

THE KING-EMPEROR

the ninth century A.D. From that time, there has been (save for brief periods of struggle) but one Kingship in England ; and the present Royal House can trace its descent from the Wessex House of the ninth century A.D.

HEREDITARY DESCENT

The old English Kingship was (as was natural from its origin) partly inherited, partly elective ; for, until the Norman Conquest, at least, the Witan, or Council of Elders, claimed and exercised the right to choose the fittest member of the Royal House to fill the throne. The Norman Conquest, however, in 1066, though it maintained the pretences both of inheritance and election, was really a forcible revolution ; and the new line was insecure in its title till, in course of time, and by prudent inter-marriage with the old Wessex House, it came to fill the place of that House in the minds of the English. Meanwhile, by its superior activity and strength, it had obtained powers which its predecessors had but slightly exercised—such, for example, as the administration of justice and the regular management of the resources of the Kingdom.

IRELAND AND WALES

To this increased activity, the Norman House and its successors, the Angevins and Plantagenets, added an increase of territory, by the partial conquest of Ireland in the twelfth century A.D., and the conquest and incorporation of Wales in the thirteenth and sixteenth. Meanwhile, by the loss of its Continental possessions (Normandy, Anjou, Maine, etc.), in the disastrous reign of John, it had become more purely English ; and it is a remarkable fact that, in spite of the immense influence of the Norman landowners and the foreign clergy, the language (or, rather, the languages) of the