it had fallen on hard times due to the interference by King John’s justiciar in Ireland, Meilyr fitz Henry. Fitz Henry was a veteran of the conquest of Ireland in the 1170s and had become King John’s greatest asset in his attempt to extend royal power in the lordship. William Marshal was

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167 Crouch, p. 117.
perceived as dangerous to both John and fitz Henry because he presented the barons of Ireland with a figure whom they could rally behind, though he was not the only figure the king was interested in bringing to heel. The Lacy brothers—Hugh de Lacy, Earl of Ulster and Walter de Lacy, lord of Meath—were probably more responsible than Marshal for the baronial alliance against Meilyr fitz Henry, given that, unlike Marshal, they were lords who were constantly resident in Ireland.168 Nevertheless, Marshal quickly became one of the central figures among these barons. These lords sent a letter to the king in protest of the justiciar’s actions. Although Marshal’s name did not appear on the document, unlike Walter de Lacy’s, the king seemingly knew who all was to blame and his response was predictably savage. In the words of Robin Frame, “Ireland was now becoming the habitat of men whom the king mistrusted.”169 Marshal and the other lords quickly became embroiled in a bitter feud with the king and his justiciar over his lordship in Ireland. At first, the results proved disappointing for both sides.170 In 1208, Marshal returned to the royal court in England while proxies continued the struggle.171 It was during this time that John forced Marshal to surrender Leinster to him so the king could re-grant it to him with Marshal’s rights severely abridged.172 When eventually Marshal’s knights under Countess Isabel were able to defeat Meilyr fitz Henry, John was forced to let Marshal return to Ireland, although he took Marshal’s second son Richard as a

169 Frame, Colonial Ireland, p. 66.
170 Asbridge, pp. 300-9.
171 Walter de Lacy was also summoned to court and arrived before Marshal. This probably illustrates that these two men, along with William de Briouze, were viewed as the leaders of the opposition against the king. See Frame, Colonial Ireland, pp. 65-7; Morris, King John, pp. 163-5
172 Crouch, Acts and Charters, p. 479. These abridgments included the introduction of the king’s court, rather than Marshal’s, as the highest in Leinster. John also grabbed the city of Dublin and the mint associated with it.
The king recalled fitz Henry in 1209, though by this time the disgraced justiciar was no threat to any of the Anglo-Irish barons. Marshal was largely left to his affairs in Ireland and during this time he was able to build a stronger sphere of power for himself, his family, and his retainers. He not only continued his civil and ecclesiastical building projects, he also gave time over for the disciplining of the native Irish through raids.

There was a final moment of discord between the king and William Marshal in Ireland. This was in 1210, when John sailed to the lordship to destroy William de Briouze, lord of the Irish lordship of Limerick. Briouze had once been a friend of the king, but in 1207-8 the two men had turned against each other. This was largely over Briouze’s debt of 5,000 marks which was due to the king for the lordship of Limerick. The debt was unsettled, and John, suspicious now that his erstwhile ally had grown too powerful, decided to use the law of the exchequer to destroy him. At first Briouze made peace with John, but he refused to hand over his sons and the sons of many of his vassals as hostages to the king. According to one chronicler, Matilda de Briouze, William’s wife, responded to the request saying “I will not deliver up my sons to your lord, King John, because he basely murdered his nephew Arthur.” John’s reaction to this provocation was as expected. Briouze gathered an army to try to liberate his castles in south Wales from royal control, while sending orders to his seneschal in Limerick, Geoffrey Marsh, to reclaim part of Limerick, which John has granted to Walter de Lacy, whose wife was

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173 When Marshal had asked permission to leave England in 1206, John had required that Marshal give him his eldest son and heir William. Now, in 1208, John had both boys and assurance that Marshal would behave on his return to Leinster.
174 Crouch, p. 131.
175 Crouch, pp. 143-7; Asbridge, pp. 310-11.
Briouze’s daughter. Marsh attempted to retake many of Briouze’s former castles as well. The rebellion in Wales collapsed however, and Briouze fled to Ireland with his family.\textsuperscript{177}

When the Briouze family arrived, Marshal sheltered them for a time before they taken in by the Lacys. David Crouch believes that Marshal may have aided Briouze because of Briouze’s connections to the Lacy family, a family he had allied with in 1207-8.\textsuperscript{178} However, on hearing of the massive force John was preparing, Marshal, chastened from his experience with John two years earlier, returned to England and came to terms with the king even before John began his military promenade through Ireland.\textsuperscript{179} Briouze also folded. He left his family in Ireland and returned to the king’s court to make amends. The king spurned him, and went to Ireland in pursuit of the rest of the Briouze family. The family in turn fled to Scotland, but they were handed over to John’s men in the north of England. On the king’s return to England, both Matilda de Briouze and Briouze himself offered to raise money for both the family’s ransom and his own debt. John agreed, but Briouze fled to France, where he died in exile in 1211.\textsuperscript{180} The king sent representatives to tell Matilda de Briouze of this development, but the lady now demurred to pay one shilling to John given her state of poverty. This final act of defiance sealed her fate. She and her son, another William, were taken to Corfe Castle and starved to death by their vengeful king.\textsuperscript{181}

The events of 1207 to 1210 seem to have humbled William Marshal. The old earl never again seems to have made a play to gain independent power for himself in spite of

\textsuperscript{177} Crouch, p. 145; Ibid, pp. 184-7; Morris, \textit{King John}, pp. 164-7 and 181-3.
\textsuperscript{178} Crouch, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{179} Frame, \textit{Colonial Ireland}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{180} Warren, \textit{King John}, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{181} Morris, \textit{King John}, pp. 185-6.
the king. The fate of William de Briouze, his wife, and his son would have given pause to any of John’s barons who contemplated crossing him. When John called on him for aide in 1213, Marshal quickly molded back into the curialis he had been before 1205. The time in Ireland was, however, enlightening to Marshal. In these trying years, he had learned how to establish relations with other barons, how to administer a lordship, and what was required to retain the loyalty of his mesnie and followers. All these skills would be put to use when he became regent in 1216.

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William Marshal’s chivalric reputation needs to be set in the context of his aspirations in life. This context, as demonstrated above, allow Marshal to be seen for what he was for most of his life: an ambitious younger son, who wanted to build a secure position for himself and eventually his family. In this, he was partially successful since the Marshal line continued as earls of Pembroke until 1245 and a Marshal descendent held on to the hereditary office of Marshal of England until 1306.182 Whether his acquisition of a great estate was accidental or planned, it quickly became a fixture in his ambitions. His ambitions as a knight were amply fulfilled by a life on and off the tournament circuit and the battlefield. Yet, the less attractive side of Marshal’s personality is evident. His actions in 1179-82 were, according to the other courtiers around Henry the Young King, offensive. His actions against King John from 1205 to 1210 also leave, if not a black mark, then a smudge on his record. He breached his oath of loyalty to the king in France when he performed liege homage to Philip Augustus and so too again in Ireland when he put himself at the head of the barons resisting the royal

authority of John’s justiciar. He then seemingly abandoned the Briouzes and the Lacys in 1210 because he needed to survive. It is telling that the most recent historian of John’s reign commented that William Marshal’s greatest loyalty was always to himself. Given these circumstances, is it still possible to say that William Marshal was a chivalric figure *par excellence*?

The key to assessing Marshal are the events of 1216. Marshal was sixty-nine years old and had achieved the status of the *prudhomme* he had been seeking. He knew how to survive and that instinct would have told him to join the forces of Prince Louis. He had a good reputation at the court of France and lands in Normandy. If Louis won the war, as seemed likely at John’s death, Marshal could merely swear liege homage to him as he had sworn homage to his father in France and keep his lands in England, Wales, and Ireland. His son, William Marshal the Younger, was already a prominent Franco-baronial supporter which meant that the Marshal dynasty would survive his own death and be a force in Louis’ potential reign as king of England. The cause of young Henry III seemed hopeless and the royalists were deficient in castles, men, and money to fight the aggressive French prince. When laid out like this, the choice seems obvious. But William Marshal did not make it. Instead, the old knight rallied to the Plantagenet dynasty he had served for five decades. Perhaps it was an attempt to wash away the sins of his younger willful self. Perhaps it was the memory of the good kings—Henry the Young King, Henry II, and Richard the Lionheart—that he had served that convinced him to rescue the son of the hated King John. Above all, perhaps it was the selfless

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184 According to the *History of William Marshal*, King Philip Augustus described William Marshal as the most loyal knight he had ever seen while William des Barres thought he had known no finer knight. See *HWM*, pp. 225-6.
dedication of an old man to the ideals of chivalry and service that motivated him throughout his life. William Marshal was a great knight on the eve of 1216. With his saving of Magna Carta and his victory at the battle of Lincoln, he became the greatest knight of his age. If William Marshal had been a prudhomme in the eyes of his contemporaries before 1216, he became one in the eyes of posterity during the events of 1216-9. If William Marshal had hitherto only superficially executed the duties of service and loyalty that were essential to chivalry, knighthood, and nobility in the Middle Ages, his actions in throwing his own safety and future to the wind showed him at his most loyal and dedicated as a knight. It was in 1216 that William Marshal became the champion of chivalry that he is still remembered as today.

As David Crouch has stated “the good end counted for everything.”\(^{185}\) In 1219, Marshal certainly made a good end. That was recognized by his contemporaries and by posterity. Around twenty years after his death, the tenants of Caversham, where Marshal had died, described him as “the noble man of holy memory…the Lord William Marshal, not just a good man but the finest of them all.”\(^{186}\) It is the epitaph of the Archbishop of Canterbury, given at the old knight’s funeral in 1219, however, which best sums up the life of William Marshal, a life that exemplified chivalry, knighthood, and nobility: “the greatest knight to be found in all the world.”\(^{187}\)

\(^{185}\) Crouch, p. 250.  
\(^{186}\) Ibid.  
\(^{187}\) Asbridge, p. 375.
CHAPTER THREE

Simon de Montfort

John Maddicott described Simon de Montfort as “a superb soldier, an ardent religious idealist, and a forcefully able politician, [who] won the friendship and loyalty of some of the greatest men of his day; yet he was also ambitious and avaricious, and determined to build a position for himself and his family from the opportunities which came with power.”¹ Historians have been divided on Simon de Montfort since the day he fell in battle at Evesham. Within months of his death, his legacy had become the topic of conversation. Perhaps it was the monks of Peterborough Abbey who best captured the spirit of the debate: “some said that [the earl] was a good man, others that he was not but that he stirred up discord.”² Simon de Montfort’s legacy is controversial due to the role he played as leader of a political movement that sought to bring better governance to the kingdom of England, while he simultaneously exploited his quasi-regal position for personal gain. Most historians have had very little sympathy for him due to these issues. The task of analyzing Simon de Montfort in a chivalric light poses the question of how important chivalry was for him in his political and personal career, and how chivalric prowess and good lordship fitted into that career. A better appreciation of Simon de Montfort as a thirteenth-century embodiment of the notions of chivalry, knighthood, and

¹ Maddicott, p. i.
nobility could perhaps go some way towards clarifying his contradictory image in historical circles.

Simon de Montfort was born around the year 1208, most likely on his family’s ancestral estate of Montfort l’Amaury in the Ile de France. Like William Marshal, the exact date and place of his birth is unclear because of his position within the family: he was the third of his parent’s four sons. The earliest extant notice of Simon appears in a grant made by his mother, Alice de Montmorency, in 1217. Simon de Montfort’s life before his journey to England in 1230 is shadowy at best.

Most historians and biographers have concentrated upon Simon’s lineage, especially his parents. His father, another Simon de Montfort, was imbued with a highly developed sense of religious faith that led him on crusade twice in his life. His participation in the Fourth Crusade in 1204 was abandoned once Simon discovered that the crusade was to be directed against the Christians of the Byzantine Empire at Constantinople rather than the Muslims in the Holy Land. Five years later, however, he would be called to play the role of leader of another crusade, this one directed at the Cathar heresy of southern France. This was the infamous Albigensian Crusade.

From 1209 to 1218, Simon de Montfort’s father battled his way across the Languedoc from Béziers to Toulouse, winning victory after victory. Throughout these years, the elder Simon proved himself to be a superlative general, winning one of the

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4 Maddicott, p. 4.
most improbable victories of the Middle Ages at the Battle of Muret, where, outnumbered by around three to one, he decisively defeated the combined armies of count Raymond VI of Toulouse and king Peter II of Aragon.⁷ Along with these military victories, Simon de Montfort also managed to take possession of the county of Toulouse and duchy of Narbonne.⁸ The prestige of Simon de Montfort had reached such a pitch by 1210 that according to the Dunstable Annales Monastici, the barons of England, already locked in the struggle with King John that would lead to Magna Carta, decided to depose John and elect Simon de Montfort as king in his place. By all accounts, therefore, the elder Simon de Montfort was the picture of the ideal Christian knight, greatly mourned when he fell before the siege of Toulouse in 1218.

Alongside the religious and military repute of Montfort’s father stood the piety and strength of will of his mother, Alice de Montmorency.⁹ She was as well connected as her husband, and through her, Simon could claim descent from William the Conqueror.¹⁰ She was as fiercely pious as the elder Simon being, like him, a friend of the Dominican order. If Montfort’s father provided him an image to aspire to, his mother further complemented it. Montfort would follow them both throughout his career in many ways. Like his father, he would become famous as a worthy man-at-arms, perhaps the most famous warrior of his generation in England. Like his mother, his religion would be fierce. Alice de Montmorency had imprisoned the Jews of Toulouse in 1217; Montfort

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⁸ Labarge, Simon de Montfort, p. 20.
⁹ For what follows, see Maddicott, pp. 5-6.
¹⁰ Alice was descended maternally from an illegitimate daughter of King Henry I of England. See Maddicott, p. 5.
would expel the Jews from his borough of Leicester in 1231-2.\textsuperscript{11} Both of his parents had exhibited the so-called traits of the Montfortian inheritance: “deep religious faith, vigorous military ability, and enormous ambition.”\textsuperscript{12}

From the charter granted by his mother in 1217 to his arrival in England, we know the barest minimum of Simon de Montfort’s activities. It is certain that by 1221 both of his parents were dead. His eldest brother Amaury took over their father’s role as leader of the Albigensian Crusade, and probably served as Simon’s guardian. Under Amaury’s guidance, Montfort might have played a part in the renewed war against the Cathars in 1226-9, this time led by the Capetian monarchy under Louis VIII. By 1230, however, Montfort had quit the field and had decided to try his luck in an altogether different arena and for an altogether different goal. That year he sailed for England to pursue his family’s rather tenuous claim to the earldom of Leicester.

The claim to the earldom of Leicester derived from his father who had his claim from his mother Amicia, sister and co-heiress of Robert de Beaumont, the last of the Beaumont earls of Leicester, who died in 1204. The elder Simon had visited England in 1205-6 and the lands of the earldom of Leicester were formally apportioned between him and Margaret, wife of Saer de Quincy, earl of Winchester in 1207.\textsuperscript{13} However, due to the strained relationship between the Plantagenet and the Capetian crowns during the 1210s, Simon’s half of the Leicester lands were placed under the control of the sheriffs of Warwick and Leicestershire, making it quite unlikely that Simon or his heirs would

\textsuperscript{11} Maddicott, pp. 6, 15, and 56-8.
\textsuperscript{12} Labarge, \textit{Simon de Montfort}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{13} Maddicott, p. 3.
actually inherit these lands.\textsuperscript{14} Despite this dismal prospect, the title of earl of Leicester seems to have been retained by Simon de Montfort after 1207: Pope Innocent III continually referred to Simon de Montfort as earl of Leicester in his communications with him throughout the Albigensian Crusade.\textsuperscript{15} The title of steward of England—a title which would underpin much of the younger Montfort’s positioning of his role during 1264-5—also remained with the elder Simon.

In 1215, King John, in need of noble support and desperate to keep on side the allies he already had, awarded Ranulf, earl of Chester with the Montfort portion of Leicester. It appears the pope himself recommended that Ranulf take seisin of the Leicester lands because he was Simon’s nephew.\textsuperscript{16} In 1218, however, with Simon de Montfort’s death at the siege of Toulouse, the claim to the title of earl of Leicester along with that of steward of England fell first to Montfort’s older brother, Amaury. Amaury made an attempt to acquire the earldom in 1227. He had, however, by then been made constable of France. This was a position of enormous significance at the French court and Henry III, who wanted to reconquer the Angevin lands lost by his father, rebuffed Amaury’s claim. The younger Simon de Montfort saw an opportunity in this, however. In 1229-30, with seemingly no prospect in France, Simon bought his brother’s claims in England by ceding his own claims to lands in France to Amaury, along with a sizeable payment of around £500.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{footnotes}
16 Ibid; Bémont, p. 3.
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In February 1230, Montfort traveled to England to lay his case for the acquisition of the Leicester estates at the feet of Henry III. While Montfort later claimed that his first request had been denied, the king was in fact receptive to Montfort’s claims. Beyond his legitimate rights to half of the Leicester inheritance, Montfort had many other notable qualities. He had, as the chronicle of William de Rishanger noted, a “pleasant and courteous way of speaking.”

Montfort was already developing into an intensely religious man and Henry, one of the most pious of England’s medieval kings, undoubtedly found such a quality attractive in a potential ally. Montfort’s greatest attribute in the king’s mind, however, seems to have been his French connections which, unburdened by any oath of feudal loyalty to the Capetian crown, might be useful in Henry III’s efforts to reconquer the former Angevin Empire.

Montfort’s negotiations for the Leicester inheritance continued throughout the first half of 1230. On 8 April 1230, the king wrote to Montfort that he had heard his (Montfort’s) wishes “to enter the king’s service both in England and abroad.” As the king was, at that moment, engaged in the plans for a campaign into Brittany to recover the Angevin lands, Montfort’s overture was welcomed. Montfort was promised 400 marks per annum to sustain his position until he had “recovered the earldom of Leicester, in accordance with the agreements made between them when Simon came to find him in England.”

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18 Rishanger, p. 6.
19 For Montfort’s developing religious attitudes, see Maddicott, Ch. 3.
21 Bémont, p. 5.
The arrangement between Montfort and Henry III looked to be a sorted affair, but Montfort eventually decided that he could not wait for the Leicester estates to become available and traveled to the castle of St. James de Beuvron in Brittany to make a direct appeal to Ranulf of Chester, who held his reversion of the Leicester estates. Here again, fortune smiled on the young knight. Ranulf was one of the greatest lords of early thirteenth-century England, ruling his lands between England and Wales “as an independent sovereign” in the words of Margaret Labarge. He was also one of the great Anglo-Norman lords as viscount of the Avranchin on the border between Normandy and Brittany. Finally, from 1189 to 1199, Ranulf was duke of Brittany in right of his wife, Constance, widow of Henry II’s son Geoffrey. This accumulation of lands, titles, and power bears out the claim of his biographer that Ranulf was one of the last relics of the Norman Conquest. After reaching an understanding at a meeting in Normandy, the pair traveled back to England and journeyed to Painscastle in the Welsh Marches. It was here in August 1231 that Henry III received Montfort’s homage for his half of the Leicester inheritance. The young knight thus became dominus de Leicestrie or lord of Leicester.

Simon de Montfort quickly set about establishing his lordship in his new lands. Seemingly, his first act in 1231-2, following in the footsteps of his mother, was the expulsion of the Jews from the town of Leicester, the caput of Montfort’s feudal honor. Montfort’s given reasons for the expulsion of the Jews from Leicester was the betterment of his soul and to aid the burgesses of Leicester, freeing them from supposed Jewish

22 Maddicott, p. 9.
25 Alexander, Ranulf of Chester, pp. ix and 101-2.
26 Maddicott, pp. 9 and 15.
usury. It was an act that combined religion and good lordship in equal measure. While modern mindsets may deplore Montfort’s actions, in the thirteenth-century actions taken against Jewish populations were far from uncommon. Robert Grosseteste, the future bishop of Lincoln, confidant and friend of Montfort, approved of the young lord’s actions. Montfort’s attitudes towards the Jews would remain the same throughout his career: in 1253, in another charter to the burgesses of Leicester, he stated that neither during his life nor the lives of his heirs reaching all the way “to the end of the world” would any Jew dwell in Leicester. In 1263, at the height of his rebellion against Henry III, Montfort aided and abetted the massacre of many members of the Jewish population in London, helping himself to their wealth as he did so.27

Margaret de Quincy’s continued possession of the other half of the Leicester inheritance illustrates one issue that would plague Montfort throughout his early years in England, namely his limited financial status as a baron. In the period from 1231-5, Montfort’s income from the honor of Leicester stood at around £500.28 While not small in terms of a landed income for a baron, Montfort also had debts to his brother Amaury of £500 and to Ranulf of Chester of £200.29 Henry III understood Montfort’s predicament and tried to ease his path. In addition to the 400 marks per annum that Henry had granted Montfort in 1231, between 1236 and 1244 he made landed grants to Montfort from the Terra Normannorum, lands that had theoretically fallen to the king of England’s control when Normandy had fallen to the Capetians in 1204. However, even if they could be

28 For a breakdown of the various parts and values of the honor of Leicester, see Maddicott, , pp. 47-9.
29 Ibid, p. 16.
collected, these new revenues amounted only to an additional £100.\(^{30}\) His revenues in the mid-1230s left Montfort little room to pay his debts, to exercise lordship by financial inducements to his tenants, or the ability to recruit and maintain a *mesnie* or affinity. One way to solve this headache was to find a suitable wife of means.

Montfort began searching for a wife during the mid-1230s. He seems to have first set his sights on Mahaut, the dowager countess of Boulogne. In 1236-7, however, he began to seriously contemplate marriage to Joanna, the countess of Flanders. This marriage would have made Montfort the count of Flanders by right of his wife, turning him into one of the greatest lords of France. Evidently, the French crown was wary of him fitting into that role for both marriages seem to have been blocked by Blanche of Castile, regent for her young son, Louis IX.\(^{31}\)

Montfort’s search for a wife ended in January 1238 when he married a woman of even higher status than Mahaut of Boulogne or Joanna of Flanders. She was Eleanor, sister of Henry III. Eleanor was herself already a widow. She had married William Marshal the Younger, earl of Pembroke (c.1190-1231), in 1224 as part of a pact made between her brother and Earl William. William died after only seven years of marriage in 1231.\(^{32}\) In 1234, Eleanor took a vow of celibacy, promising to live the remainder of her life without a husband. This had been no simple, quiet oath. It had been presided over by Archbishop Edmund Rich of Canterbury, one of the most pious churchmen of the age. In the ceremony, Eleanor had been given a ring and had adopted simple clothes in deference

\(^{30}\) Ibid, p. 49.  
\(^{31}\) Maddicott, pp. 17-8.  
to her vow. Given these circumstances, her marriage to Simon de Montfort in 1238 was extraordinary and begs an explanation.

In January 1238, at the time of Montfort’s marriage, the king seems to have supported the pair. However, there were several odd things about the marriage. It was performed in secret (a *matrimonium clandestinum* in the words of the chronicler Matthew Paris) in a small chapel within the king’s chamber at the palace of Westminster. It had been officiated by one of Henry’s chaplains, not a great prelate, and the great magnates had not been consulted about the wedding. So many were in the dark that it was even said that the king’s brother, Richard of Cornwall, had no knowledge of the marriage until it had become a *fait accompli*. In response, he briefly rose in rebellion along with Gilbert Marshal, earl of Pembroke (the brother of Eleanor’s late husband).

Before his marriage, Montfort had been one of the leading lights of the English court. He had been prominent since 1234 and by 1236 was so close to the king that Henry had allowed him to refer to himself as earl of Leicester, even though the king had not yet granted him the title. He tied second with the earl of Lincoln in the witnessing of royal charters in 1236–7, and was appointed to negotiate with the Scots on the king’s behalf in the latter year. All of this spoke to Montfort’s strong connection with the court of Henry III and the king himself. The rewards kept flowing. In the first half of 1239 he witnessed more charters than any other baron and was one of only three earls present at the baptism of Henry’s new son and heir, Edward, in July of that year. Most pertinently

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34 Maddicott, p. 21. For the revolt and Montfort’s reaction to it, see Labarge, *Simon de Montfort*, p. 49.
Montfort must have felt that he had reached a pinnacle of achievement, yet the relationship that had so far served him so well was soon to face a crisis. The catalyst was Montfort’s debt of 2,000 marks to Thomas of Savoy, uncle of Henry III’s queen, Eleanor of Provence, and a friend of the king. It seems that Thomas had taken on much of a debt of 2,800 marks that Montfort already owed to Peter of Dreux, the new count of Brittany.37 Presumptuously, Montfort named the king as security for his payment to Thomas. When Thomas of Savoy arrived in England in August 1239 to claim his money, it was the first time Henry had heard of it.38 At the churching of Queen Eleanor following the birth of the Lord Edward, Henry confronted Montfort publically over the debt. In Montfort’s own recollection, written down thirty years later, he said that the king demanded that he should pay the debt. Montfort replied he would, if the debt was his, but asked that justice should be done to him over it, claiming he was “the poorest man in [Henry III’s] kingdom.” According to Montfort, Henry “refused, with ugly and shameful words which it would be painful to recall.” Henry threatened to have Montfort locked in the Tower, but was dissuaded from doing so by Richard of Cornwall. Montfort quickly left England for France in the company of his wife.39 The debt was eventually satisfied when Henry III said he would remit 500 marks and levied the remaining 1,500 marks on Montfort’s lands. Yet Montfort claimed this was punitive

36 Ibid, p. 23.
37 For the financial history behind this debt, see Maddicott, p. 24; Labarge, Simon de Montfort, pp. 54-5; Bémont, pp. 60-1.
38 Maddicott, p. 25.
39 Bémont, p. 61.
as he was soon to embark on crusade and consequently had to sell part of his lands and forest.\textsuperscript{40}

If Henry III had confined his anger to the payment Montfort owed to Thomas of Savoy, the crisis might have been short lived. As it was, his anger had reached such a pitch that according to Matthew Paris, Henry exclaimed “You seduced my sister before her marriage. When I discovered this I gave her to you, though unwillingly, to avoid scandal.”\textsuperscript{41} These were apparently the words that Montfort had thought were “ugly and shameful,” and this charge seems to have been uttered before Henry even brought up the issue of Montfort’s debts. These were certainly words uttered in anger and later both Montfort, and especially Henry, would have cause to wish that they had never been said. Throughout his life, Montfort remained sensitive to the circumstances of his marriage.

In March 1238, Montfort had gone to Rome, with the king’s blessing, to ask Pope Gregory IX for absolution for having married Eleanor after her vow of celibacy. He gained absolution from the pope, but other clerics in England were not so forthcoming. According to the \textit{Lanercost Chronicle}, Archbishop Edmund Rich, who had presided over the Eleanor’s vow ceremony, was forced to flee England due to his opposition to Montfort and Eleanor’s marriage. On his way towards the coast, he stopped near London and allegedly cursed Eleanor and all her progeny.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, p. 61 and Labarge, \textit{Simon de Montfort}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{41} Maddicott, p. 25
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Chronicon de Lanercost}, ed. by J. Stevenson (Maitland Club: Edinburgh, 1839), pp. 390-40; Labarge, \textit{Simon de Montfort}, pp. 48-9. This curse was part of a literary tradition in the Middle Ages and may be viewed skeptically. A similar curse was allegedly uttered by the bishop of Fens, who said that the all five of William Marshal’s sons would die without heirs. See \textit{Matthaei Parisiensis, Monarchi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora}, ed. H. R. Luard (7 vols., Rolls ser., 1872-83) vol. iv, pp. 492-5. Hereafter Paris.
Doubts about the marriage may have festered for decades and been unleashed after the battle of Evesham. As is well known, after he fell in battle, Montfort’s corpse was mutilated and dismembered. Montfort’s testicles were chopped off and placed over his nose. This was all ordered and overseen by the Lord Edward, the future Edward I. It is possible that the removal of Montfort’s testicles was an act of revenge for Montfort having seduced Edward’s aunt, Eleanor. Even if Eleanor herself had been complicit in her seduction, which seems to have been Henry III’s view in 1239, Edward may have viewed Montfort’s possible seduction of her as a sexual crime against the Plantagenet family. Of course, the mutilation of Montfort’s corpse may just as likely reflect outrage at the lèse-majesté of Montfort’s rule from 1264-5.

Taken together, the evidence of Montfort’s mutilation, read alongside the absolution of the pope, the irregularities of the marriage ceremony, the opposition of the clergy, and Henry’s own accusation, make the suggestion that Montfort and Eleanor had engaged in a sexual affair which resulted in their secret and rushed marriage seem plausible. Montfort himself seems to have had doubts about the propriety of his marriage; he never seems to have denied the charge that Henry had made, significant for a man of extreme piety and self-righteousness,

When Montfort and his wife fled England in 1239, he had been in the midst of preparing to embark on crusade. Many other figures throughout Europe were also attracted to crusading in 1239-41. Richard of Cornwall led his own contingent to the

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44 Wilkinson, Eleanor de Montfort, p. 71. Eleanor had been barred from attending the churching just as her husband had and Henry’s remarks about her possible seduction had been made in public in front of her, slurring her honor a great deal. However, Maddicott does say that the marriage can be explained outside of the accusation of seduction. See Maddicott, pp. 26-7. The real truth will likely never been fully known.
Holy Land in 1240 alongside Montfort, and both men were following an even larger contingent of crusaders from France that had departed in 1239. Among the leaders of this first expedition was Montfort’s older brother, Amaury. In the event, the expedition to the Holy Land known as the Nobles’ Crusade failed to achieve anything substantial. Amaury de Montfort was taken prisoner in the battle of Gaza in November 1239, though he was later released through the efforts of Richard of Cornwall. Richard then went on to conclude negotiations with the sultan of Egypt which aided in the stabilization of the crusader states of Outremer. Montfort, like Richard of Cornwall, seems not to have seen much fighting, but he was acclaimed by the “barons, knights, and citizens” of the kingdom of Jerusalem who asked their current king, Frederick II, that Montfort be appointed as governor until Frederick arrived. Although this offer never seems to have materialized, it speaks to the regard in which Montfort was held by many throughout medieval Christendom.

By 1241, Montfort was in Burgundy, where he received a summons to join Henry III’s campaign to recover Poitou. Montfort came grudgingly, still nursing his grievance against Henry for the sale and deforestation of the lands he had had to commit to pay his debt to Thomas of Savoy. The campaign itself was a disaster: the king was forced to retreat from Taillebourg to Saintes and fought a desperate rearguard action in order to make it safely to the latter city. Montfort was one of a very few barons who distinguished

45 Maddicott, p. 30; Bémont, pp. 62-4.
47 Maddicott, p. 30.
themselves in the retreat to Saintes, but he was unable to contain his frustration with Henry, allegedly telling the king to his face that he deserved to be locked up like the incompetent Carolingian king, Charles the Simple.

The Poitou campaign of 1242-3 was the beginning of a new dimension in the relationship between Henry III and Simon de Montfort. While Henry seemed ready to move on from their quarrel of 1239, Montfort may have been less receptive to these peaceful overtures. His outburst about Charles the Simple showed that he did not respect Henry III and was bold enough to say so to his face. The relationship might have cooled there and then, but for Henry III’s generosity. The payment of Eleanor’s dower as the countess of Pembroke was arranged in a more beneficial manner and £1,944 of the couple’s debts were cancelled in 1244. One of the larger grants that Henry made to Montfort in 1244 was custody of the castle of Kenilworth and the manor of Odiham, both of which were transferred into life grants by 1253.

Throughout the 1240s, Montfort’s political role was enlarging as well. The decade was a frustrating one for Henry III. The Poitou campaign of 1242-3, which the magnates had refused to support with a tax grant, had thrust a debt of £15,000 onto the king’s shoulders. A Welsh campaign undertaken in 1245 added even more to this debt. In 1244 Henry attempted to recoup the financial position of the crown through the exploitation of the administration of the royal forest and the use of eyres (judicial visitations by royal

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48 According to Matthew Paris, the “fierce valour” of the earls of Leicester, Salisbury (William Longespée was the heir to the earldom, but never held the title because he died before his mother), and Norfolk might have changed the outcome of the battle had there been more English knights present. See Bémont, p. 66.
49 Maddicott, p. 31-2; ibid, p. 32.
50 Ibid, p. 33.
51 Maddicott, p. 33.
52 CPR 1232-47, p. 419; CPR 1247-58, pp. 5 and 250.
judges which often made a tidy profit for the royal coffers). This in turn led parliament to try and gain control over some aspects of the royal government, culminating in the so-called Paper Constitution of 1244. When Henry again asked for a tax and was again refused, the barons and prelates elected a committee of four prelates, four earls, and four barons. The committee demanded the reappointment of various officers: the justiciar, chancellor, and treasurer. Magna Carta was to be revised and its observance enforced by four counsellors elected by the Great Council (a term for the magnates and prelates in parliament). Two of these counsellors were to remain with the king at all times. The justiciar and chancellor were to be chosen by the Great Council. This plan would have effectively placed the control of king’s council, officers, and administration in the hands of parliament. Unsurprisingly, Henry III refused to agree to its terms.

Simon de Montfort’s connection with the Paper Constitution is difficult to ascertain. He was elected as one of the four earls on the proposed committee of twelve alongside Richard of Cornwall. It is, however, unlikely that Montfort was highly involved in these governmental stirrings. He was still close to the court and just before the advent of the Paper Constitution, he had been selected alongside other courtiers such as Peter of Savoy, another of Queen Eleanor’s relatives, to represent the king’s case in a public appeal for taxation before parliament in 1244.

From 1244 to 1248, Montfort could frequently be found at Henry III’s side. He participated in the Welsh campaign of 1245. Two years later the king sent him as an

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53 See Maddicott, p. 34 for other areas of financial exploitation used by Henry III.
56 Bémont, pp. 69-70; Maddicott, p. 36.
 ambassador to the court of King Louis IX of France on the king’s “very secret business.”

During the same period, however, Montfort began to drift from the court, witnessing fewer and fewer royal charters after 1245. Instead of political matters in parliament or Henry III’s court, Montfort demonstrated renewed interest in going on crusade. Louis IX had taken the cross in December 1244 after recovering from a deadly illness. Other English magnates, such as William Longespée, heir to the earldom of Salisbury and a participant in the Nobles’ Crusade, took the cross in May 1247. Montfort took his vow later in the year and made plans to join Louis IX’s army before it departed. In the end, though, Montfort did not embark on the seventh crusade. Henry III instead gave him another task: in 1248, Simon de Montfort was appointed as the king’s lieutenant in Gascony to try and bring the lordship back under royal control.

Gascony was part of the great duchy of Aquitaine that had come to the English crown when Eleanor of Aquitaine had married Henry of Anjou in 1152. Gascony had never been an easy land to govern. Both the towns and the nobility had far more independence than their counterparts in England. Ducal power, given the limited number of castles and the scattered landholdings of the duke himself, did not offer the prospect of firm control. In the words of Charles Bémont, the nobles “rushed around the king when he was present, and despised his authority when he was far away.” Added to

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57 Ibid, p. 71 n.1. According to Matthew Paris, this secret business may have been the fact that Louis, about to depart on the Seventh Crusade, wanted to restore Normandy to the king of England because he felt this was an unjust seizure. This was opposed by the French magnates, and if it had even been a valid proposal at all, it came to nothing.

58 Powicke, The Thirteenth Century, p. 110; Maddicott, p. 106.


60 Maddicott, p. 107; Bémont, p. 73.

61 Ibid.

these difficulties was the constant threat of invasion that Gascony was facing from the crowns of Navarre, Castile, Aragon, and France in the 1240s.

Henry III had experienced these difficulties personally during the campaign in 1242-3, when he had marched against the king of Navarre on the one hand, while simultaneously working to convince Gaston de Béarn, one of the great nobles of Gascony, to return to his allegiance with large donations of gifts. Gascony might have seemed quieted when the king left in 1243, but he quickly found this to be a superficial reading of events. The king of Navarre invaded again in 1244, Gaston de Béarn ravaged ducal territory throughout 1245, various nobles around Bordeaux waged war on one another, and forces from the town of Blaye fought a pitched battle with the troops of the viscount of Fronsac. By 1248, Henry had had enough and resolved to bring Gascony back under royal control. He first appointed Richard de Grey as seneschal of Gascony, giving him enlarged powers to bring the duchy into line. Grey, however, soon realized that the scope of the task was beyond him and it was decided that Simon de Montfort should be the one to replace him.

Montfort was not at first ready to accept the role of king’s lieutenant. Eventually pressure from the king, the queen, and the council convinced him to accept the task, but on certain conditions. He was to have control of Gascony for seven years, the revenues of the duchy for his expenses, and reimbursement for the building of additional castles to secure royal control of the duchy. In the event he had to fight a war on multiple fronts, Henry III further undertook to provide him 2,000 marks and fifty knights at his own

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63 Bémont, p. 74.
65 CPR 1247-58, p. 10.
The primary purpose of Montfort’s role was clearly seen to be military. He had, in effect, been given vice regal powers as military governor over Gascony and the men and material to enforce coercion of its towns and nobles should the necessity arise.

Montfort’s first moves were diplomatic rather than military, however. He had not only been selected for his role in Gascony because of his abilities as a soldier, but also because of his experience in diplomacy and his standing within the kingdom of France. With his men and money, he made for the court of France at Lorris. On 20 September 1248, Montfort managed to convince the regent, Blanche of Castile, to extend the truce until the 21 December. He was also able to persuade the king of Navarre to submit his quarrels with Henry III to arbitration between representatives of the two kings. With the borders of Gascony safe from external threats, Montfort left for Bordeaux in November 1248 to take up his duties.

From 1248 to 1252, Simon de Montfort was heavily engaged in trying to tame the unruly Gascons. By 1250, he had restored such order to Gascony that the chaplain of Alphonso of Poitiers, after a visit to Montfort in Gascony, reported that “he [Montfort] holds Gascony in good estate and all obey him and dare not undertake anything against him.” Many may have wondered, however, if the cure was almost as bad as the disease. For example, when Montfort arrived at Dax during his tour of the four judicial courts of Gascony, accompanied by his large military retinue, he had several knights arrested

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66 Maddicott, pp. 108-9 ; Bémont, pp. 75-6.
68 Bémont, “Simon de Montfort, Comte de Leicester,” p. 244.
69 Maddicott, p. 110.
70 Charles Bémont has covered this part of Montfort’s career in greater detail than any other historian. See, Bémont, pp. 73-128 and Bémont, “Simon de Montfort, Comte de Leicester,” pp. 241-277 for the full history of Montfort’s involvement in Gascony.
71 Maddicott, p. 112.
without trial, forced them to hand over their fortresses, and would not release them until they had agreed to pay ransoms. When some of the burgesses of Dax were treated in the same arbitrary fashion by having their privileges violated, they complained to Montfort personally. His response, according to Charles Bémont, was to the point: “had they not set themselves outside the law by disturbing the public peace?” In the civic quarrel between the Colom and Delsoler families in Bordeaux, he sided with the former and imprisoned members of the latter as well as seizing their property—including their vineyards. Montfort’s seizure and despoliation of vines, so central to the economy of Gascony, became one of the central charges against him in the eyes of his Gascon enemies. As a final affront to the political independence of the Gascon nobility, Montfort captured Gaston de Béarn and sent him to England to face Henry III.

Thus Montfort may have restored order to Gascony, but it was becoming increasingly clear that he could only impose a degree of control on the duchy through risking revolt. Henry III was becoming increasingly unnerved by the reports that he was receiving that Montfort was tyrannizing his Gascon subjects. The king was also having difficulty providing Montfort money for his expenses in Gascony. The lieutenant had to draw on his own estates to provide funds for his efforts on behalf of the king. Eventually Montfort’s methods provoked Henry’s wrath and when Montfort returned to England again in 1252, he faced a “trial” in the presence of the king and the great magnates.

72 Bémont, p. 77.
74 Maddicott, p. 111.
75 Ibid, pp. 112-3.
The trial, which was held in the refectory of Westminster Abbey, was an extraordinary affair. The archbishop of Bordeaux and the Gascon delegation alleged that Montfort had behaved in a tyrannical manner; Montfort replied that the Gascons were traitors and he had dealt with them in the manner they deserved. Furthermore, Montfort said, the king had not honored his fixed term as lieutenant, undermined his authority, and had not met his financial obligations. Montfort again showed how tactless he could be when he accused Henry III of not being a Christian. Henry’s response to this attack on his deeply held piety was to fume that he had never regretted any decision so much as the one to allow Montfort into England and to hold lands from him. However, if Henry III and the Gascons were of the same mind regarding Montfort’s high-handedness in Gascony, the English magnates gathered for the trial took the earl’s side.

Given this state of affairs, Henry at first found in favor of Montfort, but almost as quickly overturned this decision. Montfort made a final offer, telling the king he would go back to Gascony and fulfil his role as king’s lieutenant, or Henry could relieve him, pay his expenses and formally exonerate him. The king did not accept either scenario and made it known that he would personally embark for Gascony in 1253 to put the duchy in order. Montfort left for France to raise troops and then returned to Gascony ostensibly to raise the siege of the castle of La Réole, but more probably to avenge the slights the Gascons had made upon his honor. In the end, in order to appease Montfort and have him leave Gascony in peace, the king offered Montfort 7,000 marks, the payment of his debts,

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76 Ibid, p. 115.
78 Maddicott, p. 116.
and the rights to ransoms of the various prisoners he had taken in Gascony.\textsuperscript{79} In the following year, as Henry’s expedition to Gascony faltered, he summoned Montfort to his side and Montfort was able to extract a deal of even greater significance from the king, raising his income of £1,950 as earl of Leicester by twenty percent. Montfort then went on to aid Henry III in making the 1253 expedition to Gascony the most successful military expedition of his reign.\textsuperscript{80} While the events of 1253 demonstrated once again that honor and financial gain were often one and the same thing for Simon de Montfort, there was another event which shows that his standing outside the court of Henry III remained high. In a virtual repeat of the offer made by the representatives of Jerusalem, the nobility of France offered Montfort the stewardship of France after the death of Blanche of Castile according to Matthew Paris. Montfort’s response is interesting: he could not serve two masters and refused the offer.\textsuperscript{81} This may demonstrate that no matter how unfairly he felt his brother-in-law had treated him, his loyalty was to the kingdom of England.

The years 1253 to 1258 were difficult ones for the English polity. Henry III’s financial difficulties had never gone away and they were compounded by two new issues. The first was the introduction into England of the king’s Lusignan half-brothers, the sons of Hugh de Lusignan and Henry’s mother, Isabella of Angoulême. Known as the Poitevins or the Lusignans, the four brothers had arrived in England in 1247. The brothers quickly became a liability because Henry lavished on them great rewards and the brothers in turn behaved as if they were above the law.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, pp. 121-4.
\textsuperscript{81} Maddicott, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{82} William de Valence, the eldest brother, was married to Joan de Munchensi, heiress of Pembroke, while a younger brother, Aymer, was made bishop of Winchester in 1250. The other two brothers, Geoffrey and
The second great issue that plagued the kingdom of England was Henry III’s desire to place his second son, Edmund, on the throne of Sicily. Pope Innocent IV was trying to expel the Hohenstaufen rulers from Sicily and offered to sell the island to anyone who would send an army to claim it. In 1254, Henry accepted on behalf of his young son, undertaking not only to send an army to conquer Sicily, but to pay the enormous debt of 135,541 marks the papacy had incurred in warring with the Hohenstaufen claimants to the throne of Sicily.  

These two events coalesced to produce a movement of reform. In 1257, Henry had paraded his son Edmund in Sicilian dress and attempted to win taxation from parliament to meet his expenditures on what was now being referred to as the “Sicilian business.” The clergy had offered the king a sum of 52,000 marks, but this was insufficient, as were the forced loans that the pope was squeezing out of the English Church. In 1258, the new pope, Alexander IV, demanded that Henry pay 10,000 marks at once, promise an additional 30,000, and send an army of 8,500 to fight in Sicily. All of this was to be done by 1 June 1258. Faced with a possible disaster, Henry III summoned a parliament to meet in April. The barons and the prelates combined together to present their multitude of grievances against Henry’s government, foreign and domestic, before the king. Finally, on 30 April 1258, seven barons marched into Westminster Hall in full

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armor to compel the king to agree to their demands. One of these seven barons was Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester.⁸⁶

Although these seven barons had unbuckled their swords before they entered the hall and had reverenced Henry with honor as their king, the king himself was clearly unnerved. According to the Tewkesbury annalist, he responded by saying “What is this my lords, am I, wretched fellow, your captive?” The earl of Norfolk, leader of the confederation, responded that he and his fellow lords were friends of the crown, but demanded that the Poitevins and all other aliens should flee England and that Henry and his son Edward should agree to accept the counsels of the magnates and reform the kingdom.⁸⁷ A committee of twenty-four men, twelve nominated by the king and twelve nominated by the barons, was to look into Henry III’s policies and determine what was best for the kingdom. Parliament was adjured and reconvened in Oxford in June—the so-called “Mad Parliament.”⁸⁸ It was here that the Provisions of Oxford were produced.

The Provisions of Oxford were even more radical than the Paper Constitution. The office of justiciar, dormant since 1234, was revived in order to provide better justice by making a tour of the whole kingdom and to investigate the wrongs committed by both royal and local officials. A new council of fifteen was introduced to replace the council of twenty-four which had drawn up these proposals. This new council was to govern the realm in King Henry’s name, and no major decision from patronage to foreign policy

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⁸⁶ The other six were the earls of Gloucester and Norfolk, Peter of Savoy, John FitzGeoffrey, Hugh Bigod, and Peter de Montfort. They had all sworn a mutual oath of loyalty to one another on 12 April 1258. See Maddicott, pp. 152-3.


⁸⁸ Bémont, p. 155. Bémont describes it as a misleading name, but the reforms that were proposed by the barons would have justified its name to contemporaries.
could go ahead without their approval. Additionally, the three great officers of state (the justiciar, the chancellor, and the treasurer) were to be placed under the supervision of this council. The council would meet in parliament three times a year to address the state of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{89} Henry III would function for the time being as a figurehead, king in name only. These and other reforms were agreed to in Parliament in October 1259 and reissued as the Provisions of Westminster.\textsuperscript{90}

It was in this context that Simon de Montfort became a reformer and attached himself to the cause that he would die for in 1265. Yet his involvement with the reform movement was altogether strange. Before 1258, he had never seemed to have an interest in the reformist impulses of the day, yet he had marched into Westminster Hall with his confederates and had been made a member of both the councils of twenty-four and fifteen.\textsuperscript{91} The explanation for Montfort’s allegiance to the reform movement lies in his accumulated financial grievances alongside his newfound moral commitments.

By 1258, Montfort had a series of financial grievances which he felt the king had not addressed appropriately. These centered on Eleanor de Montfort’s dower, the Gascon settlement he had made with Henry in 1253, and the intrusion of the Lusignans into royal patronage. Eleanor’s dower had been a continual source of grievance for Montfort and Eleanor since the mid-1240s.\textsuperscript{92} As the widowed countess of Pembroke, Eleanor had rights to a dower that encompassed a third of her late husband’s lands in England, Wales, and Ireland. The Marshal family had proved reluctant to produce these lands and Henry III

\textsuperscript{89} Jobson, \textit{The First English Revolution}, pp. 20-5.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid, pp. 38-43. To see the entire history of the Provisions of Oxford and Westminster in 1258-9, see ibid, pp. 22-43.
\textsuperscript{91} Maddicott, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{92} For the background to the dower in 1258, see Maddicott, pp. 50-3; Wilkinson, \textit{Eleanor de Montfort}, pp. 38-45 and 75-80.
had convinced his sister to accept a dower payment of £400 per annum to be paid out by
the Marshal family. The family continually failed to produce the dower payment as well,
so much so that in 1244 Henry promised Montfort and Eleanor that he would begin
standing as surety for their debt.\footnote{Wilkinson, \textit{Eleanor de Montfort}, pp. 42-3 and 75.} By the 1250s, the king’s payments to the couple were
constantly in arrears and Henry was reluctant to anger the various Marshal co-heirs by
having Montfort and Eleanor sue for her dower portion in land.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 78-80.} The greatest grievance,
however, was that it became clear that Eleanor had been shortchanged in accepting a
£400 settlement when a full dower might have entitled her to up to £930 per annum
instead.\footnote{Maddicott, pp. 52-3. An even greater grievance might have been that the dower was not a sum or a
property that the couple could pass on to their heirs.}

The Gascon settlement of 1253 had entitled Montfort to 7,000 marks, an
additional 600 marks per annum, and the ability to distrain the sheriffs of various
counties to pay the various sums to him.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 122-3 and 133. These counties were Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire,
Derbyshire, Wiltshire, and Berkshire.} This was later combined with a payment of
1,200 marks which Henry III owed to a nobleman from southern France, Esquivât de
Chabanais. Esquivât made these payments over to Montfort for the debts which the earl
had acquired on Esquivât’s behalf in helping him to defend the county of Bigorre.\footnote{Maddicott, pp. 133-5. More on Montfort’s involvement with Bigorre will be addressed below.} Both
of these sums had fallen into arrears as well, but more important even than these large
sums was that Henry III’s 1253 promise to give Montfort £400 in land also remained
unfilled, and Montfort’s claims on the king had been pushed behind those of Richard of
Cornwall and William de Valence. By December 1257, even though Henry and his
ministers had made some efforts in repaying Montfort, the king’s debts to Simon still
stood at £1,199.\(^{98}\) Without a doubt, Montfort “was led to reform by a long train of private grievances.”\(^{99}\) He had also shown more concern for his own rights and property than for the people of the kingdom at large: the royal government that Montfort and his comrades were trying to reform was oppressive at the local level at least in part because of the claims of figures like Montfort himself.

If this had been the full extent of the reasons for Simon de Montfort’s commitment to reform, then he would have fitted in more with his contemporaries such as Richard de Clare, earl of Gloucester. However, genuine moral concerns also underpinned Montfort’s allegiance to reform, however hidden they may have been by his financial ones. A good example of the tie between the two can be seen in Montfort’s will, drawn up on 1 January 1259.\(^{100}\) He had two overriding concerns in the will: the payment of his debts and the provision for the “poor people of [his] land.”\(^{101}\) Montfort certainly focused on his debts in his will, but the language he used to describe how he had abused his tenants was not normal and spoke of his remorse for his actions.\(^{102}\) Montfort had always been a deeply religious man, but this was evidence of an emerging change in Montfort’s moral character in relation to the reform movement.

However, what would bind Montfort most strongly to the Provisions of Oxford was the oath he took to uphold them along with Henry III and the other magnates at the end of the Oxford parliament in 1258.\(^{103}\) According to three different chronicles

\(^{98}\) Maddicott, pp. 135-7.
\(^{99}\) Ibid, p. 358.
\(^{100}\) For an introduction and transcription of the will, see C. Bémont “Testament de Simon de Montfort, Comte de Leicester (1er Janvier 1259),” *Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des chartes*, 38 (1877), pp. 333-7.
\(^{101}\) Bémont, p. 172; Labarge, *Simon de Montfort*, p. 175; Maddicott, pp. 173-6.
\(^{102}\) Ibid, p. 176.
(Lanercost, Guillaume de Nangis, and John of Oxendes) Montfort was very reluctant to take the oath and had to be compelled to do so. The reason was that he knew that, for him, there could be no retreat on an oath taken before God and backed by the threat of excommunication, whereas he may have already suspected that many of the other barons and especially the king might go back on their oaths. Whatever else one may say about Simon de Montfort, he did hold true to his oath while many others fell away. It was the commitment to the oath that contributed to both his victory at Lewes in 1264 and his death at Evesham in 1265.

Between 1258 and 1261, Montfort was active in both the reform movement and the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Paris of 1259. Such was Simon’s engagement with the latter event that it has even been questioned whether or not he could have had a hand in promulgating the reforms initiated by the Provisions of Oxford. Montfort focused on the Treaty of Paris because he managed to convince Louis IX to require Eleanor’s assent to renunciations of the old lands once held by the Plantagenet family in order to force Henry III to agree to have the couple’s grievances rectified. Eventually the pair was pressured to renounce these claims by the time the treaty was ratified in December 1259. Montfort returned to England in a foul mood and recommitted himself to the reform moment from which he had never wavered, but had only had a small opportunity to engage in due to his own commitments. One of his first acts was the formation of an unlikely alliance with the Lord Edward in order to bring the

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104 Maddicott, pp. 161-2.
heir to the throne into the reform movement. This alliance lasted for a few months, but quickly dissipated when Henry III returned to England in 1260.  

At the same time, Montfort was resolute in the king’s absence in attempting to force the other members of the reforming council to hold parliament in the king’s absence. When parliament was forbidden by the king to meet at Candelmas on 2 February 1260, Montfort retorted that the Provisions of Oxford had stipulated that parliament was to meet three set times a year whether the king was present or not, a claim of extreme radicalism.  

This and other measures, including Simon’s attempts to bring in troops to oppose the king, convinced many that he was a “dangerous maverick” and drove them more and more into the arms of Henry III.  

Henry was only too ready to accept the aid of these men in overturning the Provisions. He had returned to England in 1260 and throughout 1261, he undermined the dedication of many towards the Provisions, culminating in the Treaty of Kingston which had the effect of returning the king to full power.  

Simon de Montfort refused to agree to this and left for France.

From December 1261 to April 1263, Montfort spent most of his time in a sort of self-imposed exile in France, opposing the king’s attempts to have him declared a traitor and pursuing Eleanor’s supposed rights to lands in Angoulême in right of her mother.  

He returned to England, however, in October 1262 to publish a papal bull which confirmed the Provisions of Oxford and revoked Henry III’s absolution from the oath he had taken to uphold them. He then made another lightning dash back across the Channel


110 Maddicott, p. 197.


to France. It seems that Montfort had only returned to England because the arbitration of his personal claims against Henry had failed.\textsuperscript{113} It is one more example of the uncomfortable connection between Montfort’s personal concerns and his idealism. It seems to have helped galvanize a renewal of opposition to Henry III’s attempts to fully repeal the Provisions of Oxford. Those lords and knights who had never wanted to succumb to Henry’s return to full power now joined with some of the discarded members of the Lord Edward’s retinue in an alliance of mutual need. They sent a message to Simon de Montfort, requesting him to return and be their leader, and he duly appeared in April 1263.\textsuperscript{114} As these men intended war, there was no better man to lead them than Montfort.\textsuperscript{115}

Between April and July 1263, Montfort led the first military campaign of what has become known as the Baron’s Revolt of 1258-67. He conducted it brilliantly. Rejecting the peace overtures of Richard of Cornwall, he marched to the Cinque Ports where he established an alliance with their representatives. After this, Henry III’s immediate position was hopeless and he capitulated to Montfort on 16 July, promising to reaffirm the Provisions of Oxford and implement a new measure barring non-natives from government and banishing all aliens from England.\textsuperscript{116}

The statute which was proclaimed against aliens was a new addition to the reform movement. It was also startling, given that the commanding general of the reformers was himself an alien. Simon de Montfort’s ethnicity became a topic for debate both during and after 1263-5. He could hardly have captured leadership of his fellow reformers if he

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{113} Maddicott, p. 219. \\
\textsuperscript{114} Maddicott, p. 223. \\
\textsuperscript{115} Carpenter, “The First Leader,” p. 222. \\
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, pp. 223-4; Maddicott, pp. 229-30.
\end{flushright}
had not been perceived as English. Yet his long absences in France and his friendships with many prominent French nobles was evidence of his foreign connections. Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester, a man who would become Simon’s greatest ally amongst the magnates, would latter remark after his break from the earl of Leicester that it was “ridiculous that this alien should presume to subjugate the whole kingdom.” The Melrose Chronicler, one of Montfort’s devotees, described him as “the enemy and expeller of aliens, although he was one of them by birth.”117 It is odd that Montfort’s identity did not disbar him from leadership of a movement that devoted itself to ridding England of aliens. It is yet another of the contradictions that swirl around him.

The quick victory of the barons, however, opened up new problems for Simon and his followers. While many of his followers were devotees of Montfort like Henry de Hastings and John de Vescy, others such as Roger de Leyburn and Roger Clifford were old retainers of the Lord Edward and wanted to rejoin his service.118 Edward was quick to realize this and he offered inducements to his old followers to betray Montfort and rejoin him. By the autumn of 1263 what had been a looked to be a quick victory was turning into a defeat. Henry III and Simon de Montfort agreed to submit the Provisions of Oxford to the arbitration of Louis IX, swearing to abide fully by his decisions, but military activity progressed in the meantime and the king almost managed to trap Montfort and

118 S. Stewart, “Simon de Montfort and His Followers, June 1263,” The English Historical Review 119, No. 483 (Sep., 2004), pp. 966-7 and n. 9.
his army in Southwark in December 1263.\(^{119}\) It was shortly after this that both Henry III and the baronial representatives crossed to France.\(^{120}\)

Louis IX rendered his judgement in the Mise of Amiens in January 1264. Not surprisingly, the French king unequivocally found for Henry III. The Mise annulled the Provisions of Oxford, gave Henry control over the appointments of his own ministers again, and revoked the anti-alien clause of the July 1263 agreement.\(^{121}\) As a small baronial concession, however, Louis upheld the “charters, liberties, establishments, and praiseworthy customs of the kingdom of England” which had been created prior to the Provisions.\(^{122}\) Louis probably hoped he had secured peace for the kingdom of England, but he had only increased Montfort’s resolve. This was surprising. Before the Mise of Amiens, Simon and Louis had been very close. Simon had always been well received at the French court and he had believed passionately in Louis’ reputation as a just arbiter. Louis held fast, however, to the idea that a king should be free to govern his kingdom and choose his own ministers. He was also Henry III’s brother-in-law as their queens, Eleanor and Margaret, were sisters. Political ideology and family sentiment had delivered a judgment against Montfort. In Simon’s eyes, the Mise of Amiens had not given a fair response to his own demands and those of the barons who supported him. It does call Montfort’s honor into question, however. Both he and the king had sworn to abide by Louis’ judgment. Montfort’s refusal to be bound by his promise because it did not deliver the verdict he wanted was hypocrisy. It was also an attack on Louis IX’s honor and the

\(^{119}\) Maddicott, pp. 235-47.
\(^{120}\) Ibid, 257-9. Montfort did not attend the arbitration because he had broken his leg in a fall from his horse. The baronial cause was represented by Thomas de Cantilupe in his absence.
friendship he had so warmly given to Montfort over the years. In the short-term, it also meant that there would be civil war. David Carpenter describes Montfort as “Fundamentally…a warrior, not a diplomat.”123 With the Mise of Amiens, diplomacy had failed. Simon’s only recourse now was to fight.

The campaign of 1264 began in February when Montfort sent two of his sons to attack the manors of Roger Mortimer in the Welsh Marches. However, it was Henry III for once who gained the upper hand militarily. He mustered an army at Oxford and in April captured the Montfortian garrison of Northampton, which included some eighty barons and Simon de Montfort the Younger, Montfort’s second son. Montfort, in London and now joined by Gilbert de Clare, the young earl of Gloucester, sallied from the city and attacked the royalist garrison at Rochester in an attempt to bring Henry’s army south. The ploy worked and after a quick return to London, Montfort marched out to face the royal army in the field at Lewes in Sussex. Like William Marshal in 1217, he was taking a huge gamble. There had been no major pitched battle in England since Marshal’s victory at Lincoln, and if Montfort failed, his cause would be doomed.124

The stakes were so high that it seems Montfort was persuaded to attempt to negotiate with the royalists before battle was joined. His first embassy, led by the bishop of Chichester, proposed that the best men, most learned in theology, philosophy, and the Christian faith, should adjudicate on the Provisions of Oxford, and Montfort and his

followers would agree with their recommendations.¹²⁵ Chichester further asked that Henry III banish his evil counsellors and only admit faithful Englishmen to government. A second mission sent by Montfort offered the king a sum of £30,000 due to the spoliations that the rebels had caused various landowners (particularly Richard of Cornwall). Henry might have been amenable to these terms, but Richard of Cornwall and the Lord Edward were not, the latter supposedly responding that “Peace is forbidden to them, unless they all bind themselves over to us for hanging or for drawing.”¹²⁶ With this response, the Montfortians withdrew their homage from the king and both sides prepared for battle.¹²⁷

The Battle of Lewes took place on 14 May 1264. The sizes of the armies must remain conjecture. It is known that the Montfortians had about 500 cavalry, the royalists about 1,500. The numbers of the infantry might have been around 7,000 for each army, though it may have been smaller in Montfort’s case.¹²⁸ Yet whatever Montfort’s army may have lacked in numbers, it more than made up for in devotion to their cause. Montfort told his men that they were fighting in a holy cause, had his army absolved by the bishops in attendance, knighted the young earl of Gloucester and other worthies, and had his men don white crusader crosses.¹²⁹ Montfort not only proved himself an

¹²⁶ *Song of Lewes*, ll. 250-2.
¹²⁷ Maddicott, p. 270.
¹²⁹ One of the young worthies was the earl of Oxford, who was a devoted follower of Montfort both during and after Simon’s death. His presence in the campaigns of 1264-5 is too often unnoted. See J. R. Maddicott, “Follower, Leader, Pilgrim, Saint: Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford, at the Shrine of Simon de Montfort, 1273,” *The English Historical Review* 109, No. 432 (Jun., 1994), p. 643.
inspirational leader, but a superb general as well: he ordered his troops to occupy the Downs just above the royal forces, giving his army the advantage of the high ground.\textsuperscript{130}

The battle initially went the way of the royalists. The Lord Edward, commanding the right wing of the royal army, attacked the left wing of Montfort’s army, made of hastily conscripted London militia, and drove it from the field. However, this gave Montfort his chance. Edward’s division held the cream of the young English knights and nobility and they followed Edward in pursuit of the Londoners.\textsuperscript{131} Montfort then advanced his remaining two divisions down the hill and engaged the sections of the royal army under the command of Richard of Cornwall and Henry III. When the time was right, Montfort threw in his reserve and destroyed whatever cohesiveness was left in the royal army. Richard was captured in a windmill; Henry had two horses killed from under him and was involved in heavy hand-to-hand combat. When Edward returned to the battlefield, it was all over. Some of his men beat a retreat to the channel ports while Edward took refuge with his father and the remnants of their army in Lewes Priory, where they were subsequently induced to surrender.\textsuperscript{132} This agreement, known as the Mise of Lewes, stated that the Provisions of Oxford were to be upheld, though they could be subject to amendment by four English barons and prelates or, failing that, Duke Odo of Burgundy and Charles of Anjou, brother of Louis IX. The Mise also allowed the friends of Edward—known as the Marchers—to go free. For the combined good behavior of the Marchers, King Henry, and Richard of Cornwall, Edward and Henry of Almain were handed over as prisoners. When the negotiations were complete the king formally

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{130} Maddicott, p. 271. \\
\textsuperscript{131} Song of Lewes, ll. 96-7. \\
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surrendered his sword to the earl of Gloucester, making a deliberate attempt to snub his brother-in-law. This gesture was all that was left to him for the outcome of the battle and the terms of the Mise of Lewes had left Simon de Montfort as the undisputed master of both king and kingdom.\textsuperscript{133}

Thus “the faith and fidelity of Simon alone is become the security of the peace of all England” wrote the author of the \textit{Song of Lewes} in the aftermath of Montfort’s victory.\textsuperscript{134} This epic poem of the battle, most likely written by a Franciscan friar in the entourage of the bishop of Chichester, was panegyrical in its presentation of Montfort as a Christian knight and leader fighting to uphold the Provisions in the face of Henry III’s tyranny.\textsuperscript{135} Montfort was on the side of God and God himself was on the side of justice.\textsuperscript{136} Basing his power to a degree on his office as steward of England, Simon began to rule England under a ‘protectorate.’\textsuperscript{137} He summoned a parliament to meet in Henry III’s name in June 1264 where the Provisions and the statute barring aliens from England were reinstated. However, a new ruling council emerged in the form of three electors who would chose a council of nine worthy men, forming a group of twelve counsellors who would advise the king. The three electors chosen by parliament were Montfort, the earl of Gloucester, and the bishop of Chichester. Known as the \textit{Ordinatio} or the Ordinance, the


\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Song of Lewes}, ll. 265-6.

\textsuperscript{135} Maddicott, pp. 279-80 and 355-6.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Song of Lewes}, l. 370.

\textsuperscript{137} In his biography, Charles Bémont refers to Montfort’s role as steward and describes his rule as a protectorate. Given that Montfort was not named regent, protector is a better title for him during this period. See Bémont, pp. 14-5 and 220-41; Maddicott, pp. 239-41 and 332.
agreement stripped the king of much of his power and once again reduced him to a
figurehead.138

All was not well with Simon’s new “kingdom,” however, and throughout 1264, he was under constant pressure. The first threat came from the Marchers. Having been allowed to leave the priory of Lewes in peace, they rebelled against Montfort’s rule. Simon moved quickly to put the rebellion down and immediately rushed south to confront the twin threats of a French invasion and the possible excommunication of himself and his followers by a papal legate sent from Rome. To combat the potential invasion, Montfort raised one of the biggest armies in England since the Norman Conquest.139 In the event, the invasion did not materialize. The legate of the pope, Gui Foulquois, cardinal bishop of Sabina, proved a more difficult challenge to surmount. When he demanded entry into England, he was flatly denied by Montfort and the other barons allied to him. Foulquois next appealed in writing to the five bishops—Chichester, Lincoln, London, Winchester, and Worcester—demanding to know why they were supporting the Ordinance set up by Montfort and were aiding the barons in preventing him from coming to England. The bishops responded by asking the legate to work with Louis IX to secure the king’s ratification of the Ordinance. When the bishops eventually met with the legate in France during September 1264, they reaffirmed their commitment to reform. The legate, in a fury, excommunicated Montfort and many of his followers.140 With the aid of the bishops allied to his cause, Montfort had been able to face down the

139 Maddicott, pp. 290-1.
140 Bémont, pp. 225-6.
papal legate and uphold his vision of the kingdom of England,¹⁴¹ and when the Marchers rose again in December 1264, Simon was able to mount a quick campaign with forced the rebels to negotiation and even sent some of them into exile in Ireland.¹⁴² With his foes crushed or in disarray, Montfort called a parliament for January 1265 to seal his victory.

During parliament, the terms for the Lord Edward’s official release from captivity were agreed to. However, in an attempt to break the alliance between Edward and the Marchers, Montfort disinherited Edward as earl of Chester and confirmed the earldom—associated with the crown—to his eldest son, Henry.¹⁴³ While these steps were momentous, the parliament which took place from January to March 1265 has become more famous for its summoning of two knights from each shire as well as burgesses from the towns. This step has led many to identify Simon de Montfort as the founder of Parliament. The title is a misleading one, however. Knights and burgesses had been summoned to parliament before, and the formation of Parliament into a permanent organ of English government belongs to the reigns of the three Edwards (1272-1377). Montfort had, nevertheless, helped bring the knights of local society into government by not only summoning them to parliament, but also giving them a voice they had not had before. The support of the knights and burgesses was coupled with the support of many members of the Church as well: around 120 writs of summons went out to abbots, priors, and no less than twelve bishops throughout England. The support of these groups speaks to the fact that the movement Simon led was popular in both lay and clerical circles. However, this also spoke to a potential danger Montfort faced. He had summoned so many

representatives from the knights, burgesses, and clergy because he lacked the support from the one group that mattered above all other in medieval England: the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{144}

Montfort’s alienation of the English aristocracy only became worse in the early months of 1265. This was primarily due to the preferential treatment directed towards his own family. Despite his involvement in the reform movement, Montfort had continually tried to increase his own personal riches and those of his family. His sons now benefited from their father’s position of power, pursuing rich heiresses and seizing baronial and even royal land with abandon.\textsuperscript{145} This was alarming and spoke to the fact that perhaps Montfort intended for his line to carry on as hereditary stewards of England, wielding power on behalf of a hereditary figurehead king.\textsuperscript{146} It was the greed and behavior of Montfort’s sons that ultimately led Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester to abandon him.

Gloucester’s alienation from Montfort’s regime had been mounting throughout 1264-5. He had been named as one of the three electors alongside Montfort, but Montfort had allowed him almost no power. Simon would also not allow Gloucester to ransom many of the prisoners he had taken at Lewes, and the continued imprisonment of Henry III, Richard of Cornwall, and the Lord Edward was unnerving to him. It was the outrageous behavior of Montfort’s sons, however, that finally convinced Gloucester to abandon Montfort. Simon’s indulgence of his sons was all too reminiscent of Henry III’s support of the Lusignans, demonstrating to Gloucester at least that Montfort was failing in his leadership of the kingdom. Clare quit the court for his lands in the Welsh Marches,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[144]{Maddicott, pp. 316-7; Bémont, p. 231; Jobson, \textit{The First English Revolution}, pp. 132-3.}
\footnotetext[145]{Maddicott, pp. 324-7 and 344.}
\footnotetext[146]{Maddicott, p. 322.}
\end{footnotes}
where Montfort soon followed with an army, determined to either settle their differences or defeat him.  

Simon soon realized that he had marched into a trap. Gloucester had made common cause with both the Marchers and some of the former royalists who were arriving back into England after having fled into exile after Lewes. One of his key allies was Roger Mortimer, a Marcher baron who had been a key opponent to Montfort throughout 1264-5. These men needed a leader, however, and there was an obvious one to hand. Together, they helped facilitate the Lord Edward’s escape from captivity on 28 May 1265. Edward rode hard for Ludlow where he met Gloucester and Mortimer. There, the prince made a promise to uphold Magna Carta and the other charters and customs of the realm. He also swore to appoint only native Englishmen to his council and to expel aliens from the country. The three men then mustered an army to go in pursuit of Montfort.

The aim of Edward and the royalists was to trap Montfort west of the river Severn along the border with Wales in order to cut him off from his centers of power in Kenilworth, London, and the south coast. Montfort nearly managed to avoid the trap. He sent for his son, Simon the Younger, to reinforce his army and draw Edward’s army away. This allowed Montfort to ford the Severn, but Edward managed to defeat Simon the Younger’s army while it rested at Kenilworth castle. By the early morning hours of 4 August 1265, Montfort’s army had reached Evesham still hoping to meet up with his son’s army. At first, it appeared that Simon the Younger had arrived on the field, but

\[\text{Bémont, pp. 236-7; Ibid, pp. 328-31.}\]
\[\text{Carpenter, “The First Leader,” p. 225.}\]
the banners were actually those that Edward had seized from young Simon’s defeated army at Kenilworth. Edward, Gloucester, and Mortimer advanced in three divisions from the hill above Evesham and it is probable that Edward had sent a contingent of men to block the bridge over the Avon, which encircles Evesham on three sides. Montfort was trapped.\(^{149}\) Seeing no way out that would save his honor, Montfort directed these words to his followers: “Let us commend our souls to God for our bodies are theirs.”\(^{150}\) Simon decided to seek martyrdom for the Provisions of Oxford on the field of Evesham.

Montfort attempted to use his cavalry to punch a hole into the ranks of Edward’s army, but the attempt failed and the battle soon became a slaughter.\(^{151}\) A remarkably high number of knights—more than thirty—died during the battle, including some of Simon’s most devoted followers: Hugh Despenser, Peter de Montfort, Ralph Bassett, and Simon’s eldest son, Henry.\(^{152}\) It was the bloodiest battle in England since Hastings. Montfort himself was marked out for special treatment as Edward and Gloucester had selected twelve men before the battle whose only purpose was to find the earl and kill him. After a strenuous fight, Montfort’s horse was killed beneath him. He continued fighting, however, even as the “death squad” closed in on him. It was Roger Mortimer who delivered the \textit{coup de grâce}, allegedly lancing Montfort in the neck. After Montfort fell, his body was mutilated by the victorious royalists. Henry III, who had been in Montfort’s


\(^{150}\) \textit{Rishanger}, p. 45.


\(^{152}\) Laborde, Maddicott, and Carpenter, “The last hours of Simon de Montfort,” p. 411.
army during the battle and had come very close to being killed, was rescued by his son and his power restored as king.  

After the battle, Montfort’s desecrated corpse was taken to Evesham and buried along with his son, Henry. Unlike William Marshal, he received no grand funeral presided over by barons and prelates. Not long after his death, however, Montfort was hailed as a saint by many. Despite royal opposition to this cult, including the emptying of his tomb, pilgrims continued to venture to Evesham from 1265 until about 1280 to pay their respects to the earl of Leicester. He came to have a reputation for working miracles: there are at least 196 that were ascribed to him throughout the height of his cult. His cult largely disappeared after 1280, due in large part to the good rule that Edward I gave to England after his accession in 1272. Yet Montfort’s piety, his self-righteousness, his devotion to the Provisions of Oxford, and his death in a cause that had seemingly been blessed by God contributed towards many people, peasant and aristocrat alike, believing that he had been a saint who had died for justice. Simon de Montfort had started as a landless adventurer from France and become a sanctified warrior who died fighting for the kingdom of England. It was one factor that made Simon de Montfort, like William Marshal before him, a great exemplar of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility.


In order to analyze the chivalric credentials of Simon de Montfort, one must seek to isolate him somewhat from the political upheavals of his times. Unlike Marshal, Montfort’s career as a knight is overshadowed by his standing as one of the great political figures of the thirteenth century. There are two questions that need to be asked. Firstly, how did the ideas associated with chivalry complement or conflict with his personal and political ambitions? Secondly, was the idea of chivalry truly valued by Montfort in his career?

There is no primary source of the caliber of the History of William Marshal for Simon de Montfort’s life. The Song of Lewes is in the same literary tradition as the History, but it only covers Simon’s victory at Lewes. His career though was just as extraordinary. He rose from a landless younger son to become one of the most central personalities of the thirteenth century. His reputation as the supposed founder of Parliament gives him a legacy which even surpasses that of William Marshal. He is held up as a champion of English liberty and a martyr for justice. Yet, like Marshal before him, there are cracks in this image which brings into question his status as an exemplar of chivalric virtues.

Montfort’s greatest and most complex fault is the degree to which he prioritized his personal concerns above the cause of political reform. To a far greater extent than William Marshal, Simon de Montfort had an intense desire to advance the ambitions of himself and his family. Marshal’s ambition to become a landed magnate was a late

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157 Bémont, pp. 274-5.
development in his career; for Montfort, it was his primary objective in life from the very outset. As dedicated as he was to the Provisions of Oxford, he was even more dedicated to the idea of himself and his family building a position at the very heart of the English polity.\textsuperscript{158}

In this desire he was influenced by one man: his father. Simon de Montfort the Elder was one of the most celebrated men of his time. His career as a warrior and his achievements during the Albigensian Crusade were extraordinary and would have created an impression on all of his sons.\textsuperscript{159} Simon genuinely admired his father and was highly protective of his memory. When he quarreled bitterly with William de Valence, the king’s half-brother, in 1257 over the fact that Valence had stolen some of his property, Valence’s response was to label both Montfort and his father as traitors. Montfort retorted that neither he nor his father had ever been treasonous and that the real traitor had been Valence’s father, Hugh de Lusignan. The rage between the two lords reached such a pitch that Henry III threw himself personally between the two to stop Montfort from killing Valence on the spot.\textsuperscript{160} Simon de Montfort the Elder provided his third son with a model of great lordship and Montfort never forgot the fact that he was his father’s son.

It was partly this notion of succeeding to his father’s place in society that persuaded Montfort to resurrect his family’s dormant claim to the earldom of Leicester. It was also out of necessity. Amaury de Montfort had not been the man to take on the task of finishing the subjugation of the Languedoc after Simon de Montfort the Elder’s death in 1218. Montfort was a young man during these events and it might be suspected that he

\textsuperscript{158} Maddicott, p. 371.
resented that Amaury had not been able to defend their father’s legacy. It also severely hampered his chances of gaining land for himself as the family lordship of Montfort l’Amaury in the Ile de France was only large enough for the eldest son. In some senses his voyage to England to present his claim to Leicester was the desperate act of a younger son hungry for land. In coming to England, however, Montfort was able to establish a landed estate for himself. He was also able to find a supportive partner in his wife, Eleanor.

Eleanor de Montfort was an ideal woman to be Simon’s wife. She was, according to Louise Wilkinson, “[a] friend and valued patroness, as well as a determined, forceful, willful, and, at times, quarrelsome wife…a woman who manipulated and subverted gender expectations…”161 We have little evidence as to the personal nature of their relationship. There are signs though that they were close. They produced six children together and there was never any hint of infidelity on Montfort’s part during the marriage.162 It could be suspected that their similar characteristics had drawn them together. Each held strong religious beliefs. The couple was close friends with two of the greatest churchmen of thirteenth-century England: Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, and Adam Marsh.163 Simon and Eleanor were similar too in their sensitivity to any infringement of their rights. It was this similarity that sometimes led the couple to quarrel with themselves and if Montfort “was his own man, Eleanor remained very much her own woman.”164 It was Eleanor’s lands as much as her personality, however, which attracted Montfort. The dower that had been provided to Eleanor gave Montfort the

162 Maddicott, p. 39.
estates he needed to secure his position in England even though it often unfulfilled status brought its own complications to the couple’s relationship with Henry III.

Nevertheless, Simon and Eleanor worked together more often than not throughout their marriage. They traveled to Gascony and remained together throughout Montfort’s lieutenancy. Like Isabel de Clare before her, Eleanor served in a military capacity on behalf of her husband. While Simon and her sons marched their armies towards Wales to face the Lord Edward in 1265, Eleanor traveled to Dover castle to garrison it against a possible royalist attack. Even after Montfort’s death at Evesham, she continued to hold out against her brother, who was determined at all costs to capture her. In the end, the fear of what might befall her children convinced Eleanor she had to surrender. She managed to negotiate a settlement with her nephew Edward and left the castle on 28 October 1265. She traveled to France where she would remain in exile until the end of her life. It was what Eleanor did when she was informed of Montfort’s death though that displayed the affection she held for her late husband. She immediately ceased dining in the great hall of Dover, rejected the consumption of meat and fish, and clothed herself in the habit of widow. She also began distributing alms in Simon’s memory. Eleanor’s actions in the autumn are evidence of a close marriage between two remarkable individuals. Together, the couple formed a dynamic partnership which sought to expand their influence and wealth for their own benefit and that of their children.

165 Wilkinson, Eleanor de Montfort, pp. 80-2.
166 Wilkinson, Eleanor de Montfort, pp. 119-25.
There is no doubt that Montfort’s children, especially his four elder sons, played a deep part in the motivations of his career. As with Eleanor, there are signs of deep affection between Simon de Montfort and his sons. He was so sure of his sons’ loyalty to him that he supposedly uttered the statement: “If all the world should desert me, I and my four sons will stand firm for the just cause to which I have sworn.” Montfort’s dedication to his offspring had begun at an early stage when he sent two of his sons, Henry and Amaury, to be tutored in the household of his great friend, Robert Grosseteste. While both Simon and Eleanor were in Gascony, they were regularly informed by Adam Marsh on how their children were doing in the bishop’s care. Certainly the younger Montforts benefited immensely from their father’s rule in England during 1264-5, but throughout these years his sons proved to be some of Montfort’s most loyal lieutenants, if not necessarily his most able. The loyalty which Montfort’s sons demonstrated to their father speaks of their reciprocal affection towards him.

This loyalty and affection was not nullified by Simon’s death. While Henry de Montfort died on the field of Evesham, his three younger brothers survived the battle and throughout 1265-6 tried to lead a resistance movement against the royalist revanche. In 1271, having fled to Italy and entered the service of Charles of Anjou, both Simon and Guy de Montfort astonished Christendom when they murdered their cousin, Henry of

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168 Montfort’s youngest son Richard was only thirteen when his father died at Evesham in 1265. He disappeared from the records after 1266. He was thus too young to have played a part in his father’s career. His only daughter, Eleanor, was even younger in 1265. She fled to France along with her mother and Richard, though she later married the last native prince of Wales, Llewellyn ap Gruffudd. There is some evidence that Countess Eleanor had a daughter while in Gascony. This young girl died young, probably between 1248 or 1251. See Maddicott, p. 44; Labarge, Simon de Montfort, pp. 263 and 271-2.

169 Rishanger, p. 17.

170 Labarge, Simon de Montfort, pp. 22-3, 78, and 114.

171 Maddicott, pp. 342; Jobson, The First English Revolution, pp. 153-5. The royalists in the end proved to strong however and the Montfort family was forced to flee to the continent at the end of 1266.
Almain, before the altar of a church in retaliation for the deaths of their father and brother. Henry’s body was then mutilated in the same fashion as Montfort’s had been at Evesham.\textsuperscript{172} The longest lived of Montfort’s sons was Amaury de Montfort. He had an eventful career ranging from studying at the universities of Bologna and Paris to being imprisoned on the orders of Edward I when he escorted his sister to marry Llewellyn ap Gruffudd of Wales. When he died around 1300, his will spoke of his loyalty to his family and above all to his father. He listed his final titles in outrageously arrogant fashion as “earl of Leicester and Chester and steward of England.”\textsuperscript{173} Simon de Montfort succeeded where kings like Henry II had failed: he had four adult sons, loyal to him, and determined to honor or avenge his memory.

The relationships that Simon de Montfort forged with his wife and his children were directed towards one ultimate purpose: the creation of a hereditary estate. For the extension of this estate, Simon de Montfort, like William Marshal, looked beyond his primary estates in England. In the mid-1250s he secured interests in two lordships at opposite ends of the Anglo-French world: Embleton in Northumberland and Bigorre in the Pyrenees. As John Maddicott observed “the acquisition of both fiefs…was a mark of the wide and ambitious sweep of territorial interests which remained one of Montfort’s central preoccupations in these years.”\textsuperscript{174} The acquisition of Embleton was straightforward enough. It contributed an additional £300 to his revenue and furthered the

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, p. 370-1. The murder took place in Viterbo. Henry had served alongside the Montforts throughout 1263, but had deserted them late in the year. He had been sent by the Lord Edward to attempt to make peace with the Montfort family.
\textsuperscript{173} Maddicott, p. 370; Labarge, \textit{Simon de Montfort}, pp. 269 and 271-2.
\textsuperscript{174} Maddicott, pp. 142-3.
portfolio he was developing in Northumberian society due to his temporary wardship of Gilbert de Umfraville’s lands, which he had purchased in 1245.\textsuperscript{175}

Montfort’s primary focus in the acquisition of land, however, was the county of Bigorre. The story of Montfort and his interests in Bigorre is puzzling.\textsuperscript{176} The countess of Bigorre, Perronelle, was Montfort’s sister-in-law. In 1248, she handed the county over to Simon in order to protect it from the intrusions of Gaston de Béarn.\textsuperscript{177} He gained access to the lordship for the hefty price of 7,000 marks and by 1251 was already in arrears to his sister-in-law. In that same year Perronelle made her will and left Bigorre to her eldest grandson, Esquivât de Chabanais. Gaston de Béarn immediately protested and argued that the lordship should devolve to him and his wife because Perronelle’s marriage to Guy de Montfort had been invalid and her children were therefore illegitimate. The ambitions of the viscount of Béarn made Esquivât look around for a protector and he found one in Simon de Montfort, who after all already held the lordship of Bigorre and was Esquivât’s great-uncle.\textsuperscript{178} Throughout the 1250s Simon and Esquivât worked together to defend Bigorre from Gaston de Béarn, adding another layer of enmity between the viscount and the earl. When Montfort left Gascony in 1253, his great-nephew was deeply in debt for his protection and had made over to Montfort some of his estates in Poitou until he could repay him.\textsuperscript{179} It was in this context that Henry III commenced his own pursuit of Bigorre for the English crown when he arrived in Gascony.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{176} The best account by far is that of Margaret Labarge, \textit{Simon de Montfort}, Ch. 8.
\textsuperscript{177} Béarn was the great-nephew of Perronelle’s first husband and the husband of her third daughter, Mathe.
\textsuperscript{178} Labarge, \textit{Simon de Montfort}, pp. 131-3.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid, pp. 133-4.
When the king arrived in Gascony, he bought Bigorre for himself. Esquivât was only too happy to come under Henry’s protection, believing that the king would be able to offer assistance against Gaston de Béarn. However, Henry III had very little interest in protecting his new vassal and far greater interest in the use of Esquivât’s castles to protect Gascony. Like his brother-in-law, Henry was often in financial arrears and by 1255 Esquivât was owed £1,000 for the king’s use of his castles and 1,000 marks for his service in Henry III’s army. When Henry began to pay these debts, Esquivât asked that these payments be made over to Montfort and Eleanor due to the debts he owed to them. Yet the machinations of Gaston de Béarn continued to be a threat and sometime between June and August 1256, Esquivât, formally ceded Bigorre to Simon de Montfort. It seems, however, that the cession of Bigorre to Montfort had only been intended as a temporary recourse for Esquivât and his family. He later submitted his claim to Bigorre alongside that of Gaston de Béarn to the adjudication of the count of Foix. This deal subsequently made peace between the two warring parties, but Simon was determined to hold on to Bigorre, despite the fact that Gaston argued that Simon had only been appointed to pacify the county and then return it to Esquivât. Montfort refused to acknowledge this and thus, by a strange reversal of fate, during the year 1261, Esquivât and Gaston campaigned together to reestablish Esquivât’s lordship of the county. The Montforts’ claims to Bigorre, however, continued until October 1265 when Eleanor de

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180 Bémont, p. 127
181 Labarge, Simon de Montfort, p. 135.
182 Bémont, p. 128 ; Ibid, p. 136. Simon ceded the castle of Lourdes to Esquivât by way of recompense. 
183 Labarge, Simon de Montfort, pp. 136-8.
Montfort and her son, Simon the Younger, handed it over not to Gaston or Esquivât, but to the king of Navarre.\textsuperscript{184}

The acquisition of Bigorre demonstrated how committed Montfort was to expanding his power. In some respects, it was an attitude which complemented Henry III’s interest in securing Sicily for the Plantagenet dynasty.\textsuperscript{185} It seems that Montfort was keen to establish a landed estate in France that was even larger than that he held in England. When his claims to Bigorre came to nothing, he shifted his focus to the county of Angoulême. In 1260 the earl and countess of Leicester brought a legal case against the Lusignans arguing that Eleanor should have been provided with an inheritance in Angoulême after the death of her mother in 1246. This case simmered on and off for two years and was eventually brought before the parlement of Paris in November 1262.\textsuperscript{186} It is not quite certain why the couple advanced these fairly dubious claims, but the claim to Angoulême was certainly used, as the claim to the former Angevin lands had been used, to pressure Henry III into finally solving the issue of Eleanor’s dower.\textsuperscript{187}

Montfort’s quest to increase his landholdings and finances seem to have developed into an ambition to hold an appanage outside the sovereignty of Henry III. The constant challenges he offered to his brother-in-law perhaps made Montfort suspect that

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, pp. 138–40.
\textsuperscript{185} Maddicott, pp. 142-3 and 173.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid, pp. 204-5 and 221-2; Labarge, Simon de Montfort, pp. 192-3.
\textsuperscript{187} Wilkinson, Eleanor de Montfort, pp. 96-102. Eleanor’s claims to Angoulême were not resolved in 1262, but after the debacle at Evesham in 1265, Eleanor retired to France, where she resumed her ambitious dreams for her family by pursuing her rights in Angoulême, eventually resulting in a favorable financial settlement that allowed her children a measure of security in the wake of the loss of their English lands. See Ibid, p. 132.
the king would one day seek to deprive him of his earldom.\textsuperscript{188} It would be natural in these circumstances to safeguard his position by seeking other lands and it was also natural for Montfort to look to France for these lands. He was always far more comfortable in his homeland than in England.\textsuperscript{189} Montfort’s successful pursuit of Bigorre and Angoulême alongside his wife’s claims to the former Angevin lands would have made him a great French potentate, granted him both a more secure landed and financial base, and provided a larger inheritance for his own children. In the end, these claims may have been no more than an attempt to coerce ever more land and money out of his brother-in-law. Yet, if these plans were more than just a façade for Montfort’s grievances, it could explain why Henry III intervened to curb Simon in all three cases, for his acquisition of any or all of these lands would have made him a lord independent of Henry’s suzerainty. When Montfort became even more threatening to Henry after the inception of the reform movement, it became even more imperative for the king to keep his errant brother-in-law from any source of money or troops that might aid the baronial cause.

Montfort’s private pursuits and grievances hold extreme importance for an understanding of his character and career. For a man who would eventually lead the baronial reform movement that had grown out of the Provisions of Oxford, he had been a passive spectator to many of its events in 1258-60. His ambitions for money and land had dominated all other considerations and in a way pushed him into the camp of the reformers. Montfort would have held little respect from his contemporaries had he not looked after his own interests. We may even wish to say that these interests were rather

\textsuperscript{188} Henry threatened him with dispossession after his ‘trial’ in 1252. Simon responded to this with his usual wit saying “I well knew that he would despoil me to enrich some Provençal or Poitevin with my earldom.” See Paris, vol. v, p. 338.
\textsuperscript{189} Maddicott, pp. 361-2.
chivalric duties for both himself and his family. While this may have been the same chivalric devotion that William Marshal extended to his family, Simon focused on them to a greater degree than his predecessor and it has earned him little favor in the eyes of posterity. ¹⁹⁰ His pursuit of these goals for himself and his family in the 1250s and 1260s are a lens through which historians must see Montfort’s participation in the Barons’ Revolt. They are also a warning against ascribing to him a reputation he may not fully deserve.

One of the resources that Montfort utilized in the quest to realize his ambitions was his affinity or mesnie. Outside of his devotion to his family, it was his devotion to his affinity that was paramount. As he sought to expand his power, land, and influence, Montfort needed loyal agents. It was a chance as well for him to exercise the qualities of lordship and patronage that were always crucial to chivalry during the Middle Ages. Like many of his contemporaries, Montfort’s affinity was not wholly “feudal” in its composition. ¹⁹¹ Many of the men who served him throughout his career were not his direct tenants or vassals, but instead were often men who were drawn to Montfort’s lordship from the neighborhoods of Leicestershire and Warwickshire, the main counties where his land in England were located. Simon’s ability to recruit his affinity was helped in two respects. The first was that like William Marshal before him, Montfort was able to exploit the previous connections of many of his retainers. Men like Thomas of Astley and Ralph Basset of Sapcote were longstanding retainers of the honor of Leicester, and the

¹⁹¹ The best account of Montfort’s affinity is Maddicott, pp. 59-74. For a useful, short introduction to his affinity, see Carpenter, “The First Leader”, pp. 226-9.
Astley family had a long record of service with the Beaumont earls of Leicester. Other members of Montfort’s retinue were men who had taken up service with Ranulf of Chester when he was custodian of the earldom and now found their way into Montfort’s service. These included the Segrave and Despenser families who provided a third of Montfort’s retinue throughout his career. Simon’s recruiting of his mesnie was helped secondly by the absence of other lords with whom he would have to compete. Roger de Quincy, earl of Winchester held the other half of the Leicester estates, but he was a political nonentity and died in 1264. The earl of Warwick, another neighbor of Montfort, died in 1242 without male heirs. As a consequence, some of his retainers moved into Montfort’s service as well. The combination of previous connections and the absence of other lords explains how Montfort received his chief retainer and the man who might have been his closest friend: Peter de Montfort. Peter de Montfort (no relation to Simon) moved into Montfort’s service after Warwick’s death, but had connections to Ranulf of Chester as well. He accompanied Montfort to Gascony in 1248 and from then on was constantly at his lord’s side. He was appointed as one of Simon’s executors and was a constant witness to the earl’s charters. Peter de Montfort was the equivalent of John of Earley in Marshal’s retinue. He served Montfort until the very end, dying with him, like so many of Montfort’s other retainers at the Battle of Evesham. It was on these loyalties and networks that Montfort’s power rested.

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192 Maddicott, pp. 61-2.
193 The Segraves provided three generations of their family to serve in Montfort’s affinity in the persons of Stephen, Gilbert, and Nicholas. The Despensers provided a father and son pair, both named Hugh. It was the second Hugh Despenser who would go on to become one of Montfort’s leading confidants, justiciar of England for two terms, and would fall in battle with Simon at Evesham, allegedly at the hands of Roger Mortimer as well. See Ibid, pp. 63-4.
195 Carpenter, “The First Leader,” 227-8; Maddicott, p. 66.
However, Montfort’s tenure as lord of his affinity was rather strange when compared to those of the other magnates of his day, including William Marshal. Comparatively speaking, it was small. Although there were as many as fifteen men serving in the retinue throughout his career, Montfort’s core retainers never numbered above twelve and it is quite possible that the inner core was never greater than six to eight men at one time. This was much smaller than William Marshal’s immediate *mesnie* of eighteen knights. Montfort’s ability to patronize his followers was also less than his standing as an earl might suggest. The constant financial difficulties he was under and the small size of his hereditary lands did not afford him the assets to give to his knights on a lavish scale. At times, the evidence makes it appear that Montfort was a distant figure for his knights and did not reward them as he should. If this was the case, it makes the loyalty which Montfort’s *mesnie* showed to him even more remarkable, for the most extraordinary difference between Montfort’s followers and those of other magnates of his day was that they became the core of a political movement. Peter de Montfort, Hugh Despenser, and another retainer of Montfort’s, Richard Grey of Codnor were among the members of the baronial council of twelve in 1258, and Despenser later served as justiciar of England during the 1260s. Montfort may have originally been attracted to recruiting major knights and minor barons because they would require less direct patronage, but their status also allowed many of his retainers to recruit small *mesnies* themselves which aided Simon’s struggle against the king. Simon de Montfort’s ability to hold the loyalty of his affinity was complemented by his ability to gain the support of

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196 Ibid, p. 69.
197 Crouch, pp. 251-5.
198 Maddicott, p. 72
199 Maddicott, p. 70; Carpenter, “The First Leader,” p. 228. Peter de Montfort was a minor baron in his own right and had been one of the seven lords who marched into Westminster Hall in 1258 alongside his master.
many of the young nobles of England.\textsuperscript{200} When he returned to lead the forces ranged against Henry III in 1263, these men elected to follow his banner. They included the likes of Humphrey de Bohun, son and heir of the earl of Hereford, Sir Giles d’Argentein, Robert de Vere, the new earl of Oxford, and even for a time Henry of Almain, son and heir of Richard of Cornwall.\textsuperscript{201} The number of men who joined Montfort in his rebellion against Henry III proves that he appealed to the chivalry of many of the youthful knights and nobles of his day. Daniel Williams argued that it was Montfort’s chivalrous upholding of the Provisions of Oxford which led men to join his side alongside his undoubted leadership and military skills.\textsuperscript{202} Yet even when the idealism of many of these young men cooled, the dedication of Montfort’s affinity did not. They stayed loyal to the end whether that meant dying with Simon at Evesham or trying to aid his sons in leading the remnants of the reform movement in 1265-7. Unlike the later affinity of Thomas of Lancaster, the self-proclaimed heir of Montfort, his affinity did not disintegrate when threatened.\textsuperscript{203} If Montfort occasionally appears as a distant figure to his affinity and those drawn to his cause in 1263, he was a charismatic distant figure who commanded the respect and admiration of many of his contemporaries. His chivalry as leader of men is apparent.

If Simon de Montfort was chivalric in his duty to his family and followers, he was abysmal in his chivalric duty to his lord, Henry III. This transformation was not one that

\textsuperscript{200} Carpenter, “The First Leader,” p. 219.
\textsuperscript{202} Williams, “Simon de Montfort and his adherents,” pp. 169-171.
could have been expected. Montfort owed everything to Henry III. It was due to Henry’s
generosity that he became earl of Leicester; it was Henry’s approval that allowed him to
marry Eleanor; and it was to Henry that he owed his protection from other magnates in
England hostile to him at the beginning of his career. This is the second greatest
accusation one can make against Montfort as a chivalric figure: he breached his oath of
loyalty to Henry III in such a manner as to make it virtually worthless. Can anything
explain this that would still allow Montfort to be considered an honorable man?

At first glance this seems doubtful. Aside from owing Henry everything, he
undermined the king on at least two famous occasions. In 1254, he told parliament that
the king was lying to them about the severity of the Castilian threat he was facing in
Gascony.204 In 1262, when his claims before the court of Louis IX had been stalled due to
Henry’s connivance, Montfort returned to England and published the papal bulls which
showed that Henry III had lied again when the king reported that the pope had denounced
the Provisions and absolved him of his oaths to obey them.205 Henry can be faulted
morally for lying to his subjects, but Montfort’s actions on these occasions were a
betrayal of the king’s confidence. Moreover, they were committed out of spite rather than
principle.

William Marshal could have been charged with undermining King John’s
authority in Ireland, but he never raised an outright rebellion against the king. Montfort
however did in 1263 and in doing so he brought more harm to England than any mistake

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204 J. R. Maddicott, “The earliest known knights of the shire: new light on the Parliament of 1254”,
205 Treharne, Baronial Plan of Reform, p. 289 and n.9.
ever made by Henry III.\textsuperscript{206} It might be argued that his actions in 1263 represented a case of rebelling against the king in the name of the crown, but this was not true in 1264-5. He ceremonially withdrew his homage to his king, raised his banners against him in war, defeated him in battle, and held him captive for a period of fifteen months. Montfort was so contemptuous of the monarchy by 1265 that he encased Henry in a suit of borrowed armor on the field of Evesham which almost led to the king’s death at the hands of the royalist forces.\textsuperscript{207} There were no bounds to Montfort’s crime of \textit{lèse-majesté} and few other English nobles have ever acted in such a fashion against a king.

One of the reasons that Montfort behaved in this way towards his king is that he viewed him contemptuously. This can be explained by the differences in the two men’s personalities. Once again, however, William Marshal looks better when compared to Simon due to the differences of the characters of the kings they served. King John was a petty tyrant with a record of lechery and treachery; Henry III was a generous, pious man who was devoted to his family and friends. King John was overbearing to his baronage, demanding money, hostages, and, in some cases, their wives from them; Henry III was frequently delinquent in fulfilling obligations to his nobility, but he did not seduce their wives or demand their children for security. However, it may have been Henry’s mild nature that led Simon to have such a negative view of his king.

Henry III may have been a decent man, but he was far from a capable king. He was known as \textit{simplex} for his frank, yet often naïve nature, and he was attached to foreign favorites and relatives at the expense of his English baronage. In sharp contrast to his

\textsuperscript{206} Maddicott, p. 369.
\textsuperscript{207} Jobson, \textit{The First English Revolution}, p. 144.
father, he was often in financial straits and did not really set himself to the government of England in the same furious way. He may have been perfectly suited to the role of a “post-Magna Carta” king, in the words of David Carpenter, but his very nature led his greatest subjects to disrespect him.  

This is best demonstrated in Montfort’s outburst that he should have been locked up for being a useless king.

Simon de Montfort was a different caliber of man. He was a military leader, capable of inspiring respect and even fear from his enemies. He was religious like Henry III, but his piety seems to have affected him more than did Henry’s. Where Henry’s religion was extravagant, Montfort’s was stern. Henry III built Westminster Abbey in a show of his Christian faith; Montfort wore a hair shirt to demonstrate his. Above all, Simon was contemptuous of anyone who was less single minded than he was. When Henry of Almain left his camp in the autumn of 1263, promising to never take up arms against him, Montfort responded that “I was hoping for special constancy from you. Go and return home with your arms. I do not fear them.” Henry III might have seemed to be a man similar to his nephew. He was not suited for the field of battle and would not stay the course. This was overtly shown to be the case when Henry had himself absolved of his oath to preserve the Provisions of Oxford. For Simon, this was a betrayal of the vow they had taken before God. Perhaps in Montfort’s mind this exposed Henry as a religious sham and even less deserving of respect. Matthew Paris’ famous story of Henry III in a storm in 1258 telling Montfort “I fear thunder and lightning beyond measure, but by God’s head I fear you more than all the thunder and lightning in the world” is

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209 Maddicott, p. 206. Montfort’s devotion to Christianity was more akin to Louis IX’s than that of Henry III. It could explain the closeness of Montfort’s relationship with the French king.  
210 *Rishanger*, p. 17.  
illustrative. Henry did have cause to fear his former friend and favorite. David Carpenter summed up the divide between the two in succinct fashion: “Henry had a heart of wax, Simon one of steel.”

Beyond their differences in personality, Montfort had his grievances against Henry III. Many of these have been shown to be suspect, but some were not. Whether the accusation was true or false, in Simon’s mind, Henry had insulted him and his wife when he declared publically that Eleanor had been seduced before their marriage. Montfort and Henry’s relationship never seems to have recovered from this incident. Eleanor de Montfort’s dower was not worth the 2,000 marks that the couple claimed it was in 1259, but it was worth much more that the £400 which Eleanor had been made to settle for in 1232. Following on from the dower, Montfort must have been immensely frustrated that many of the great marriages available to the nobility in the 1250s continually went to the king’s foreign relatives. By blood, Montfort’s children were royal, yet Henry III was ignoring them in his marriage schemes. It does not take a giant leap to imagine the effect upon their father. Above all, Montfort felt betrayed during his service to the king in Gascony. Henry commissioned him to bring the duchy back into a state of order and to put down rebels. Montfort’s methods were harsh, but he did what the king required of him, and yet due to Henry’s changing nature and the protests of the Gascons, he found himself on trial for his ‘high-handed’ treatment of the king’s rebellious subjects. Montfort may have felt that his chivalric responsibility had been constantly thwarted by Henry III at nearly every turn and that his service to the king counted for very little. It

may be that having seen Henry III’s breaches of his loyalty to him and the king’s constant undermining of his position in Gascony, Montfort became convinced that Henry needed to be controlled if all in the kingdom, including himself, were to be prosperous. Both his private concerns and religious zeal persuaded Simon de Montfort that Henry III had to be brought to account. It was not chivalric in the traditional sense of service and loyalty to king, but it was service and loyalty to an ideal. That may have been chivalric enough for Simon de Montfort.

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Simon de Montfort seems an odd figure to analyze in a chivalric context. The more one writes about him, the more one is convinced that he and William Marshal were poles apart in their respective practices of chivalry. Montfort’s primary objective was the establishment of himself and his family in a position of prominence, not the life of a “captain and a knight.” If this was his objective, he failed to achieve it for his earldom was seized by the crown and his family died in exile on the continent. In the pursuit of this goal, he displayed behavior that was arrogant and reproachable. He rebelled against a king who had done everything for him and brought suffering to his adopted homeland. At the end, can it truly be said that Simon de Montfort was an exemplar of chivalric behavior? Is it possible to reconcile these contradictions?

In assessing Montfort’s chivalric persona, we must strive to get away from two images: R. F. Trehame’s portrayal of Montfort as the unselfish man of principal and conviction and C. H. Knowles’s view of him as the shallow, self-interested

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217 Labarge, Simon de Montfort, Ch. 15.
opportunist. Each is a too simplistic reading of his character and does no service to the earl of Leicester as an historical figure. In looking at Montfort’s character, we can see that he was a man of honor. It was his dominating characteristic. This could mean honor in terms of his private grievances being fulfilled or honor in terms of the oath he swore to the Provisions of Oxford. For his personal concerns, Montfort felt that he was doing no more than pursuing what was owed to him, especially after his time as lieutenant in Gascony where he had striven to uphold the authority of the Plantagenet crown. He had sworn a sacred oath to the Provisions of Oxford, and he would stay true to his word. There was no other way to preserve his honor.

Aside from his honor, other chivalric characteristics are discernable in Montfort’s career as well. His ability as a warrior is one. Although he was not a knight-errant in the spirit of William Marshal, he was a gifted soldier and brave knight who never shrank from fighting for a cause. He may have cared deeply for his own interest, but there was idealism in him than cannot be discounted. His retainers saw it, young noblemen in England saw it, and a good proportion of the English Church saw it. Montfort’s rebellion was supported by the “middle orders” to an extent no previous rebellion ever had been. Knights, townsmen, and clerics saw in Montfort someone worthy to follow. His friendships with men like Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, Adam Marsh, and Walter de Cantilupe, bishop of Worcester show a man who valued the opinions of the best men of his age. The conviction that many had in him as the leader of a cause worthy of belief should not be discounted as it sometimes is.

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219 Williams, “Simon de Montfort and his adherents,” p. 169.
220 Maddicott, p. 365.
The friendships that Montfort sustained with some of the greatest churchmen of his age speaks to his other greatest driving attribute besides self-interest: piety. Montfort’s piety has been mentioned frequently. It is, however, something that separates him from many other rebel leaders in English history. Montfort may have wanted power to pursue his own priorities, but he wanted much more to stay true to the oath he had sworn to the Provisions. Charles Bémont’s view of Montfort as “the implacable opponent of an arbitrary and over-powerful Angevin monarchy”\(^{221}\) is perhaps the best view that can be had of Montfort’s career, and it was an opposition that was motivated by a pious belief in Christianity as much as by any “long train of private grievances.”\(^{222}\)

Perhaps the greatest example of the combination of Montfort’s piety and chivalry is the cult that quickly grew up around him after his death. Like Thomas Becket before him and Thomas of Lancaster after him, Simon quickly came to be seen as “one of the ‘martyrs’ of English liberty.”\(^{223}\) The comparison was apt for all three men shared similar characteristics, most clearly arrogance and pride.\(^{224}\) But their contemporaries seem to have believed that each man died for a cause greater than himself. Thousands of people came to Evesham Abbey to worship the unofficial saint. These pilgrims included all sorts of people from poor peasants to men like Robert de Vere, earl of Oxford, one of Montfort’s supporters in 1264-5. Oxford’s case is the most illustrative for this combination of piety and chivalry. Earl Robert was praying to the man who had knighted him before the Battle of Lewes, imbuing him and the other young worthies in the army

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\(^{222}\) Maddicott, p. 358.
\(^{223}\) Bémont, pp. 14 and 275.
\(^{224}\) Carpenter, “The First Leader”, p. 238.
with a sense of religious mission and chivalric glory. Montfort’s cult preserved the memory of not only a martyr, but of a Christian knight, a crusader as dedicated to the eradication of arbitrary power as his father had been to defeating the Cathar heresy. It is not a picture that convinces fully today, but it did for many people in later thirteenth-century England. The chivalry of Simon de Montfort was the product of his religion. If historians do not doubt the depth of that piety, nor should they doubt they depth of his commitment to chivalry and honor.

“The good end counted for everything” in the case of William Marshal. It did in Simon de Montfort’s case as well. His good end was his death in battle at Evesham. Had he survived, he would have been executed as the traitor to his king he undoubtedly was. In the end he kept his honor and a great deal of his reputation as he was hacked down on the field of battle. From there the myth of Simon de Montfort grew. He was lionized by Victorian historians as the Founder of Parliament. Today, his mural graces the doors above the House Chamber of the U. S. Capitol, celebrating him as a man who championed a form of democratic government. These tributes are not a correct reading of history. Maurice Powicke described Montfort as a man whose “feet were not firmly planted on the earth [while] his eyes were not firmly fixed on heaven.” He was a knight between two extremes: self-interest and piety. John Maddicott ventures to suggest that Montfort was guilty at time of self-deception, sometimes believing that what was best for him was best for all. There is much to be said for this view. The contradictions

226 Crouch, p. 250.
227 Powicke, The Thirteenth Century, p. 115.
228 Maddicott, “Who was Simon de Montfort,” p. 58.
inherit in Simon de Montfort’s character are far more fascinating than the templates of the principled reformer or the corrupt opportunist.

We should always be inclined to listen to the words of contemporaries as well as our own as historians. I leave it to Simon de Montfort’s contemporaries in the *Song of the Barons* of 1263 to give their verdict on a life that captured many qualities associated with nobility, knighthood, and chivalry:

*Montfort he is rightly called
He is the mount and he is strong
and has great chivalry.*

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Comparison

To analyze the careers of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort in a chivalric context is difficult. One chief area of difficulty is the disparity in the modern chivalric reputation of each man. This can be most clearly seen in Richard W. Kaeuper’s recent history of chivalry. Whereas he selects William Marshal as one of his five model knights of the Middle Ages, alongside Robert the Bruce, Geoffrey de Charny, Don Pero Niño, and Thomas Malory, Simon de Montfort only receives one mention in Kaeuper’s work. This is when his body is mutilated after his death in battle at Evesham and used as a trophy of war.¹ A similar attitude can be seen in other works on medieval chivalry. Maurice Keen’s *Chivalry* holds Marshal up as an exponent of chivalry, while Montfort receives only minor mentions in the text.² Nigel Saul’s *For Honour and Fame* does much of the same thing: Marshal is an exponent of the ideal of the medieval knight while Montfort is important in a chivalric sense only because his death and mutilation at Evesham demonstrates how political violence began to overtake the niceties of chivalry after 1265.³ This provides an important reminder that the concept of chivalry was constantly evolving and situated in a specific—and different—context for each of these men.

¹ Kaeuper, pp. 4 and 25-56.
² Keen, pp. 20-2; pp. 79, 87, and 135.
Challenging though it may be, the attempt to read chivalry comparatively through Marshal and Montfort is worthwhile for three reasons. Firstly, Marshal and Montfort were two of the greatest warriors that medieval Britain produced during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Secondly, both were heavily involved in the political and constitutional history of England during their careers, culminating in their involvement with Magna Carta and the Provisions of Oxford respectively. Lastly, both Marshal and Montfort were great barons, caught up in both the administration of their landed estates and the aristocratic culture that surrounded them. An examination of these three factors in the lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort will illuminate not only the practice of chivalry, but the changing contextual landscape in which it existed.

One of the central points of comparison between William Marshal and Simon de Montfort as exponents of chivalry is their ability as military leaders. Both have enviable reputations as warriors. William Marshal was regarded as both a brilliant tournament knight and a capable commander. Simon de Montfort, in the words of the chronicler Matthew Paris, “was a warrior, famous and experienced in warfare.” Exploring the comparisons between the two men in terms of their military careers is an ideal starting point for a general comparison of the two.

At the outset, the differences between the military attributes of the two must be stated. Some of the differences center on the practice of tournaments. William Marshal was a champion of the tournament. In a one-year period, he and Roger de Jouy, another knight in Henry the Young King’s mesnie, joined together and took 103 knights as

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5 Maddicott, p. 109.
prisoners, along with their horses and equipment. On his deathbed, Marshal confessed to having captured 500 knights along with their horses and equipment. It was not only his own prowess as a knight that distinguished Marshal. Georges Duby referred to him as the “team manager” of the Young King’s mesnie. It was his skill as “commander” of that mesnie that drew knights from all across northern Europe to want to serve under the banner of the Young King. When Marshal himself went into a short exile after his feud with the Young King in 1183, he found many lords willing to give him fees and land to join their retinues. Marshal even seems to have accepted the offer of Count Philip of Flanders, the other great patron of the tournament in the 1170s and 1180s. From 1168 to 1183, there was no better tournament knight in northern Europe than William Marshal, at least according to his biographer.

Against the tournament achievements of William Marshal in his prime must be set the complete seeming absence of tournaments in the career of Simon de Montfort. Montfort’s military reputation was well established by the time he accepted the position of king’s lieutenant in Gascony. It had been this reputation that had recommended Montfort to the king and the court for the role. Yet, it was a reputation that had a mysterious origin. He had certainly campaigned extensively: the expedition to Brittany in 1230, a possible campaign with Emperor Frederick II in 1238, the Nobles Crusade of 1239-41, the Saintes campaign of 1242, and the Welsh campaign of 1245. These campaigns however had witnessed little action, excepting Montfort’s rearguard action in defending Henry III’s retreat at Saintes. It is possible that the victories of Montfort’s

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6 HWM, pp. 62-3; Crouch, p. 188; Strickland, Henry the Young King, pp. 243 and 252.
7 HWM, p. 219; Ibid, p. 188.
8 Crouch, 192. Marshal was called back to the Young King’s side when he embarked on his second rebellion against his father, Henry II, in 1183. He was never able to take up Count Philip’s offer as a consequence.
father at Castelnaudary and Muret contributed to the younger Montfort’s military reputation.\(^9\)

If it seems likely that Montfort did not participate in tournaments, part of this was the changing nature of monarchical rule in both England and France during his life. Louis IX was on the throne in France and Henry III in England. Both monarchs sought to ensure the tranquility of their kingdoms and tournaments were counter to this goal.\(^10\) Henry III was also a king who lacked a martial reputation, meaning that tournaments were even sparser in England while he was on the throne.\(^11\) These developments would have left Montfort with little opportunity to gain knightly exploits through these events. Montfort may have been disinterested in tournaments altogether though. Interestingly, his father, Simon de Montfort the Elder, a contemporary of William Marshal, was a keen participant in tournaments, having taken the cross for the Fourth Crusade during a tournament held at Écry on 28 November 1199.\(^12\) The *History of William Marshal* seems to have even invented a passage that has him in attendance at the tournament at Lagny in 1179—when he was perhaps no older than eleven.\(^13\) Perhaps the younger Simon took

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\(^9\) Maddicott, p. 109. However, Maddicot posits that Montfort, perhaps like Marshal before him, had made his reputation in tournament exploits which have been lost to history.  
\(^10\) R. W. Kaeuper, *War, Justice and Public Order: England and France in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 1988), pp. 201, 205, and 208. Louis IX banned tournaments for two years in 1260 when he learned of Christian reversals in the Holy Land. Saint Louis seems to have believed that if any of his nobility were inclined to fight, they should go on crusade, not to tourneying venues.  
\(^12\) Lippiatt, *Simon V of Montfort*, pp. 80 and 83  
\(^13\) Lippiatt, *Simon V of Montfort*, p. 5. It is possible, however, that the elder Montfort was older at the time of the tournament, possibly fourteen or even nineteen.
after another keen soldier of the age, Richard the Lionheart, and preferred real war instead.\textsuperscript{14}

The differences in each man’s appreciation of the tournament can possibly be traced back to the idea of how Marshal and Montfort conceived of themselves in relation to their society. The goals of each man were different. Marshal was content for much of his career to occupy the role of the household retainer. It was only in the latter part of his career that his ambition to become a baron began to take precedence. For the first thirty-five years of his life, Marshal was devoted to his career as a soldier, caring little for other preoccupations of the twelfth-century knight. In the words of David Crouch “Marshal was unusual in being so \textit{decidedly} a captain and a knight.”\textsuperscript{15} Montfort was different. From an early age he wanted to become a great baron and to pass his estates on to his descendants.\textsuperscript{16} He was certainly a warrior, but he defined himself through his piety and his title as earl of Leicester, not through war as Marshal did. It is this which may account for their views on the tournament. Marshal, as a military man through and through, needed tournaments to continuously prove himself. Montfort, as a landed baron from a young age, had no need to validate himself in this manner. It is a difference that lies not just at the heart of each man’s military career, but with also regard to how each man approached the ideas of chivalry, knighthood, and nobility. William Marshal was the model of the knight-errant from his first battle to his last while Simon de Montfort was a more restrained military leader. Personally brave in battle, he was less well practiced at acts of dashing heroics. It is easy to imagine Marshal climbing over a ditch and up a

\textsuperscript{16} Maddicott, p. 369.
ladder to aid a fellow knight during a siege.\textsuperscript{17} It is less easy to see Montfort acting in similar fashion.

Just as there are differences within the military events of each man’s career, so there are similarities. One of the most obvious is the way each man sought battle in a defining moment in their life. In general, battles were very rare in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries because they were too risky.\textsuperscript{18} Sieges were preferable because if no relieving army arrived, the besiegers could be confident that they would take the castle or the town. Battles seem to have been sought only in a last desperate throw of the dice or in a moment where a decisive advantage was needed. Marshal, Montfort, and their contemporaries generally abided by this rule. The \textit{History of William Marshal} is reflective for Marshal’s career: of all the warfare in its pages, there are only four encounters that merit the title of a battle.\textsuperscript{19} Simon de Montfort only fought in two battles: Lewes (1264) and Evesham (1265).\textsuperscript{20} Yet both men in the end sought battle on one occasion. For Marshal, this was the battle of Lincoln in 1217; for Montfort, Lewes in 1264.

William Marshal, from November 1216 to May 1217, was looking at defeat in the face of Louis of France’s onslaught. Some members of the English nobility, such his son and heir, William Marshal the Younger, and the earl of Salisbury, had come back into the

\textsuperscript{17} This action was the siege of the Milly castle in 1197. See \textit{HWM}, p. 144; Crouch, pp. 97-8; Painter, \textit{William Marshal}, p 110-1.
\textsuperscript{19} Crouch, p. 202. These four battles are Neufchâtel (1166), Bouvines (1214), Lincoln (1217), and Sandwich (1217). William Marshal fought in only two of these battles: Neufchâtel and Lincoln. There were thus fifty years in between the two battles he fought, demonstrating their rarity. See Gillingham, “War and Chivalry in the History of William the Marshal,” pp. 10 and 12. For descriptions of the battles in the \textit{History}, see \textit{HWM}, pp. 35-9, 181-2, 195-205, 206-10.
\textsuperscript{20} Maddicott, pp. 270-2 and 340-2.
English royal fold, but Louis and his baronial-French forces still held a number of castles and towns throughout the south and east of the kingdom, including London.\(^{21}\) Louis himself was besieging Dover castle in a final attempt to capture “the key to England,” while his forces in the north were intent on subduing Lincoln castle.\(^{22}\) David Crouch captures Marshal’s dilemma: “the kingdom would not be reclaimed by the Marshal sitting still and waiting for Louis to go away.”\(^{23}\) Marshal saw the necessity for decisive action, but he may have also suspected that the odds would only become more desperate if Louis’s forces were victorious at either Dover, or Lincoln or, worst of all, both. He therefore raised the biggest army he could and deliberately sought a battle with the baronial-French forces at Lincoln.\(^{24}\) It flew in the face of the accepted military logic of the thirteenth century, but Marshal chose the right moment and conducted the battle flawlessly.\(^{25}\) In the end he won a stunning victory which, combined with the victory at the naval battle of Sandwich in August 1217, forced Louis to return home and safeguarded the Plantagenet dynasty. Alongside his part in the reissue of Magna Carta, Marshal’s seeking of battle at Lincoln stands out as his greatest decision as regent of England.

Simon de Montfort acted in much the same way during the period leading up to the battle of Lewes in 1264. His decision to seek battle, just like Marshal’s, was motivated by both desperation and the need for decisive action. However the panegyric

\(^{21}\) Crouch, p. 163; Hanley, *Louis*, pp. 124-5; Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, pp. 275-6 (where the reader is informed that there were 200 castles in use throughout 1215-7) and 282-3.


\(^{23}\) Crouch, p. 163.

\(^{24}\) Ibid, pp. 163-7.

\(^{25}\) Except for the moment where he almost forgot to strap on his helmet before charging off into Lincoln as a “ravening lion” according to his biographer. See *HWM*, p. 200.
Song of Lewes might describe events, the only way for Montfort to save face in 1264 was by a desperate solicitation of battle. But in desperation, Montfort repeatedly rose to the challenge. Take the example of his actions in Southwark during December 1263.

Montfort and his army were trapped by royalist citizens of London barring the gates against them with the armies of Henry and Edward advancing upon their position. In the heat of the moment, Montfort kept his resolve. His response was to make his small army confess, take communion, and sign themselves with crusader crosses. When called upon to surrender, Montfort replied that he would not do so to “traitors and apostates,” a reference to his oath to uphold the Provisions of Oxford. And this attitude was again apparent in Montfort’s preparations before the Battle of Lewes five months later.

Montfort addressed his troops in a stirring speech filled with religious overtones. The army then prayed together for its sins and was absolved. Montfort held a knighting ceremony where he personally girded the earls of Gloucester and Oxford alongside a number of other young men with the arms of war. As a final gesture, the army again donned white crusader crosses as they had done at Southwark. It was an army infused with holy resolve that confronted the royalists the next morning. This resolve was one reason why they carried all before them. Lewes too was a stunning victory which upheld the principles of the reform movement and delivered the king and the kingdom to Simon de Montfort. It was his finest military achievement.

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26 *The Song of Lewes*, ll. 271-81.
27 Maddicott, p. 247; Bémont, p. 203 and n. 2.
29 *The Song of Lewes*, ll. 100-27 contrasts the inexperience of Simon’s knights versus the knights of the royal army. In doing so, he compares them to the army which Gideon led to victory in the Bible: they were fewer, but were far more faithful than their enemies.
The attitudes which Marshal and Montfort expressed on the eves of their great battlefield triumphs exhibit two other similarities in their military careers. These were the mixing of religion and war and their ability as inspirational leaders of men. The speeches which Marshal and Montfort gave to their troops were imbued with religious zeal. Marshal told his army that they were there to defend themselves, their families, and their honor, but also “the peace of the Holy Church…[as] God in His grace has sent us the chance to avenge ourselves on those who’ve come to abuse and wrong us.”

Montfort called on his troops to fight for the kingdom of England, God, the Virgin Mary, all the saints, and for the Holy Church. There was a similar religious element in the air at both Lincoln and Lewes. The papacy may never have declared a formal crusade against the baronial-French forces, but the presence and activity of the papal legate, Guala, spoke of the fact that the forces of Henry III were fighting in a cause sanctioned by the pope and by extension, God. The papacy supported Henry III again during the civil war of 1263-5, but a large portion of the English Church upheld the reform movement headed by Simon de Montfort. Marshal and Montfort were not cynics, but they could see how mixing religion with their military endeavors would garner them greater support and add luster to their causes. Their actions during the years 1216-7 and 1263-5 respectively bear the marks of what Simon Lloyd refers to as “political crusades.” The best example of this symmetry between the two is that both of their armies donned white crosses in preparation for battle.

This use of religion furthermore demonstrates that each man was an inspirational leader of men. This might be each man’s greatest attribute as a war

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30 HWM, p. 196.
31 Maddicott, p. 271.
leader. Marshal and Montfort managed to appeal to knights and lords throughout England. To see Marshal almost forget to don his helmet and then charge into battle at the age of seventy or Montfort articulate the cause of the reform movement and then dub young worthies into the roles of holy knights would have been extraordinary. The fervor which Marshal and Montfort could inspire in the men who followed them was exceptional and it speaks to them as captains *par excellence* in the medieval knightly tradition.

William Marshal and Simon de Montfort were able warriors, but this thesis has communicated that their interests extended beyond the battlefield. Another of the chief areas was their involvement in the politics of their days. The two men’s extensive involvement in political struggles might not have been expected at the outset of their careers. William Marshal had been born and bred to be a knight, not a politician. It was only his entrance into the baronage of England that forced him to accumulate skill in the art of politics, moving him from the role of captain to that of counselor and, eventually, statesman. Simon de Montfort’s position as earl of Leicester demanded his attention to politics, but mainly to the politics of patronage and of the royal court. His participation and eventual leadership of the Barons’ Revolt would never have been foreseen when he arrived in England in 1230. One of the best ways to understand each man’s political skill is to observe their attachment to the great constitutional undertakings of their times: Magna Carta and the Provisions of Oxford. Each was led to positions of power through these documents. The political principals expressed in Magna Carta and the Provisions are illustrative of why Marshal succeeded as regent and Montfort failed as steward.

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33 *HWM*, pp. 200-1; Williams, “Simon de Montfort and his adherents,” p. 171.
William Marshal was a royalist throughout the entirety of the Magna Carta crisis. He was one of John’s primary representatives during the negotiations which framed Magna Carta, but neither he nor his partner in the negotiations, Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, were likely the real authors of Magna Carta as Sidney Painter once claimed.\textsuperscript{34} Marshal may have been content to see John’s oppressive government reined it, but he was not content in seeing twenty-five barons effectively making themselves king.\textsuperscript{35} How surprising it was then that when he became regent for Henry III, one of the first actions he presided over was to reissue of Magna Carta in the king’s name. It was a political masterstroke for the minority government. Louis had a copy of Magna Carta, but he had made no plans to reissue it himself.\textsuperscript{36} Marshal effectively exposed the English barons who were still in rebellion against the crown as hypocrites because it was the government of Henry III who now guaranteed them the terms they had been clamoring for in 1215. It may be that William Marshal came to believe that Magna Carta held the key to saving England for the Plantagenet dynasty. Many of the charter’s infringements upon royal power were stripped out, but it was presented as an offering to the political community, a sign that henceforth the king would seek to rule in cooperation with his greatest subjects. William Marshal’s greatest attribute as a statesman was that he grasped this concept and utilized it in favor of the English crown in the early days of Henry III’s minority.

\textsuperscript{34} Painter, \textit{William Marshal}, pp. 181-2. Asbridge, p. 330 and Crouch, pp. 151-2 both argue that Marshal did not author the document himself. His role in negotiations, however, may have had some bearing on the charter’s ultimate form in 1215. Nevertheless, this is not the same as Painter’s claim that he and Stephen Langton coauthored the charter.

\textsuperscript{35} Carpenter, \textit{Magna Carta}, p. 328.

\textsuperscript{36} Hanley, \textit{Louis}, pp. 125-6.
Simon de Montfort was involved with the Provisions of Oxford from the outset of the movement in which they were conceived in 1258. Yet he only became intimately involved with the reform movement after the failure of his private claims in 1260. When he did recommit himself fully to the Provisions he became their greatest champion. When many of the other reformers fell away in 1261, Montfort did not. This was in large part due to his oath to uphold the Provisions, but it is also likely that he came to believe that they offered him and his contemporaries the best recourse for their grievances against the crown. At every attempt to negotiate a peace between him and the royalists, Montfort was unequivocal in his demand that the Provisions had to be observed. He was prepared to submit to an arbitration over their contents—as both the Mises of Amiens and the Mise of Lewes demonstrate—but they had to remain as central elements in the conduct of royal government. Sometimes this zealous allegiance to the Provisions was problematic for the barons themselves. Some began to realize that the goals of the Provisions had been too grand to be realized in full. 37 Simon was not amenable to this position. While his allegiance to the Provisions of Oxford might demonstrate his lack of statesmanship, it does show that he was a committed politician in the cause he had chosen to uphold.

Magna Carta and the Provisions of Oxford led Marshal and Montfort to the heights of power in England: regent for Marshal; steward for Montfort. However, it is here that their differences as politicians become apparent. After winning the war against Louis, Marshal became instrumental in the conduct of the regency government. His arbitration between the barons on matters of land, and his negotiations with Llewellyn the Great of Wales and Alexander II of Scotland, did much to strengthen England’s external

37 Treharne, *Baronial Plan of Reform*, Ch. 6.
borders. It was also under his watch that the administration of the kingdom began to function as it had before the advent of the Magna Carta civil war. The courts commenced their itinerant journeys around the kingdom again and the exchequer swung back into action.\footnote{Painter, \textit{William Marshal}, pp. 228-9. Some of Painter’s views on William Marshal as regent of England have been challenged by David Crouch, but the chapter he wrote on the subject is still the best extended overview of Marshal as regent. See Ibid, Ch. 11.} Marshal’s regency government certainly did not solve all of the problems it had inherited in 1216, and Hubert de Burgh’s achievements after Marshal’s death rank high. But without Marshal’s winning of the war and shepherding of the minority government, Burgh could not have rebuilt the full apparatus of royal power. In the task of serving as regent of England, Marshal was highly successful. There are many reasons for that success, but one stands out from the rest. This was that Marshal never forgot that his government was by the barons for the barons. His retinue benefited from his regency, but not to an inordinate extent.\footnote{Crouch, pp. 169-73.} He made no attempts to take a semi-royal position at the heart of government. He was \textit{primus inter pares} and governed as such.

Simon de Montfort forgot the lesson taught by Marshal. While there is no doubt that his government went to great lengths to implement the Provisions of Oxford, Montfort accumulated power to a shocking degree.\footnote{Maddicott, pp. 313-4.} He also abused his position for his and his family’s benefit. He kept nobles such as Richard of Cornwall in prison to hold onto their lands and disseized other lords and knights at the same time. Montfort even went so far in ostentatiously demonstrating his wealth and power that he maintained a retinue of knights greater than any thirteenth century king of England.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 310-1.} Writers like the Tewkesbury annalist saw Montfort’s greed for what it was: “he ought not to give himself
and his men plunder and rewards if he works for the common good.” The fact that the \textit{Song of Lewes} took pains to try and absolve Montfort of charges such as these illustrates that they had become prevalent complaints. Unlike Marshal, Montfort allowed his followers, principally his sons, to profit from his tenure of power to a degree which demonstrated that he had divided his “court” in the same manner as Henry III had in the 1250s. Montfort’s power was not the result of a choice by the “community of the realm,” but by his victory in battle against his king. He was not royal and his parading of himself as a \textit{de facto} king was seen as perverse by many of his contemporaries. Simon de Montfort was acceptable as the confederate reformer of 1258 or the general of 1263. He was not acceptable as the quasi-royal figure he became in 1264-5. His political legacy was nearly as destructive as Marshal’s had been constructive. The way in which his body was mutilated after Evesham spoke of the fury his actions had aroused in the minds of the royalists. It would also aid in shaping unwelcome precedents for political violence in the future. Edward I, perhaps with the precedent of Montfort’s manner of death and mutilation in his mind, developed new penalties such as hanging, drawing, and quartering for the crime of treason. His son, Edward II, utilized many of these new penalties against his own subjects in the latter part of his reign. Montfort’s actions raised the stakes in rebellion and treason. It is possible to see in both his crime of lèse-majesté and his death at Evesham the first inkling of new political tactics and savagery that would eventually lead to the forced deposition and murder of Edward II and Richard II in the fourteenth century. In the end, these two differing approaches to the government of England explain

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\item Song of Lewes ll. 325-32.
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to a large degree why William Marshal ended his tenure as regent by resigning peacefully from his deathbed while Simon de Montfort ended his tenure as steward by dying on the battlefield.

Outside the realms of war and politics, William Marshal and Simon de Montfort’s primary responsibilities lay in the construction and maintenance of their hereditary estates. Their approach to this goal was similar due to the parallel nature in which they entered their lands as earls of Pembroke and Leicester respectively. As has been mentioned frequently, they were younger sons with limited claim on the lands and tenants they held from the king. This position drove them both to become ambitious for gain and to look for strategies to increase the extent of their wealth and power. David Crouch analyzed Marshal’s practice of the methods of colonization and assimilation in Wales and Ireland, but Montfort used the same tactics in building his sphere of influence in Leicestershire and Warwickshire. Both entered into territories that had been settled and held by families other than their own. It was essential to find a balance in maintaining the followers each already had while at the same time persuading their new tenants that their lordship was something worth recognizing.

In the building of a landed estate, Marshal seems to have done better for himself. Like Montfort, Marshal had been very poor at the beginning of his career as a baron in 1189, but unlike the earl of Leicester, he ended his life as a very wealthy magnate. His landholdings were bigger than Montfort’s, but Marshal—or his advisors—possessed a sharp financial sense as well. He began selling sacks of wool from his lands in Wales and Ireland into the burgeoning wool markets of Flanders in the 1190s and early 1200s. He

was in such a strong financial position by 1206 that he was able to advance money to King John.\textsuperscript{46} Simon de Montfort would have been envious of Marshal’s ability in this regard.

Each earl had a desire to construct a landed estate to pass onto his heirs once he died. The importance of this goal was not consistent across the lives of each man, however. Marshal’s longing to become a baron was late in coming. He does not seem to have held ambitions in this regard until the mid-1180s and never seems to have counted on becoming an earl before his marriage to Isabel de Clare in 1189. During first years as lord of Striguil and then earl of Pembroke, he was to be found more at court than on his estates. It was really not until his break with King John in 1205-6 that Marshal embarked on building his power as a great magnate. Montfort, on the other hand, had schemed from his first visit to England in 1230 to acquire the earldom of Leicester. If their entrances into their respective earldoms had been different, however, their drive to advance the positions of their lineage was similar. Both men wanted a central place for their family in the political structure of the wider Anglo-French world. They were assisted in this drive by wives who were of considerably higher status than they were—a great landed heiress and the daughter of a king. The marriages between Marshal and Isabel de Clare and Montfort and Eleanor developed into close, affectionate partnerships, and both couples went to great lengths to provide for their children. The making of a will to benefit his children was one of Marshal’s last acts on his deathbed.\textsuperscript{47} Montfort in the hours before his demise at Evesham is said to have rebuked his sons collectively, turning to Henry de Montfort and saying “Your presumption and the pride of your brothers has brought me to

\textsuperscript{46} Crouch, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{47} HWM, pp. 215-6; Painter, William Marshal, pp. 280-1.
this end.”\textsuperscript{48} He may have been right, but it was Montfort’s own fault given that his extensive promotion of his sons and exploitation of the riches of England for their benefit in 1264-5 had turned many against him. In the long term, only Marshal was successful in building a hereditary position for his family. The demise of the Marshals as earls of Pembroke in 1245 was accidental: all five of Marshal’s sons died without heirs and the lands of the earldom were split between his daughters and their heirs. The tenures of the Montfort family as earls of Leicester ended with Simon de Montfort himself. However, each man devoted considerable effort to the promotion of his family. Chivalry entailed good lordship and the care of one’s house. William Marshal and Simon de Montfort excelled at this.

Good lordship entailed the management of one’s \textit{mesnie} as well. Marshal and Montfort excelled here too. Marshal’s early experience of the life of the \textit{mesnie} during his service to the count of Tancarville, the earl of Salisbury, and “his lord,” Henry the Young King, encouraged him to form strong bonds with his own knights. Montfort lacked this early experience, but he too formed a solid bond with his affinity. The durability of these bonds was tested throughout each man’s career. Marshal’s \textit{mesnie} exhibited cracks in its solidarity during the height of the crisis between Earl William and King John during 1208. During the negotiations which led to the Treaty of Kingston in 1261, several of Montfort’s knights—Richard de Grey, Ralph Basset of Sapcote, and even Peter de Montfort—aided the royalist cause.\textsuperscript{49} These were minor, however, compared to the defections which occurred at other moments of crisis in the affinities of

\textsuperscript{48} Guisborough, pp. 201-2; Maddicott, pp. 341 and 344.
\textsuperscript{49} Maddicott, pp. 214 and 363.
men like King John, Henry III, and especially Thomas of Lancaster.\(^{50}\) At other points for both men, especially in the victories of Lincoln and Lewes, the allegiance of their mesnies was critical. The retainers of both earls provided the backbone of the armies which won these battles. William Marshal certainly always tried to be a good lord to his knights. On his deathbed, when it was suggested by one of his clerks that he sell the fur-lined robes which were part of his knights’ yearly dues in order to obtain money for alms, Marshal was enraged. He replied that his knights had rights to receive their robes and it would be his last chance to give them any.\(^{51}\) This touching scene evokes the devotion which Marshal held for the members of his mesnie and the order of chivalry. No scene like this exists which encapsulates Montfort’s devotion to his knights, but the loyalty that many held for him is evident in the high number of his retainers who stood by him in defeat. Chivalric leadership was about man management as much as heroic deeds. One reason why Marshal and Montfort were such inspiring war leaders was that they had learned how to cultivate a following from the experiences of molding their mesnies.

In constructing a landed estate, increasing the prosperity of their families, and in demonstrating good lordship to their mesnies, William Marshal and Simon de Montfort proved themselves to be ideal representatives of the nobility during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There was more to the nobility than these factors, however. Marshal and Montfort were part of the elite of medieval society. This gave them in an interest in leisure noble activities such as hunting or music alongside more serious endeavors such as literature or castle building.

\(^{51}\) HWM, p. 221.
Hunting was the sport of the aristocracy. A knight was encouraged to hunt because it was good practice for war, but also because it was a way to demonstrate one’s status as a nobleman. It is curious, then, that hunting does not seem to have attracted Marshal or Montfort. Marshal had the landed resources necessary for hunting or hawking and could afford to hire a forester as part of his household, but no evidence exists that he did so.\textsuperscript{52} Montfort’s family had been the hereditary foresters of the royal forest of Yveline in the Ile de France, and Montfort was shown blowing a hunting horn with a dog at the feet of his horse on his seal.\textsuperscript{53} Yet there is no evidence that Montfort was a huntsman either. Perhaps both men viewed the activity as frivolous or perhaps they developed no interest in it in contrast to many of their noble contemporaries. It is one place where the two could be considered to have been unconventional.

We are on firmer ground with each man’s approach to the topics of literature or music. Marshal’s illiteracy would have largely disbarred him from debating the merits of medieval romances and he never seems to have patronized literature.\textsuperscript{54} There is evidence though that the *History of William Marshal* was written to be performed rather than read. Marshal may have engaged in such performances in the halls of his castles during his life.\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, the *History* offers evidence to support this. It recounts that at a tournament held in Joigny, before the actions began, a number of ladies asked for a song. Marshal, we are told, had a fine voice and quickly dazzled those around him with his singing.\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Crouch, p. 240; Crouch, “William Marshal in exile,” p. 30.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Lippiatt, *Simon V of Montfort*, pp. 17, 104, and 127.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Crouch, pp. 5-6, 25-6, 61, and 229.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{56} *HWM*, p. 63.
\end{itemize}
This story, captured by the *History of William Marshal*, is entertaining evidence of Marshal’s life as a courtly performer.\(^{57}\)

Simon de Montfort’s attitude to music is not known. He seems to have been a less gregarious man than Marshal and never seems to have been inspired to burst into song. In literary matters, however, Montfort far outshone Marshal. It was recounted that he knew the primer, psalter and other prayers by heart.\(^{58}\) He was not illiterate like Marshal, and had the skill to read spiritual works in Latin. He also seems to have been aware of elements of Greek learning.\(^{59}\) He studied the Bible throughout his life. When it came time for him to choose a household in which to educate two of his sons, he chose that of Robert Grosseteste, the scholarly bishop of Lincoln. Here his sons would receive an education in knightly skills, but it was probably hoped they would acquire learned abilities just like their father.\(^{60}\) When Montfort asked that the Provisions of Oxford be arbitrated by the most learned men, he demonstrated the respect he held for literacy and learning.

A final similarity, rather than a difference, is the interests of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort in their construction of castles. Castles were vital to the medieval nobility. They were often where they resided and they projected a visual sense of authority, wealth, and power to the surrounding community. Marshal was responsible for new additions to his principal castles at Chepstow and Pembroke. At Chepstow, he built a

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\(^{57}\) Crouch, p. 195.


\(^{59}\) Ibid, p. 95. Grosseteste sent Montfort a tract he had written for presentation at the Council of Lyons in 1251 which drew from the *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle. Montfort may have also received instruction in Greek from John of Basingstoke, Grosseteste’s archdeacon of Leicester.

\(^{60}\) Ibid, pp. 94-6.
double-towered gatehouse as a new entrance to the castle in 1189. He would subsequently add an inner wall with two three-storey towers as defense alongside a curtain wall surrounding the fortress.\textsuperscript{61} He began to reconstruct the entirety of Pembroke castle in stone after 1199. He commissioned the great round tower of the castle in 1200. It was massive, rising eighty feet into the air. The tower was probably based on the \textit{donjon} keeps that were prevalent throughout northern France.\textsuperscript{62} Marshal might have also been inspired by the architecture of castles in the Holy Land he had seen during his crusade of 1184-6. William Marshal’s work at Chepstow and Pembroke confirmed him as one of the more innovative castle builders amongst the magnates of twelfth and thirteenth century medieval Britain.

Simon de Montfort followed a course similar to Marshal. He refurbished his wife’s castle and manor of Odiham. His greatest castle construction, however, was at his seat of Kenilworth castle, which Henry III granted to him in 1244. During his two decades of holding Kenilworth, he refurbished it with “marvelous buildings” and “unheard of machines [of war]” according to the \textit{Flores Historiarum}.\textsuperscript{63} His constructions at Kenilworth demonstrated Montfort’s abilities at as a military engineer. He rebuilt the defenses to such an extent that when Henry III laid siege to the castle in 1266, attempting to capture all of Montfort’s remaining adherents, the castle resisted the king for six months, the longest siege in English history.\textsuperscript{64}


\textsuperscript{62} Asbridge, p. 294; Crouch, p. 137

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Flores Historiarum}, vol. ii, p. 489.

\textsuperscript{64} Bémont, p. 33; Maddicott, pp. 75 and 109.
One factor in Marshal’s and Montfort’s personality remains to be considered: each man’s approach to religion. This was another key difference between the two men. Marshal was a religious man, but he was not as zealous as Montfort. Montfort’s religion has been described as one half of his whole being. Marshal exhibited very little depth to his spirituality. Yet, Marshal, seemingly the less sophisticated of the two, theologically, was a more generous patron of the Church than Montfort. He founded three religious houses: the priory of Cartmel and the abbeys of Duiske and Tintern Parva. Montfort founded perhaps only one small Dominican friary in Leicester. This was strange, but there could be explanations for it. The most obvious is that Montfort did not have the money to found new religious houses. His debts prohibited this throughout most of the stages of his life.

Beyond the patronage of religious communities, how strong was the faith of these two respective knights? Marshal seems to have maintained a soldier’s piety for most of his life. He was a crusader, though not a particularly committed one. The journey to the Holy Land may have left him with an experience of God, but if so he never spoke of it. If his faith was not intellectually profound, however, it was real nonetheless. The best evidence of this comes from his deathbed. Just before he died, Marshal renounced his worldly life and entered the Templar order as a knight brother. He asked that his dearest knight, John of Earley, retrieve the cords that he had brought from the Holy Land to be

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65 Maddicott, p. 77
66 Crouch, p. 243.
67 Maddicott, p. 93.
68 Witness his absence from the Third Crusade for example. It was not only one of the greatest religious events of the late twelfth century, but perhaps the greatest chivalric event of the same era—and Marshal was not present. Alternatively, this may have been Richard the Lionheart’s decision rather than his.
69 Crouch, p. 243.
buried in. The best description of Marshal’s religion in the *History*, however, comes from one of the old earl’s last conversations. When one of his knights, Henry FitzGerald, told Marshal that the clerks say no man can be forgiven unless he returned all he had taken in life, Marshal responded:

“The clerics are too hard on us! They shave us too close! I’ve captured five hundred knights and kept their arms, their destriers and all their gear. If that means the kingdom of God is barred to me then that’s that—I can’t give them back! I can do no more for God, I’d say, than yield to Him repentant of all my misdeeds, of all the wrongs I’ve done. Unless the clergy mean to see me damned they should stop their harrying! Either their claims are false or no man can have salvation!”

This retort wonderfully portrays Marshal’s practical approach to his faith. Since “he was a good man” he would be saved because “God loves good men.” This was the faith of a confident, if not particularly pious, medieval Christian and it still commands respect eight hundred years on.

Simon de Montfort’s religion manifested itself in more overt ways than Marshal’s. Like Marshal, he was a crusader and a far more devoted one. He took part on the Nobles Crusade of 1239-41 and was in the process of preparing to take the cross again when Henry III appointed him as lieutenant in Gascony. He may even have come to see the campaigns of 1263-4 as a “crusade” for the Provisions of Oxford. This

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71 *HWM*, p. 219.
72 Crouch, p. 241.
73 Maddicott, p. 79.
The crusading spirit was an inheritance from his parents and it stayed with him his whole life. He combined it with a sincere piety that came from a variety of directions. Perhaps the most important were the friendships he forged. Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, Adam Marsh, lector of the Oxford Franciscans, and Walter de Cantilupe, bishop of Worcester, were all three spiritual mentors of Montfort as well as close confidants. Through their instruction, Montfort developed a practice of faith that was highly unusual compared to that of other members of the nobility. One of the reasons that Montfort may not have founded as many religious houses as Marshal was the fact that Christianity was changing for the nobility of the thirteenth century. By Montfort’s era the Church began to look for ways to transform nobles and knights morally. The salvation of the second estate of medieval Europe was moving away from the works of monks in monasteries and into the moralizing of friars and pastors, determined to affect a sincere moral change in men like Montfort. Yet, it seems that even though Montfort was the ideal convert for this type of practice, he never fully healed himself of sins like greed, harshness, and avarice. He prayed to be delivered of these woes, but many of his actions as earl of Leicester spoke of a man driven as much by profit as piety. Sometimes he would even earn sharp rebukes from Grosseteste or Marsh for his behavior. One thing that stands out is how tightfisted he was as a donor. The religious and chivalric virtue of largesse escaped Montfort. We can say that in the end Montfort was an extremely religious man, one of the most intense among laymen of medieval England. However, despite the views of many of those who came to his shrine at Leicester, he was no saint.

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74 Maddicott, pp. 79-84.
75 Ibid, p. 78.
76 Ibid, 99-100. One example of Montfort’s halfway conversion was the fact that he was never a generous giver to the poor.
Marshal and Montfort’s similarities and differences as religious men are striking. Both were crusaders. Both used the Church to commemorate their friends and family. The main difference, however, lies in the impact which religion had on their commitment to chivalry. It seems that William Marshal’s religion was the result of his chivalry while Montfort’s chivalry descended from his religion. This contrast is another step towards understanding the two men as chivalric figures at the different ends of a century-long span.

The last factor to be addressed in a comparison between the lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort is how prevalent the values of chivalry were to each man. The use of the word chivalry itself presents difficulties, for it would have held different meanings for Marshal’s contemporaries than for Montfort’s. To Marshal’s generation, chivalry meant the art of being a knight. It was a word that described a military capacity which a man of the twelfth century ought to have. If Marshal had been asked if chivalry meant a guideline for behavior and practice, he would have been puzzled, for those notions were expressed in the idea of courtliness during his time. Courtliness was the behavior that men like Marshal—an especially eager curialis—had to master. But it was different than chivalry because it could apply to those outside the military elite. Chivalry was different as it was intrinsically linked to the hierarchical class divisions of Europe.

77 Witness Marshal’s foundation of Cartmel Priory for the soul of “his lord,” Henry the Young King or Montfort’s use of his influence to benefit the abbeys and nunneries of the Ile de France which were staffed by or held the remains of his family. See Acts and Letters, p. 76; Maddicot, pp. 101-3.
78 Crouch, pp. 177-8.
79 Keen, pp. 145-7.
In Marshal’s day, chivalry was for the field and courtliness was for the hall. He wanted to be a *prudhomme* or “upright man” rather than a chivalrous knight, given Marshal would have seen himself to be chivalrous just by dint of being a knight. This outlook had begun to change by Montfort’s day. Courtliness was gradually being subsumed into chivalry itself. To be a good knight, one now had to master the skills of the courtier. This was one reason why the religious changes described above took such a great effect in thirteenth century. Knights were being taught to be men of *haute culture* to a degree, as well as brutal practitioners of war. This transition in chivalry marks a comparison between the careers of Marshal and Montfort so illuminating. It is also something one needs to keep in mind as well when comparing the two men in terms of their chivalrous qualities.

Other differences are on hand as well. Perhaps the most illuminating is the idea of honor. This was something which the two men might have appreciated differently. They both exhibited degrees of prowess, wisdom, and loyalty in their career and would have understood what those words meant. They exhibited honor as well, but did it mean the same thing to both men? There is good reason for thinking it did not. For Marshal, honor meant winning. The *History of William Marshal* is very reticent to ever describe a loss sustained by Marshal during his tournament career. Likewise, the *History* did not recount Marshal’s attack upon the French forces at Chateau Gaillard in 1203, but this was because he lost, not because he massacred both soldiers and civilians during the attack.

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80 Crouch, pp. 177-87.
81 The *History* recounts a story when a Flemish knight, Matthew de Walincourt, lost his horse to Marshal twice in the same tournament at Eu. While he returned it the first time, he refused the second time because he had lost his horse to Matthew at a previous tournament and Matthew had refused the pleas of Marshal and other men to return it. See *HWM*, pp. 61-2.
82 Crouch, p. 207.
To be a prudhomme required an unimpeachable reputation, but that was gained by the ability to win on the field and display appropriate courtliness in the chamber. Where Marshal would say he had been honorable by defeating over 500 knights in combat, we might say that all this proves is that his prowess on the field was terrifically effective. It was by his action in aiding Henry III in 1216 that he demonstrated a sense of honor that we would recognize today.

Montfort’s view of honor was more akin to what the modern world would recognize. He was as keen as Marshal to have a spotless record, but this included more than a record on the battlefield and in the court. In the financial demands he placed before Henry III, he always wanted his honor to be observed. When he asked that justice should be done to him during his first row with the king in 1239, justice may have been a substitute for honor.⁸³ Even if it was likely that he had seduced Eleanor before their marriage, Henry’s broaching of the subject brought Montfort’s honor into disrepute. Henry’s breach of his contractual obligation to Montfort as his lieutenant of Gascony affected Montfort’s honor. This and the disputes arising from Montfort’s lands and finances may have demonstrated that the king did not hold to his promises, which would have been anathema to the earl of Leicester. Finally, it was Montfort’s devotion to honor which led him to remain a determined partisan of the Provisions of Oxford. The oath to the Provisions was a religious one made before God, but it doubled as a chivalric one made on his honor as well. In his death in battle at Evesham, Montfort upheld his honor. Marshal might have suggested that Montfort had achieved no honor because he lost. Montfort might have replied that to win without keeping one’s honor was worthless.

⁸³ Bémont, p. 61.
In the end, despite the differences between the two men in terms of ideas like courtliness and honor, it is still possible to see William Marshal and Simon de Montfort as chivalrous paradigms. Their careers as captains, politicians, and barons revealed this too. William Marshal was undoubtedly a knight: he rose from the son of a middling baron to become regent of England through his skills on the battlefield and in the council chamber. He is viewed as one of Richard Kaeuper’s five model knights because his story mirrored those of other knights both before and after him. Simon de Montfort’s story did not. He was never a man who fitted into a traditional knightly role and this is perhaps why attempts to locate him within a chivalric framework have been few and far between. But Montfort’s career was no less extraordinary. He was a landless son who became one of the most prominent earls of the kingdom and then helped to lead an intense political movement. Like Marshal, his skills on the battlefield and in the council chamber helped him in this respect. The one item which linked them together the most was a dogged determination to succeed and make something of themselves. They demonstrated the virtues of prowess, wisdom, loyalty, and honor throughout their lives, though they were not blameless knights. They were certainly ambitious men and sometimes these ambitious natures led them to do things for which the modern world might castigate them as unchivalrous. Marshal and Montfort did not live in the modern world and must not be judged by its standards. Their lives read together demonstrate the evolving nature of chivalry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Through their similarities and differences, William Marshal and Simon de Montfort were chivalrous knights and each worthy of the title of a prudhomme.

84 Kaeuper, pp. 25-56.
William Marshal and Simon de Montfort, both in their similarities and differences, were devoted to the chivalric ideas of their time. Their careers are also a window on how the ideas surrounding chivalry developed between 1150 and 1265. There are two concluding questions to be asked. The first is whether Marshal or Montfort embodied the spirits of their respective ages and the second is if their careers demonstrate whether or not the role of the nobleman changed from 1150 to 1265.

William Marshal was the embodiment of his age, but he was also the ending of that age. In many respects he belonged to an even earlier age of knighthood than that of his own time. Marshal always seems to have been most comfortable in his role as household knight and retainer. Even after he became a baron in 1189, he still regarded himself as a loyal retainer of the Plantagenet house. He served as a judge and administrator only when duty called. He was primarily a “captain and knight” for all of his days. He was, however, a member of a dying breed. Nobles and knights were beginning to become increasingly involved in literary, religious, and administrative pursuits. They may have wanted to maintain their positions as the king’s “hereditary generals in time of war,” but that was increasingly a secondary concern. For Marshal, military activity was the primary concern. In his abilities as a knight, his triumphs on the tournament fields, and his victories in battle, he showed himself to be the embodiment of that militant age. He was “a paragon of the military virtues of his day” in the

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development of chivalry.  

If he was not necessarily the greatest knight who ever lived, he was the greatest of his age and with his death in 1219 that age may be seen to enter a twilight phase.

The new developments emerging in chivalry and the life of the nobility which William Marshal witnessed in his time more fully flourished in the thirteenth century. It was the figure of Simon de Montfort around whom many of these developments coalesced. His religion, friendship with learned churchmen, and interest in theological works contributed to this image. If his understanding of the teachings of Robert Grossteste and Adam Marsh was only ever partial, he still exhibited the traits of the devout thirteenth-century nobleman. He was capable of leading the armies of the king into battle, but he was more interested in the building and administration of his own lands in England. Yet it would be a mistake to think of Montfort as the embodiment of his age. He was too unique to be that. Noblemen like Richard de Clare, earl of Gloucester and his son, Gilbert, were far more typical. They wanted their own estates to prosper and to receive the best patronage the king could give them. Occasionally they would oppose the king if he threatened these objectives, but in principle they were royalists who could not conceive a world where the king was constrained permanently. Simon de Montfort was different. Certainly he wanted to safeguard both his estates and his claim on the king’s patronage. However, his zealous religion and pursuit of his rights made him into a nobleman who could challenge the king and even attempt to dominate him. Richard de Clare abandoned his oath to the Provisions of Oxford; Simon kept his and died defending the Provisions and his honor. Richard of Cornwall built a great abbey at Hailes, but he

87 Crouch, p. 177.
88 Maddicott, p. 99.
did not wear a hair shirt like Montfort. In his beliefs and practices Montfort demonstrated time and again that he was a man in-between the extremes of piety and ambition. He was not a traditional nobleman, but neither could he make blameless claims to holiness. He may not have embodied the spirit of his age, but the developments in chivalry that had begun to form at the end of Marshal’s lifetime had their first culmination in the life of Simon de Montfort. If one were to extend this study of chivalry in Medieval Britain it would be possible to see that each century had a figure in which this culmination of chivalric values and mentality continued. Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster (c. 1310-61) would be an exemplar for the fourteenth century while Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick (1382-1439) would be an exemplar for the fifteenth. There is a thread in chivalry that connects these four men together. Its exploration could reveal more of this crucial medieval phenomenon.

The final question that needs to be asked is whether the comparative careers of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort reveal a change in the role of the nobleman from 1150 to 1265. More research would need to be done to present a full answer to this question, but the correct response seems to be yes. In 1150, the nobility of England appeared disinterested in the administration of the kingdom. That was the orbit of the king and his ministers. They regarded themselves as the king’s companions, but they preferred to tend to their own estates and receive royal patronage. By 1265, the situation was vastly different. The nobility now regarded themselves as the king’s natural advisors as well as companions. They had a right to be consulted on the affairs of the realm, whether in politics or war. They also now had the right to a voice in the granting of taxes

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89 Maddicott, pp. 88-90.
to the king. If the king wanted to pursue major policies, he had to take the wishes of his nobility into account. Much of the impetus of this change lay in Magna Carta, which had required that the king should summon the prelates and barons for consultation on feudal duties. This was an idea which William Marshal embraced when he governed England during his regency. He was always careful to summon his fellow barons to a council when a major policy needed to be decided upon. When he surrendered his powers as regent on his deathbed, he summoned a council to make his decision permanent. By the time Henry III finally established his personal rule in 1234, this idea was firmly established in the political culture of England and was expressed in the developing notion of parliament. The primary aim of the Provisions of Oxford was to grant the nobility control of the king’s appointment of his ministers and officers of state in order to deliver better governance to the kingdom. It was this idea that Simon de Montfort swore to uphold in his oath. By the time of his death in 1265, the notion that the king had to rule in harmony with his greatest subjects was firmly established. The political role of the nobility had changed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and William Marshal and Simon de Montfort had played important roles in this development.

The lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort are instructive templates for viewing how both chivalry and the political role of the nobility changed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. William Marshal is the archetypal knight, but his record is far from unblemished. Simon de Montfort’s record has always been scrutinized by historians, but his role as a knight reveals that the traditional knightly values found in the works of writers like Geoffrey de Charny or Ramon Llull were not the only ways of

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90 Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 44-5. This was clause 14 of the Magna Carta of 1215.
embodying the concept of chivalry in the Middle Ages. Perhaps the greatest lesson of this thesis is the impact that ideas like chivalry, knighthood, and nobility had on the politics of medieval Britain. In order to understand the personalities of medieval kings or noblemen, one needs to understand chivalry.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown the nature of chivalry in medieval Britain during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries through the lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort. However, can it be said that the qualities of chivalry evolved between 1150 and 1265, and can it be said that lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort illustrate this change?

The evidence presented suggests that chivalry did evolve from 1150 to 1265. Chapter one chronicled the development of chivalry from its earliest conception during the reign of Charlemagne to the end of the First Crusade in 1100. Chivalry, at its birth, was purely military in function. However, other forces were quickly at work as well. The Church was able to mold chivalry during the tenth and eleventh centuries through the Peace Movement as well as the launching of the Crusades. The literature of the romances also shaped chivalry, imbuing it with a touch of art and display while at the same time presented tales of how knights should behave in society. Finally, the development of chivalry in England from the Norman Conquest until Magna Carta demonstrates how the role of the knight changed. During the Norman Conquest knights were solely warriors, but, in the new political culture nurtured by Magna Carta, they began to take on increasing political and administrative roles in local as well as national society.

William Marshal witnessed many of these changes during his career. Yet he remained somewhat ambivalent toward them. While other knights and nobles engaged in
administrative or judicial roles, he remained a committed warrior. By the beginning of
the thirteenth century, the type of purely militarized chivalry practiced by Marshal was
anachronistic in many ways. To him honor meant victory, and it was only in his decision
to support Henry III in 1216 that he became honorable in a modern context. Yet, it would
be wrong to label Marshal as a glorified automaton. His grasp of the political landscape
was keen in 1216 and it is partially down to him that Magna Carta survived to become a
cornerstone of English constitutionalism. His service as regent of England heralded the
beginning of a greater involvement by the nobility in the politics and administration of
the kingdom of England. If Marshal sometimes lacked cultural finesse as a nobleman, his
abilities as a soldier-statesman marked him out as the ideal of his age of chivalry. If he
died as the last embodiment of a bygone age in 1219, he had also helped mold a new age
in chivalry in Britain.

Simon de Montfort lived during a flourishing age of chivalric values, but his
career as a practitioner of chivalry was not as straightforward as Marshal’s. Although a
good warrior, Montfort’s chivalry expressed itself more in his devotion to his status as a
nobleman. He was a man of honor unlike Marshal in that honor meant far more than
victory in battle. However, honor and chivalry were not always the same thing for
Montfort. If he considered himself honorable in the promotion of his family and in
upholding the Provisions of Oxford, contemporaries might have seen him as distinctly
unchivalrous in his repeated affronts to Henry III. His chivalry was a result of his intense
piety, but neither seems to have restrained him from pursuing his own benefit at all times.
For all this, however, Montfort was more than an arrogant nobleman. His dedication to
the Provisions was honorable and even chivalric, while his rule as steward of England
revealed how involved noblemen had become at the heart of the politics of medieval Britain. If at times Montfort seems dishonorable to the modern world, his religiously inspired practice of chivalry reveals a zealous knight in a highly religious age who, if too unique to be an archetype of the noble in thirteenth century Britain, was molded and helped to mold the emerging chivalric ideas of the thirteenth century.

The comparison between William Marshal and Simon de Montfort reveals many similarities as well as differences in the practice of chivalry during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Their ability as military leaders demonstrates that prowess on the battlefield remained a constant. On the other hand, their differing appreciations of learning reveal that the thirteenth century gave rise to a greater concern for literary interests on the part of the nobility. William Marshal and Simon were also unique as well different to their contemporaries. Their interest in castle building shows them as wholly traditional while their disinclination to pursue hunting as a leisure activity is evidence of how contrary they could be to their station in life. Their pursuit of land and wealth for their families was wholly traditional. Their religious observance was rooted in the age in which they lived, even if Montfort was seemingly more refined in his spiritual pursuits. As a political leader, Marshal learned how to manage the government of the kingdom and left a constructive legacy for the political involvement of the nobility. Montfort on the other hand failed to adequately lead the kingdom during his period of rule and his affronts to the crown bequeathed hazardous prescriptions for the future. The similarities and differences of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort as chivalric figures help illuminate the changes occurring in chivalry from 1150 to 1265.
From 1150 to 1265, the nature of nobility, knighthood, and chivalry evolved. The idea of nobility advanced from a hereditary position as a companion of the king to one of high political involvement in great affairs of the realm. Nobles were expected to be more than just warriors and increasingly had to accept responsibilities beyond their estates. Lower down the social scale, the role of knighthood changed in this period as well. Thirteenth century England saw the emergence of knights into English national life through judicial proceedings, service on commissions such as that sent to reform the royal forest, and, most importantly, their summons to parliament as representatives of the shires. Nobility and knighthood acquired a political, administrative, and constitutional importance by 1265 that they had not had in 1150.

Above all, chivalry in Britain changed in the period between 1150 and 1265. In 1150, chivalry was still thoroughly military. A great knight was a great warrior. By 1265, chivalry had evolved into something different. The twin ideals of courtliness and chivalry were beginning to fuse into one idea that increasingly held that a knight had to be an administrator or politician alongside his role as a warrior. Even more, the thirteenth century developed the idea that a chivalrous man was a man of culture and of God. The ideal chivalrous knight by 1265 and increasingly after was a warrior, politically active, and a man of faith and learning. The ideals that dictated the notion of the prudhomme had shifted during the lives of William Marshal and Simon de Montfort. In many respects their successes and failures along with the successes and failures of men like them had helped to shape the idea of chivalry in medieval Britain between 1150 and 1265.
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