

of the "shires" and the royal household. The membership was restricted to Sheriffs, Bishops, Abbots, caldormen (corresponds to aldermen), and Thegns (Earls). The power of the Witenagemot was great in the early days of its inception. It had the privilege of electing or deposing the king. Grants of public lands were subject to its consent. It was virtually the supreme court for both civil and criminal cases. It shared with the king the law-making and appointing power and joined him in the imposition of taxes. However, as the influence of the king increased, the power of the Witenagemot dwindled away, until it was only a shadow of its former self. Two or three meetings were held yearly; but they proved only a form, a symbolic remembrance of its quondam power.

With the coming of William of Normandy and his conquering army in 1066, profound changes were made in the government of England. The feudal system, with its vast baronial jurisdictions, and its personal dependence of vassal upon lord, and of lord upon overlord, was firmly established. However, William preserved the Witenagemot, with modifications most suitable to his manner of rule. He sought and obtained formal election to the throne, and as much as possible, in accordance with ancient forms; having made his throne secure he endeavoured to rule with the sanction of ancient custom. The "Mycel-Gemot" was merged into the "Great Council" (Magnum Consilium) of the king's tenants-in-chief. Theoretically, every landowner was entitled to claim a seat in this council; it was meant to be a national assembly which would speak for the governing classes, but in the course of time, "tenure by barony" became the only valid title to membership. Woodrow Wilson in "The State" says: "The development of the Great Council of the Norman kings is the central subject of early English constitutional history; out of it directly or indirectly, by one process or another, have been evolved Parliament, the Cabinet, and the Courts of Law."

The Great Council finally became the parliament of the realm; members who were state officers and chief officials of the court became a "Permanent Royal Council," from which sprang the modern "Privy Council" and, at length, the "cabinet." I will attempt to trace the connection as briefly as possible. The "Permanent Council" was composed of former members of the "Great Council"; it formed an "inner circle" of the latter body. The "Great Council" met but three times a year and its membership varied numerically and personally from year to year. Gradually this "Permanent Council" became more powerful than