

in 1013—and there were almost certainly two other instances at an earlier date of the deposition of Kings of Northumbria, three of the Kings of the West Saxons, and at least two of Wessex. There are very many instances of election of kings not in the hereditary succession, although, of course, preference would be given to the family of the dead King.

It was not, however, always the case that the King was chosen from the royal kindred, or even from the hereditary nobility. Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings, was the son of a parvenu, yet he was chosen by the Witan, King of England, because he was the wisest, the bravest and the best.

After the battle of Hastings (in 1066), which an old book calls a victory over the House of Harold and not over the nation collectively (I pass over the episode of the Danish Kings), the Conqueror William saw to it that his title was confirmed by the Great Council—and so with each of his successors when there was any conflict or fear of conflict. Even if we pay regard to the interlude (curious in many respects) of the reign of King Stephen, the throne descended in a hereditary and fairly regular line until the time of Richard II., the last of the Plantagenets. He, in 1399, signed a document absolving his subjects from their allegiance and renouncing every claim to the Crown. He did this much for the same reason that a traveller renounces his claim to his own purse when it is demanded by a band of robbers in overwhelming force. But times were changed from Ethelred's period: Parliament, which was the successor of the Witan, did not, as the Witan had done three centuries before, depose the monarch without at least his nominal consent; the document signed by Richard was read to Parliament and thereupon he was declared to be no longer king. Then came what was in fact the exercise of power given by military strength, but in form an assertion of hereditary right