

a body-guard of professional warriors, mounted, well and uniformly armed, and practised in the art of war. Nevertheless, the main defence of the country rested with the "fyrd." The Danish invasions put it to the severest test and revealed its military defects. It was one of the most notable achievements of Alfred to reorganize and reconstitute it. Thus reformed, with the support of an ever-growing body of King's thegns, it wrought great deeds in the days of Alfred, Edward, and Athelstan, and recovered for England security and peace. In the days of their weaker successors, however, all the forces that England could muster failed to keep out Sweyn and Canute, and, above all, failed to hold the field at Hastings.

The Norman Conquest might have been expected to involve the extinction of the English militia. For feudalism as developed by William I. was strongest on its military side, and William's main force was the levy of his feudal tenants. But quite the contrary happened. The Norman Monarchs and their Angevin successors were, as a matter of fact, mortally afraid of their great feudal tenants, the barons and knights through whom the Conquest had been effected. Hence, as English Kings, they assiduously maintained and fostered Anglo-Saxon institutions, and particularly the "fyrd," which they used as a counterpoise to the feudal levy. They even called upon it for continental service and took it across the Channel to defend their French provinces. Thus in 1073 it fought for William I. in Maine; in 1094 William II. summoned it to Hastings for an expedition into Normandy; in 1102 it aided Henry I. to suppress the formidable revolt of Robert of Belesme, Earl of Shrewsbury; in 1138 it drove back the Scots at the Battle of the Standard; and in 1174 it defeated and captured William the Lion at Alnwick. So valuable, indeed, did it prove to be that Henry II. resolved to place it upon a permanent footing and clearly to define its position. With that view he issued in 1181 his "Assize of Arms."

III. Mediæval Regulations.

Into the details of the "Assize of Arms" it is unnecessary here to enter. Are they not written in every advanced text-book