

HENRY II AND HIS POLICIES.

- The Norman ruler Henry I had no son to succeed. So he had nominated his daughter Matilda to succeed him.
- But on his death, the Great Council, chose Stephen, the count of Blois as the new ruler.
- Stephen had no son to succeed ,so after his death, Matilda's son became the next ruler.
- He took up the title Henry II. Since he was the son of the Count of Anjou the dynasty came to be known as the Angevins. They were also called Plantagenets, because Henry's father had the habit of wearing a twig of a shrub Plantagenisia, on his helmet.

- Henry wanted to make him supreme. So he decided to control the barons and the clergy. Henry was advised by his chief minister and Arch bishop of Canterbury, Theobald.
- His first task was to put an end to the feudal anarchy. He recovered all the royal lands which Stephen had distributed to his favorites.
- He forbid the barons from issuing their own money.
- Mercenaries imported by Stephen were expelled.

- ▣ Instead of relying on the personal service of the barons, he extracted a tax called Scutage. This made the barons weak, and there was no scope for them to display their martial talents.
- ▣ This money was used to develop the national Militia.

- Henry II was known as the father of English Jury System.
- Henry wanted to attack the feudal law courts, and revive the royal courts.
- He initiated rule of law in England.
- Numerous brief law codes or Assizes were issued by the kings council or Magnum Councilium.
- The most important among these series was the Assize of Clarendon. According to this 12 respectable men from each hundred and 4 from each township had to present the notorious criminals of their localities before royal justices for trial by ordeal. This trial by presentment was similar to Anglo Saxon Compurgation.

- ▣ Jury system was extended to Civil cases by Grand Assize. Hitherto Civil disputes were settled by trial by combat. Henry put an end to this.
- ▣ By Grand Assize 12 sworn men were employed to settle disputes regarding property.
- ▣ The Assize of Arms determined the quality of arms each free man could supply.
- ▣ Henry revived the practice of sending royal justices in itinerary, ie. Royal judges were sent to the local courts in circuit. This brought royal justice within the reach of all.
- ▣ The king's judges framed a uniform system of justice for the whole land, which came to be known as common law.
- ▣ In all these measures Henry's aim was to check the growth of Baronial jurisdiction.

- While Henry was successful in his encounter with the baronage, he could not bring the church under control.
- Henry II wanted to bring the church under royal jurisdiction. So in 1164, he drew up the constitution of Clarendon.
- This included the conditions that no Bishop should leave the realm or send appeals without the king's permission. Similarly no baron should be excommunicated without the royal consent . The most controversial law enacted was that the clerics who were found guilty in the religious courts ,should be degraded and sent to royal courts for punishment. Henry insisted that no unfair distinction should be made between the clergy and the laity.

- Henry's views were shared by his chancellor Becket. When the post of Arch bishop of Canterbury was vacant, the king made Becket get elected to that post.
- But contrary to his expectations, on becoming the Arch bishop, Becket refused to pass the Constitution of Clarendon. Henry became furious, and the Arch Bishop had to flee from England. He remained in France for six years, and when he returned, he dismissed the Arch Bishop of York and the Bishop of London who had officiated the coronation ceremony of Henry's son.
- When heard this, he ordered the arrest of Becket. The encounter that followed, led to the murder of Becket.

- Becket was soon hailed as a martyr and saint.
- The murder of the Arch Bishop shocked the whole Christendom and Henry was forced to yield.
- All clergy who were found involved in crime were tried in religious courts itself.
- The martyrdom of Becket preserved the privileges of the clergy.
- Humbling of Henry ,increased papal influence and papal exactions. The murder of the Arch Bishop marred the otherwise glorious reign of HenryII.
- Becket was canonised and his tomb at Canterbury became the greatest of English shrines.