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The Shaping of the Nation (1066-1381)   1066-1381   I. Norman Rule (1066-1381)   1066-1381   1. Williams Rule   1066-1087   1066-1087   Under William, the feudal system in England was completely established.   According to this system, the King owned all the land personally. William gave his barons large estates in England in return for a promise of military service and a proportion of the lands produce. These estates were scattered far and wide over the country, so that those who held them could not easily combine to rebel the king. The barons, who had become Williams tenants-in-chief, parceled out land to the lesser nobles, knights and freemen, also in return for goods and services. At the bottom of the feudal scale were the villeins or serfs. One peculiar feature of the feudal system of England was that all landowners must take the oath of allegiance   not only to their immediate lord, but also to the king.

2. King Henry II and his reforms

Henry II took some measures to consolidate the monarchy. He forced the Flemish mercenaries to leave England. recalled grants of Royal lands made by his previous king Stephen. demolished many castles built in Stephens time. strengthened and widened the powers of his sheriffs and relied for armed support upon a militia composed of English freemen.

King Henry II greatly strengthened the Court and extended its judicial work. He divided the whole country into six circuits and appointed justices to each. Cases were therefore heard before the intermittent justices who applied the law impartially. During his reign, a common law was gradually established in place of the previous laws of the local barons. He also introduced a new jury system to replace the old ordeal-based trial system. Besides, he shifted the trial of clergymen charged with criminal offenses from the Bishops court to the Kings court.

II   Contents and the significance of the Great Charter

Great Charter was signed by King John in

1215 under the press of the barons. It consists of sixty-three clauses. Its important provisions are as follows: (1) no tax should be made without the approval of the Grand Council. (2) no freemen should be arrested, imprisoned or deprived of their property. (3) the Church should possess all its rights, together with freedom of elections. (4) London and other towns should retain their traditional rights and privileges, and (5) there should be the same weights and measures throughout the country. Although The Great Charter has long been popularly regarded as the foundation of English liberties, it was a statement of the feudal and legal relationships between the Crown and the barons, a guarantee of the freedom of the Church and a limitation of the powers of the king. The spirit of the Great Charter was the limitation of the powers of the king, keeping them within the bounds of the feudal law of the land.

1215

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III. The origins of the English Parliament   The Great Council is known to be the prototype of the current British Parliament. In 1265, Simon de

Montfort summoned the Great Council, together with two knights from each county and two citizens from each town. It later developed into the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Its main role was to offer advice. There were no elections or parties. And the most important part of Parliament was the House of Lords. 1265

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